

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Year A

Sunday 8 February 2026

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Muriel Pearson, Interim Minister, Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale for her thoughts on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

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.

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.

Introduction.....	3
Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12).....	3
Psalm 112	4
1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16)	5
Matthew 5:13-20	6
Sermon ideas	7
Prayers	7
Musical suggestions	12
Reflecting on our worship practice	13
Useful links	15

Introduction

I have been accused several times in my ministry of being 'too political' in my worship leading and preaching. In face of the lectionary selection for today, I don't know how not to be political: not party political, but 'political' in the sense of being aware of justice issues, and how injustice impacts all our lives. I also read holistically. In other words, life is not separated into spiritual and secular spheres, but each informs and infuses the other aspect.

And God is Lord of all aspects.

As I prepare, I read each passage several times, looking particularly for a word or phrase that invites my curiosity. I like to read them several times over a couple of days. I will then turn to commentaries or online resources, looking for a hook to anchor my reflections. I particularly like Working Preacher <https://www.workingpreacher.org/>

Items of news or world events which chime or contrast with the lectionary passages will also be noted and filed, in case I want to quote or use a story. I also hold in mind any events or anniversaries relevant to the congregation(s) and look for a contemporary text to read alongside: from a biography, or a poem, or a novel.

I frequently turn to resources from Christian Aid, for example: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/our-work/between-life-and-debt> for stories and prayers, or Oxfam for illustrations or statistics.

I might use one or two of the passages in full (I rarely use them all), and if appropriate sing the psalm or a paraphrase of it.

[Isaiah 58:1-9a \(9b-12\)](#)

It is reckoned that 3rd Isaiah (from chapter 56 onwards) dates from the return of the exiles in 538 BCE. Having learned to worship the Lord in a 'strange land', they are now back home and trying to restore patterns of worship and living. But what this prophet Isaiah (borrowing the mantel of previous Isaiah's) tells the people that worship alone: performing religious acts or ceremonies, even with great sincerity, is not 'acceptable to the Lord'. Why?

'Is this not the fast I choose:
To loose the bonds of injustice,
To undo the straps of the yoke,
To let the oppressed go free,
And to break every yoke?' Is 58:6

It seems that justice for the oppressed is part of the DNA of God. I am interested that Isaiah's audience – who have been oppressed themselves by Babylonians and Assyrians and others – are being called out for their oppression of those in need. God's interest is in justice for those truly on the margins.

The prophet proposes radical hospitality: 'Share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house.' This is not about giving more to charity, it about recognising that those who suffer are family.

Professor John Swinton tells a story about being taken to see the original Starbucks coffee shop when in Seattle. It was a small, unremarkable place – Starbucks only took off as a brand when they shifted their focus from selling coffee to *creating community*. [1]

The optional verses (10-12) reiterate earlier themes, but add the image of light shining in darkness which is relevant to Epiphany and our gospel reading (Matt 5:13-20).

[1] *From a talk to the Guild of Health and St Raphael, 08.11.25*

[Psalm 112](#)

The lectionary omits verse 10 from the Psalm portion: 'The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.' Doing this smooths out the passage, but I think removes something all who seek God's will need to grapple with. In our day, and perhaps in every day, it is not true that the righteous flourish and the wicked melt away. For those sitting as members of the congregation, some will be experiencing joy and blessing, material and otherwise, but many will not. They may be anxious about health or job security or a family member. They may be exhausted from their daily exposure to the evidence that it is the wicked who prosper.

In terms of the structure of the Book of Psalms, Psalm 112 belongs with Psalm 111. They are both acrostic poems in Hebrew. Psalm 111 sings praise to God for God's unfailing righteousness, with Psalm 112 describing how those who 'fear the Lord' flourish. Unlike a simplistic 'prosperity gospel', however, it is not a case of cause and effect. It is precisely when things are not going well that a life lived by God's grace and in relationship with God has resources to cope:

'They are not afraid of evil tidings; Their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.' (v7)

'Happy are those who fear the Lord' (v1, NRSV). This is a beatitude, and like the beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel should not, I think, be read passively, but actively. The blessing is in the doing. What is being described in Psalm 112 is a relationship with God lived out in daily life.

'The righteousness that God blesses is not an uptight, tight fisted, grim lipped, rules-oriented life. It is open handed, delightfully joyful, wildly generous, *people-oriented* life. God gives us all the blessings of family and fortune not so that we can simply enjoy the blessings and thank God profusely, but also so that we can share our blessings with the poor. A righteous person is "gracious and compassionate." She is "generous and lends freely." He even "scatters abroad his gifts to the poor." Such a person is truly just, and that's what counts to God.

Indeed, such a person will ultimately be impervious to the disorienting disasters of life, because their security is not based on those blessings. Even though the sun doesn't shine for a while, "even in the darkness light dawns for the upright." Even when the foundations of fortune and family are shaken, "surely he will never be shaken." Even when the headlines are filled with bad news, "he will have no fear of bad news..." Such a person holds their power and prosperity loosely because they hold their God so tightly. "[H]is heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.'" Stan Mast, sermon commentary.

<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2017-01-30/psalm-1121-9-10/>

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16)

The small Christian community in Corinth, settled by freed Roman slaves some forty years before, was where Paul had spent eighteen months church planting (50-52 CE). Now in Ephesus, he has received word from Chloe's people that there is discord in the predominantly Gentile community, and has also received a letter with a number of questions around how to live a Christian life. Paul is writing to the community and not to individuals with what may be the second of four letters.

'Wisdom', it seems, is very important to the Corinthians, and again and again Paul brings them back to the cross. 'The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.' (1 Cor 1:18)

The entire letter can be seen as an appeal for unity, and for the identity of the community to be shaped by the cross and the resurrection. 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (v2). Paul contrasts human wisdom with the power of

God, which is perceived by the world wise as weakness and foolishness. Paul's theology of the cross is that it is the place where God's wisdom, the mystery of God's intervention in human history, is seen. The Lord of glory was crucified by the rulers of this age, and this is revealed through the Spirit of God.

It is hard for us to truly understand how counter cultural this worship of a crucified God is. The cross was an instrument of torture, humiliation, shame; designed to deter rebellion and punish those who dared push against the power of empire.

Most commentators interpret v10 as irony or sarcasm. The Corinthian Christians are not displaying maturity or wisdom. Paul is hoping to call them back to the source of wisdom, and to true maturity, which is love.

The verse I am most drawn to in this portion is v 16: 'But we have the mind of Christ.' How are the Corinthians, and how are we, to navigate the social trends and wisdom of the world? By having the mind of Christ. This leads us on to the gospel passage.

Matthew 5:13-20

Our Gospel passage follows immediately after the beatitudes, the first section in this block of teaching to the crowd about God's kingdom and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Father Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Israeli Greek Malchite priest reflecting on the Beatitudes says: 'When I understand Jesus' words in Aramaic, I translate like this: Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied. Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God. To me this reflects Jesus' words and teachings much more accurately. I can hear him saying, "Get your hands dirty to build a human society for human beings; otherwise, others will torture and murder the poor, the voiceless, and the powerless."

Christianity is not passive but active, energetic, alive, going beyond despair "Get up, go ahead, do something, move," Jesus said to his disciples.' [2]

[2] *Elias Chacour with Mary E. Jensen, We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 143–144.*

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/set-yourself-on-the-right-way/>

Not passive but active...so then Jesus' teaching about salt and light is about our practice as Christians. We are citizens of a different kingdom and our praxis should make us stand out.

Over time, Christian praxis has occupied an increasingly narrow sphere, often around sexual morality, but this is to miss the global, inclusive, radical nature of discipleship. We are called to live counter culturally: together.

The Roman city of Hippos, or Sussita, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, sits across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, the centre of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Its lights will have been seen for many miles. This centre of Graeco-Roman occupation would have been a constant reminder of domination. The followers of Jesus, living as citizens of an alternative empire, were invited to shine brightly by obeying God's laws and teaching others to do the same.

The connection with the true worship of Isaiah 58 and the blessing of the righteous of Psalm 112 is clear, but clearest of all is the connection to having 'the mind of Christ'.

Sermon ideas

True religion – The church is what the church does

A focus on Isaiah 58 and Matthew 5.

This can reflect on the local congregation's mission, with others, to realise God's kingdom now.

Having the mind of Christ

A focus on 1 Cor 2:1-16 and Matthew 5

Especially in a time of transition or change, the 'mind of Christ' as focus helps people and congregations (in a new union, say) come together.

Let your light shine

A focus on the 3 references to light shining in darkness in Isaiah 58:8; Psalm 112:4; Matthew 5:14-16

The emphasis is on 'you' as a plural pronoun. As individuals we are the church together. This is an important counter cultural statement in a very individualistic society.

Prayers

Opening responses based on Psalm 112

Prayer of approach

In a moment of quiet
we open ourselves
to the wonder and the worth:
God beyond us and God with us.

Help us to be still
Help us to know
Help us to let go
Help us to be open

As we breathe in and out
Breath of God
Within us and between us

Help us to be still
Help us to know
Help us to let go
Help us to be open

And if we find ourselves weary
or wounded
If we find ourselves brittle
or broken
then reassure us:

Your forgiveness is for us
Your life is in us
We are salt. We are light.
Because God wills it so.

So may healing come
may light break forth
and all for Love's sake.
Amen.

Reflective prayer

Following Jesus
is not about finding ourselves,
or even seeking the meaning of life.
It is about opening our eyes to the world around us,
to see the need of our neighbour,
to pick up on the unspoken cues
the longing behind the smile
the spark that is no longer there,
extinguished when hope took flight.

It is about recognising our kinship
with the man and his dog
begging on the city steps,
or the young woman
sitting in the shop doorway,
or the elderly veteran
whose once proud bearing
is now stooped and dejected.

Following Jesus
does not require us to travel far physically,
but to take huge steps
in our understanding
of our sisters and our brothers
who make this pilgrimage with us,
to bear their burdens
and lighten the load
with love and grace
lived out in mercy and compassion,
with steps more faltering than sure
and a hunger born of justice.

Is not this the fast that God chooses?
Help us to bring light
into all the darkness of life, spreading hope for a better world,
a world where justice is made real by Your children living together
in harmony.

Help us to bring salt
into the blandness of life,
encouraging vitality and joy in living
in a world that dares to hope
for the future that You promise
where all Your children will know themselves
loved and valued
and treasured,
created in Your image,
bringing You glory forever.
Amen.

(Liz Crumlish)

Prayer of thanksgiving and dedication

We thank You, God of Life
that Your love and justice and mercy
are higher, and deeper and wider than we can know.
We come as Your children
seeking to live in your will
and we offer our gifts of time and talent and money
and we offer our selves:
Salt for the wounds for the world
Light for those who feel they are in darkness.
Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

In our prayer, please respond by repeating 'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for ourselves and those we love:
We give thanks for times of grace and contentment and we bring to You
Times of anxiety, loneliness, ill-health and loss.

(pause)

As we navigate our daily living
'May we have the mind of Christ.'

'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for our church, local and national.
We pray for neighbours of all faiths and none.
We pray for those needing welcome
needing a home
hungry, and anxious for tomorrow.

(pause)

As we play our part in community
'May we have the mind of Christ.'
'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for our country, and for our leaders.
We pray for those tasked with upholding justice
and keeping peace
and those who are carers and educators

(pause)

We pray for business leaders and trade unionists
as we pray for unity and a hopeful future
'May we have the mind of Christ.'
'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for our world, conscious of gross inequality
that millions toil without justice and scarce pay
for our comfort and convenience.
We cry out against the mountain of debt
which keeps countries from caring for their people.
We pray for our planet itself
exploited and abused
groaning and damaged.

(pause)

As we pray for Your kingdom of justice and wholeness
as we seek to live Your way
'May we have the mind of Christ.'
'May we have the mind of Christ.'

These and all our prayers we make in the name of Jesus
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Blessing

God be in our heads, and in our understanding;
God be in our eyes and in our looking;
God be in our mouths and in our speaking;
God be in our heart, and in our thinking;
God be at our end, and at our departing.

And the blessing of God
Creator, Redeemer and ever-present Spirit
Be with us now and always.

AMEN.

(Book of Hours, adapted)

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources, including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

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.

- GWA 111 – “God, come now to explore my hear”
- GWA 202 – “God, may our church reflect your grace”
- GWA 203 – “ Que esta iglesia sea unarbol/May this church be like a tree”
- GWA 207 – “We’re the light of all the world”
- CH4 291 - “When out of poverty is born” – An Advent hymn that is relevant to this week’s readings
- CH4 264 – “Judge Eternal, throned in splendour”
- CH4 529 – “Forth in thy name, O Lord I go”
- CH4 180 – “Give thanks with a grateful heart”
- CH4 536 – “May the mind of Christ my Saviour”
- CH4 53 – “We do not hope to ease out minds”
- CH4 538 – “God be in my head, and in my understanding”
- CH4 708 – “O Lord, the clouds are gathering”
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness”
- CH4 694 – “Brother, sister, let me serve you”

Etta James singing This Little Light of Mine <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAYQcQxDha0>

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

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

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 are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc. If you would like to reproduce this material for commercial purposes, please contact the copyright holders, the Faith Action Programme, for permission: faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

©Faith Action Programme