

## Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year B

**Sunday 28 April 2024**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Reverend Deanna Macartney (she/her), Rowan Moodie (she/her), Tamsin Munro (she/her), and Iona Kimmitt (they/them), for their thoughts on the fifth Sunday of Easter.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:  
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

We asked a group of writers from the Church of Scotland to engage with the Lectionary passages for this week from and considering the LGBTQ+ perspective. Shared below are some thoughts from the writers on how they approached the passages:

- ❖ I approached this passage through the lens of Queer Theology. This is a method of reading scripture informed by the experience of LGBTQ+ people. It is not about reading things into the text that are not there, but about allowing perspectives and themes to rise from the text that might be hidden to people who have not had the experience of living as an LGBTQ+ person. It is an approach that is rooted in the belief that all of us are made in the image of God, and by embracing the full breadth of human diversity, we can begin to understand the God who is beyond all our labels and binaries.
- ❖ When I am dealing with any passage the first thing I do is read it through multiple times and see if there is a word or verse that particularly jumps out at me.

I will sometimes also look at different translations of the passage online to see how it has been worded by others, because having grown up with the KJV and NIV, the interpretations, word use and meaning frequently change over time and sometimes seeing the same sentence phrased differently, as in the MSG Bible, can really help the passage come to life. Then I look at the full chapter to make sure that I have a feel for the wider context that the passage sits in with regard to what the author was writing about at the time. Then I will pray for insight and go about my week and let the passage sit with me for a few days, before coming back and reading it once more and finally putting some of my thoughts down on paper.

- ❖ When I'm preparing worship, I like to think less of *who* might be there, but *how* they might be. People can have very different lives and circumstances, and I like to take a few moments while I'm reflecting to consider how differently people may be feeling when joining in a worship service. There will be those suffering grief or illness, those who are overworked, stressed, and those who are celebrating, joyful. What news might they have had in their weeks, what has been going on in the world? Can I consider ways in which these words may be heard by people in different places as I plan worship?

## [Acts 8:26-40](#)

*“What is to prevent me from being baptised?”*

On this question hinges the entire passage. It’s a question about inclusion. Can I become a part of your community as an equal? You would think the answer would be straightforward for Phillip. But unfortunately, it wasn’t, because the person asking was a eunuch.

In the ancient world the term eunuch was a broad one, encompassing people who had been castrated, but also intersex people, and other kinds of gender nonconformity. Socially, eunuchs existed in a grey area. They were treated as not being ‘real’ men as they could not fit in with Roman ideals of masculinity. This is why they were allowed to access many women-only spaces. But on the other hand, they were not treated as women either. They existed in a place outside a neat gender binary.

This in-betweenness could be a real advantage, opening up jobs and opportunities to advance in society (like being a trusted confidant of the Queen of Ethiopia). But it also exposed them to stigmatisation and discrimination by people who found their existence uncomfortable. We even see this recorded in the Old Testament Law: Deuteronomy 23 prevented eunuchs from even setting foot in the Temple.

And not only is the person asking the question a eunuch, they are a eunuch from Ethiopia. To inhabitants of the Roman Empire, Ethiopia was the edge of the known world, a land far from Israel. In this passage a black, gender non-conforming person asks Phillip, “will you let me into your community?”

Phillip answered with his actions. He brought the Ethiopian eunuch to water and baptised them on the spot. He welcomed them into his community as an equal, a sibling in Christ. The Ethiopian is the first recorded convert to Christianity, and was a small taste of how radically inclusive the early church would be, including people of all castes, ethnic backgrounds, and social groups.

### **Sermon ideas based on the reading from Acts 8**

Preaching on Acts 8 gives us the opportunity to proclaim the unconditional and accepting love of God. Phillip could have easily said, “There’s no room in my church for someone like you”. But instead he gave an unconditional welcome. This is a hopeful message for all of us, but it is especially meaningful for people who have previously experienced rejection or a lack of acceptance from the Church.

This passage has resonated with many LGBTQ+ Christians, transgender people especially. To be clear, being a eunuch and being transgender are very different, and we cannot impose modern identities onto people who lived in a very different society. But trans people know what it's like to not fit into society's ideas of what it means to be a man or woman. And they certainly know what it's like to experience shame and stigma from a society that finds their existence uncomfortable.

When we first met to plan this resource, each of the contributors shared that there had been times when they felt afraid to be open about their LGBTQ+ identity to the Church, for fear of being judged or misunderstood. I would encourage you to use this passage as an opportunity to make explicit that "all are welcome" – words that adorn the signs of many churches – extends to members of the queer community.

If the Ethiopian had continued to read through the book of Isaiah, they would have reached chapter 56, which reads:

*To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,  
I will give, in my house and within my walls,  
a monument and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that shall not be cut off.*

For people who have been kept on the margins, passages like these show that there is a place for us in God's family. And not begrudging acceptance, but a place of honour as beloved children of God.

### [Psalm 22:25-31](#)

Psalm 22 is probably easier to identify with for the modern reader than many would admit, especially within the Church. It is a psalm of lament, which, if we are honest, is something we all need to go through at one time or another. What is so endearing about this passage in particular is the transformation. This passage still talks about feelings of hopelessness and considers those with struggles. However, the acceptance is what we should be focusing on. The transformation we see in these final verses of this psalm is something that as Christians we will all recognise to some degree. The relief of being able to submit to God and let God have full control as They will, with or without our consent, is recognised here.

## Sermon ideas based on the reading from Psalm 22

As a candidate I am still developing my sermon writing style, but inevitably I start with a series of questions that I look for answers for, or inspiration in the life I have seen around me recently. Here are some of the questions and inspiration that I would start writing from if I were addressing this passage.

- **What is the cost of committing to God?** From verse 25 of this reading the question that jumps out is “What will my vow to God cost?”. This took me back to a poem I heard recently that opened by stating, “I will not let my son play with dolls” (*Barbie*, by Demetri Manabat). This seems initially like a really intense stance to take. I won’t spoil the poem for you, but it made me wonder about the knee-jerk response most people would have to the poem, which I think for many can be the hardest part of being a Christian. It is the response that people have to your confession of faith that can be considered the cost of our commitment to God.
- **How do you praise God?** If you seek God, you should praise God (v26). How does challenging the way in which God has created someone constitute praise? Even if you truly believe being LGBTQIA+ is wrong, how are you praising God? If you are shunning others who are seeking God’s love, how does that constitute praise?
- **Always turn to God.** This passage is a reminder to turn to God and not to turn and judge others.
- **God has control.** God has the power, not us (v28). God has determined who we are, and God has the say in what is and isn’t okay, not you. God has full control and rules over all: as Christians, this is vital to remember, we are not God and should not be trying to rule over each other. We all have our own individual responsibility to live in a way that is pleasing to God.
- **Let it Go.** In the words of that famous Disney song ... Let what go? – Our desire to control. We (all who sleep in the earth [...] all who go down to the dust, (v29)) will have to bow down and accept that God is in control one day.
- **How often are we called to spread the good news?** Verse 30 states, “future generations will be told about the Lord”. We all know we are called to share in the joy of the resurrection, we know we are to tell others about God, because it says so in the Bible – but how often do we say it? This is what we are here to preach. We have a God who is in control, the pressure is off... if we let it. We only need to show God’s love and trust in that love ourselves.

- **God has saved all people.** Finally, in verse 31 we have the affirmation that we already know but often forget. We have been delivered. Even those that we do not know, have not known and will not know, have been delivered.
- **God is ruler over all.** Our focus should always be on God and showing God's love, showing God's love to all people who have been created perfectly by the perfect creator. Remembering that God creates all our experiences before we know them, and if we have been created to experience periods of change, we should be able to. No matter how big or small others see this change, and we all deserve the love and support that Jesus would show us during these periods of life.

My final thought on this passage comes from a quote with an unknown source, but it is a piece of wisdom that I feel is helpful to share:

*“God gave you a fingerprint that no one else has, so you can leave an imprint that no one else can.”*

God has given you value, a value that is different from others, but to God it is just as important as anyone else's.

### [1 John 4:7-21](#)

This passage starts with its conclusion and then it explains why it got there in order to emphasise its subject matter. It is the opposite way to approach modern storytelling, where we have our introduction, our content and our conclusion, but it stresses the importance that the writer places on it. In this case “love is from God” – and not just that, God *is* love!

“Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Everything in this passage is just different ways to get this message across, and the author states that it is by demonstrating the love we receive from God for others that we ourselves achieve perfection.

It is a dynamic passage, a call to do and not just to think or say; it is the definition of ‘thoughts and prayers’ being the beginning and not the sum total of Christian love in action.

The passage clearly states that fear is not a demonstration of love – if people are afraid then we have not demonstrated love.

If someone demonstrates hatred then they cannot claim to be loving.

The passage is holding a very clear message of eternal hope shown and given through Christ, with an indictment of Christians who do not live up to God's ideal of how to be seen and heard to love.

We never know what others are going through, and nobody likes to have their faults called out, but it is a part of how we grow in our faith. The author makes a series of statements of fact about the definition of Christian love; why we love, who we love, and how we should love, but he also grounds that in reality, verse 20 comes from personal experience and so when we are talking about this then we too can call on our own personal experience.

This passage is interesting because it applies to everyone, not just to those already professing to be Christian.

#### **Sermon ideas based on the reading from 1 John 4**

1 John 4:7-21 falls into the category of trying to help Christians understand and improve their relationship with God, and by extension, the World God created. This passage is wonderful to talk about because it is very clearly about love. I say clearly because in 15 verses the author uses the words love or loved 27 times, almost twice in each verse and almost everybody that attends church has heard verse 19: "We love because God first loved us". If they haven't heard it before then they should hear it from you, because it is the Gospel!

There are lots of different ways to share something where the theme is so clear, love has inspired people since time immemorial so there are paintings, poems, songs and music and our own experiences to bring to what we think about when we hear the word 'love'.

You can also discuss the meaning of the word itself, church does not have to be passive – it can and should be an interactive experience! Young folks can understand love in terms of whether or not they like sports, sprouts or Snapchat with their friends, not just family or romantic love – and with this passage you also have the option of contrasting it with fear and hatred, which are mentioned as ways to explain love.

Christian love is something we do, not just something we receive and have. Any sermon or conversation for me is going to focus on just how radical love is and can be in a sceptical world.

- Do we actually demonstrate love as a defining Christian characteristic?



- When we tie love in with our behaviour, is the Church known for its love?
- Do we love those who are different?
- Can we love someone whose values are vastly different from our own?
- If by loving we grow towards perfection (7:18) then why do we not place more emphasis on love?

As a Christian and a trans person in the LGBTIQ+ community I feel the Church fails in this area in the real world. This passage is one of hope, but one tinged with sadness at the reality of the world in which we live. A case of what *could be* over what *is*. For example, the reading from Acts, where Christian love is shown to others; a foreigner being baptised because they declared their love for the Lord.

Every Pride march, where our brothers and sisters are simply asking for the same rights everyone else has, you can expect to see someone claiming to be Christian, holding a hateful picket sign. Is that showing love?

How often have we people heard speaking on the street with a microphone, spreading fear and judgment in the name of Christ? Is that showing love?

Women heading into abortion clinics face verbal abuse from people who give no thought to the effect on the woman's mental health and wellbeing. Is that showing love?

Each time we ignore or walk around a homeless person, is that showing love?

When you think of any church meeting, from choirs or kirk sessions, to presbytery and GA, is love the overriding thing that you know?

For me personally, the Church as an institution is not known for love – I know it for judgment, hypocrisy, bullying, abuse and privilege.

Given that the passage ends with the commandment from Christ, that if we love God we must love our brothers and sisters too, it does not leave much wiggle room for interpretation and arguments. To be Christian is to show love – no ifs, no buts, no limits, no small print, no terms and conditions – it is how we show how much love we have for God, because love comes from God in the first place.

## [John 15:1-8](#)

This familiar reading is the last of John's seven 'I AM's of Jesus, a string which describes Jesus' identity and relationship with God and humanity. Jesus describes God the Father as 'vine grower', and Himself as the true vine, and the hearers, now ourselves, as the branches. There is much imagery in the bearing of fruit and how this is a symbol of discipleship which glorifies God. With Jesus as the one true central vine, believers and disciples are imaged as the branches, and together they grow and bear fruit, not apart from each other but within and through each other, abiding in one another as Jesus abides in the Father. 'Abide in me' is a common phrase and a well-used hymn, particularly for funerals, but it is worth taking time to consider what abiding means in this passage.

### **Sermon ideas based on the reading from John 15**

Though this passage, or at least the imagery of it, is familiar, vines and vineyards are not something we come across often in Scotland. People are perhaps more familiar with images from gardening and horticulture. For example, in an apple orchard (as in a vineyard), the trees produce an intelligent network of roots that communicate the conditions in different sections of the whole area of interconnected plants and can even compensate for very localised problems around a few plants.

- What references and experiences might people have of growing?

One of the questions that arose for me while reading this passage over is – what exactly is the fruit? Is the fruit the love and joy that is spoken about later in the chapter? Is it the works of faith? Is it the results of effective prayer? It would be powerful to reflect on this and decide what, in your context, the fruit of the true vine might be, and what fruitfulness might look like.

- What are we growing? What are the fruits we aim to bear?

Another part of the passage that jumped out to me was in verse 2, "every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit". In the current climate of the Church and mission planning, pruning is a difficult concept – we are all aware of the need to assess our resources and work in a mission-focused way while being good stewards of what we have, but if the fruit of faith is part of our mission, then this passage promises good things after a necessary pruning.

- Does this image of pruning make sense to our current contexts? Are there other ways we can prune our work and faith?

In verse 6, the passage says that those who do not abide in Jesus are like branches that are thrown away and wither, and are burned. This is a difficult verse to read with the imagery of fire and the context that LGBTQ+ people are often told that they will 'burn in hellfire', so it requires some careful consideration.

- What is the reading actually saying about branches that do not bear fruit or abide in Jesus? Can we consider what those branches are?

## Prayers

### Gathering prayer/Call to worship

God of Love,

Let us gather together in Your name  
to spend time in Your presence.

May we abide with You in Your love,  
that we may share and live Your love with one another.

The road we have travelled to get here today is different for each one of us,  
but we meet together in this place to praise You.

Let us be open to Your transforming love,  
that we may become Your disciples  
and follow You on Your way. Amen.

### Prayer

Creator God,

Giver of life and compassion,

Nurture us in this time of praise to You.

Blessed is Your name,  
provider of senses and experiences,  
we appreciate the gift of touch,  
that we may know the softness of Your creation in communion with others.

We appreciate the gift of hearing,  
that we may enjoy the sound of the wind that can carry Your spirit.

We appreciate the gift of sight,  
that we may witness the rainbow of Your promise.

We appreciate the gift of smell,  
that we may experience the beauty of Your flowers in other ways.

We appreciate the gift of taste,  
that we may explore the creativity You give us in baking and cooking.

The complexity of Your creation, is beautiful –  
knowing when some senses may fail us  
we are not excluded from Your kingdom,  
from the beauty all around us.  
Your generosity abounds beyond all words.  
We thank You.

God who has created us in different ways,  
with diverse abilities to experience,  
let us communicate,  
so we can see how amazing all that You have made is,  
experiencing together for a fuller understanding of just how great You are.

God of all people and all time,  
we take this time to worship You.  
Amen

### **Prayer of confession and absolution**

Creator, Redeemer,  
Gift giver,  
God who loves us beyond all understanding,

we admit now, times when we have tried to take control,  
to take control over things not within our power.  
Times when we should have left the heavy burdens  
to You, our strong deliverer.

When we let our fear stand in the way of sharing Your love, God,  
we are sorry.  
Most merciful God, who knows all our guilts but still forgives us,  
we take time today to talk to You about what is heavy on our hearts.  
We ask You take these burdens,  
reduce our anxieties,

letting us know Your forgiveness,  
and help us forgive ourselves.

Let us lean into Your love,  
remembering that You gave Your son,  
for all our sakes.  
No matter how we may have wronged You,  
You still clear our names.  
Help us also clear our conscience,  
that we may begin our week  
free to focus on all the good You provide.  
Loving, compassionate and generous God,  
we pray to You this day.  
Amen

**Lord's Prayer** *(as rewritten by Rev Urzula Glienecke, shared with permission)*

Loving God, our Companion in heaven  
Hallowed be Your name  
Your community come,  
Your heart's desire for us  
Be realised on Earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today all that we need for a life in fullness.  
Help us to stop doing harm  
and heal us from harm done to us.  
Guide and shield us in difficult times  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the community, the vision and the joy are Yours  
Now and forever  
Amen

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

Lord, we thank You for all that You have shared with us.  
Showing light and love in this world  
where we so often see fear and darkness.  
Showing diversity in all the majesty of Your creation.  
The seasons that vary and cycle unceasingly,  
the climates that show and share life  
from extreme cold to extreme heat,  
from the depths of the oceans to the highest rocky outcrop

difference is all around us,  
leaving us in awe of the sovereignty You hold over Your creation.

Then You added us to Your creation,  
just as different and varied as the rest of this world in which we live,  
our lives and our stories often vastly different,  
and yet all belong and point to You.

You are love,  
Your Son, our saviour, came in love  
and offered us life through Him.  
Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.  
We thank You for clearly showing us how to be with Your creation.

May we offer our thanks and praise  
for the love that we have received  
and the love that we do receive,  
knowing that You are the source.

And may we go out into this world sharing Your perfect love,  
so that all may experience what it means to abide with You.  
Amen.

### **Prayer of intercession**

*In my home congregation we have a practice where we ask the congregation if they want any names to be included in the prayers. People either shout out a first name, or type it into the chat function on Zoom. Those are written down then included in the prayer.*

Loving God,  
We thank You that You are a God of such abundance and generous grace.  
We are grateful that within Your loving embrace  
there is space enough for all of us.  
We lift before You a world that sadly does not always reflect that all of us are children of God, equally worthy of respect.

We pray for people who are marginalised and persecuted,  
people who are made to suffer for their sexuality, gender, faith or convictions.  
For those who have been deprived of home and safety,  
we pray for protection and comfort.

For those love live under the shadow of violence,  
live threatened by war and destruction  
we pray for peace.

We bring before You all those living under the daily strain of debt, poverty, climate  
destruction, and discrimination.

We pray that they may experience justice within their lifetimes.

We pray for all those living on the margins of society:  
those without homes, people experiencing bereavement,  
people who are estranged from their families and communities,  
and for everyone who feels as though they cannot cope.  
Bring comfort and rest where there is none,  
and guide them towards communities of support and encouragement.

And finally we pray for those closest to our hearts.

We pray for *[read the names collected before the prayer]* ...

Lord of all compassion and love,  
surround each person we have named with Your grace and peace.  
May they experience healing and transformation in their lives,  
and most of all know how much they are loved by You.

Now as we go from this service, fill us with Your Holy Spirit  
so that each of us in our own uniqueness can bring blessings to our world.  
Help us to be healers, menders, guides, and friends to all we meet.  
And remind us that we are all God's children, known and loved.  
In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.

### **Prayer of intercession**

God of love,  
let love be shown to all Your creation.  
To people and places we know and love,  
and those that we do not,  
encourage us to show Your love even in spaces we find difficult.  
May our family, friends and colleagues experience the goodness of Your works,  
let them know love can be found within this congregation,  
let them know love can be found within Your church,

through Your almighty son.

God of peace,  
go where there is little or none,  
be the glimmer of hope so desperately needed,  
let those in times and places of war know we still pray for them.  
When peace is too far away, we pray for moments of joy,  
fleeting or lasting,  
give strength to all in times of darkness,  
support them as they fight to keep their light shining.

Compassionate parent,  
bring those we see often in pain without knowing it some relief.  
Creator of billions of incredible and diverse people,  
support Your people as we learn to accept every individual,  
created just as You intended,  
to experience as You will it,  
to grow as You planned it.

We pray especially for those leaders who set examples of behaviour,  
for teachers who need more time,  
for kirk sessions who need more people,  
for ministers in transition,  
for politicians who need more understanding.

We ask God that Your love may be shown through peace,  
peace from war,  
peace from judgment,  
peace from poverty,  
peace from pain,  
peace from trying to control that which we cannot.

God remind us today as we start our week,  
of the love and acceptance,  
shown to us by Your son, Jesus,  
help us to be more Christlike in our actions and inactions,  
supporting others,  
accepting the differences that we like and don't,  
and loving to the best of our ability,



just as Jesus did.

In His loving name we pray,  
Amen

### **Sending**

*“We love because God first loved us.”*

As we leave wherever we have gathered, virtually or physically  
may we understand that different does not mean bad.

May we demonstrate the love that God has for us and in us by sharing that  
with those we come into contact with in the coming days and weeks.

Offer kindness and conversation in place of silence,  
find a way to spread love instead of fear  
and welcome instead of rejection.

May love be something we do instead of say.  
Knowing that someone else’s life experience may be utterly alien to ours,  
may we recognise that love leads others and ourselves to get closer to God  
from whom all love and blessings flow.  
Amen.

### **Musical suggestions**

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- CH4 193 – “God is love, his the care” – This hymn ties in with the theming of the 1 John reading in particular, but also works as a general hymn of praise. Could follow readings or be sung at a lively pace as a final hymn.

- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house” - Verse 3 can be omitted if not having communion. This emphasises the community of the church and faith community, and the inclusion of all, and the love of God, in line with themes from all the lectionary readings.
- CH4 204 – “I am the church! You are the Church!” – This is another hymn emphasising the community and inclusion of the Church of all ‘many kinds of people’. This would also be a suitable children’s hymn, and there are suggested actions!
- CH4 342 – “Says Jesus, ‘Come and gather round’” – Although drawing on a different gospel story, this hymn reminds us of Jesus’ ministry and what He means to ‘walk my way’. This hymn isn’t a children’s hymn particularly but it does speak about the gifts of children and could be used after a children’s or all-age address.
- CH4 510 – “Jesus calls us here to meet him” – This is a good opening hymn, setting the tone for worship while also bringing in a theme of inclusion, and prompting thought about who is in our churches and God’s community.
- CH4 519 – “Love divine, all loves excelling” – The theme of love is key for this hymn, and it fits particularly well in the post-Easter Sunday season with references to the incarnation and salvation of Jesus.
- CH4 604 – “Holy wisdom, lamp of learning” – Ties into the John reading well in verse 2 with ‘Vine of truth...bearing fruit of faith today’ but also is a prayer for ourselves in our relationship with God and the Word and carries themes of unity, justice and peace. There are several well-known tunes that fit the metre of this hymn if the tune is unknown – my suggestion would be Abbot’s Leigh (CH4 642).
- Wild Goose Resource Group – “The love of God comes close” published in *Enemy of Apathy, Love and Anger, Complete Mission Praise* 940. There are multiple tunes to this – originally published with ‘Melanie’, it is in *Complete Mission praise* with ‘Rhosymedre’. In ‘Known Unknowns’ it is also suggested for use with the well-known tune ‘Love Unknown’ which fits very well. This hymn is a wonderful compliment to a service around the Acts reading, speaking of the love, peace, joy, grace and Son of God ‘embracing those who walk his way’.
- CH3 714/*Complete Mission Praise* 628 – “Tell me the old, old story” – This old favourite picks up on the language used in the reading from Acts, where Philip asks about the scripture passage and proclaims the good news about Jesus.

- Dave Bilbrough – “Let there be love shared among us” – This is a lovely worship song that could be played on its own or as a hymn.

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?

- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?  
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?  
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?  
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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