

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2 October 2022

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Gillian Paterson, Minister of Methil Wellesley Parish Church, for her thoughts on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.

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.

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Introduction

October is a month with a particular focus on tackling poverty. Monday 17 October is the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and 3-9 October is [Challenge Poverty Week](#) and the resources for the first four Sundays in October have been written by Priority Area congregations.

You will also find more Challenge Poverty Week resources on the Priority Areas [Facebook page](#), including videos and prayer memes. We would encourage you to share these with your congregation as a way of highlighting how the church is engaging in anti-poverty work at a local level. Since the early 1990s the Church of Scotland has placed a priority on putting resources into the most deprived communities. However, while there is great work happening in [Priority Area congregations](#) (those in the 5% most deprived parishes), it is important to recognise that the priority for the poorest and the most marginalised is the Gospel imperative facing the whole church.

This is the beginning of Challenge Poverty week, a time of the year when we often tell the stories of what it is like to live and work in a Priority Area church. Over the next few weeks the work of the Priority Areas team will be highlighted, and the lectionary readings for this week spotlight common themes that I see every day, every week and every year serving the community of Methil in Fife. I am a great believer that what I do during the week informs my preaching on a Sunday, and I prepare for worship by reading through the various readings to see how they are relevant to my situation.

I tend to read several commentaries to see what writers think of the passages. I not only use modern writers, but also look back to people like Willie Barclay and others, because the past can often inform the present. I tend to think about each of the passages in turn, and then see where the common theme comes in each of them. Once I have reflected on each of the passages, I then take time to consider where the themes relate to what we are doing in Wellesley Parish Church. For example, in recent years we have worked extremely hard to build a new, modern, flexible Centre that is the hub for our community. The trials that faced us seemed insurmountable at times, and often the Psalms, or in this week's case, Lamentations, related well to the feelings we were experiencing.

I usually write the sermon first, and then choose the hymns that mirror my thoughts. Sermon preparation begins with what we can learn from readings. I ask myself questions such as, "What is Jesus saying"; "What is He teaching us today?" I consider the Old

Testament passage to see what we can learn, as well as the New Testament reading, but tend to only use one of them in addition to the Gospel reading in the service itself.

In the majority of the sermons I write I tend to speak of the people I have met, the situations they are in, and the consequences of their actions. Names are changed and nothing personal is ever mentioned, but the congregation know that this is the reality of our parish. It's a big learning curve for all of us, but makes it easy to relate to, and this has often led to the start of new initiatives.

The final part of my preparation is to write the prayers and the children's address. My congregation tell me they learn as much, if not more, from the children's address. Engaging with our young people, making it age appropriate and interactive is what I tend to concentrate on. I have three questions I ask myself:

- Is it easy to understand?
- Do they have something to do to catch their attention?
- What will they learn from what I say?

[Lamentations 1:1-6](#)

Lamentations is a book commonly known for sorrow and its 'lamenting' of the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is thought to be the author of the book, expressing his sadness at all that has happened. The primary person in the book is an unnamed narrator, although they are interrupted at various points as they speak. In verse 9 they are interrupted by "Daughter Zion", who cries out: "O LORD, look at my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed." There are various themes that flit between the two voices in this first chapter, and a theme emerges of Daughter Zion having no one to comfort her. She has been abandoned by her lovers, and is distressed that those who oppose her have triumphed. Daughter Zion laments to people passing by, although she does eventually address God.

Both voices are very alike – using the tone of sorrow and shame and both putting the blame squarely on the desolate city herself. There are also some differences worth highlighting. For example, there's the comparison of how Daughter Zion used to be in a prime position, full of glory and joy, but now she is desolate and alone, no wonder she laments! There is a real sense of despair and disappointment within this chapter.

We can compare and contrast these ways of looking at a situation. There seems to be a blame culture here, which reminds us of some of the writing of Job, yet Daughter Zion 'owns' her guilt and takes seriously what is being said to her. In today's culture the world

view would be that Daughter Zion has caused her own problems; I often hear of drug addicts and alcoholics who are told, “you have made your bed, you need to lie on it”. Daughter Zion laments and wails, despairing of her own situation, but at the same time, she learns a great deal about herself and how to move on from the despair.

I’ve met many people in the same position, and would want to highlight this in the service. There is not a week goes by that I am not listening to someone wailing at the unfairness of the benefits system, the fact they cannot clothe their children, or provide a warm and clean home for their family.

[2 Timothy 1:1-14](#)

This letter to Timothy was written towards the end of Paul’s ministry and many people find Paul’s farewell a fascinating way to learn more about the great man. The letter begins with greetings and positive and helpful remarks about Timothy and his family, complimenting his sincere faith, and his proven track record, because the roots of faith in his family are strong and sure.

Timothy is encouraged to see that his faith and calling are simply part of who he is and how he lives out his faith. The chapter also imagines that faith is something to be guarded so that it is never diluted or damaged in any way and warns about false teaching and rival doctrines that could lead away or negatively influence.

Timothy is encouraged to remain faithful, and to do as much as he can to be like Paul. In enduring suffering and shame he will be just like Paul, and is reassured that suffering indicates neither dishonour, or failure, because he is preaching the Gospel. The Gospel is all about God’s power to bring life from death and that power, seen in Jesus, helps us to change our perspective on the anguish and humiliation that supposedly should accompany suffering.

Paul expresses confidence in Jesus’ ability to guard what he has entrusted to Jesus, meaning, perhaps, Paul’s very own self. Timothy must faithfully guard the teaching entrusted to him. The defeat of death is regarded as powerful good news, and it is easy to imagine Paul confidently writing this farewell, ensuring his beloved friend lives with the certainty and assurance of God’s grace being poured out upon him. Paul makes it clear that there will be suffering too, being realistic about what is a good way to die, and what kind of life prepares someone for this.

Poverty is a reality for our community, we cannot hide or deny that, but there is also a genuine sense of community and people who look out for one another. I know of a lady who makes pots of soup that are delivered to families who have little or nothing. She bakes too and leaves cakes and scones on the doorstep, never wanting praise or thanks, she does it because of her faith, it is her way of living out her faith in God.

[Luke 17:5-10](#)

This passage has three main themes – faith, forgiveness and obedience. Jesus was teaching His disciples to do their duty first before they could start doing great things on their own. He was trying to impress on them that you cannot gain great faith in a short time. It is through mistakes, trials, temptations and experience that faith is earned. It can take years of experience, whether in ministry, or as a volunteer in the Church, for the people of God to have strong faith. In many ways Jesus was providing assurance for His followers, ensuring that they didn't feel overwhelmed by the task ahead of them.

The disciples, like all of us today, can find that faith is tested to the limit, sometimes beyond what we feel we can bear. The image of the millstone, which would drag anyone to the bottom of the sea, is a powerful reminder of the gravity of what Jesus was teaching. He was encouraging His disciples to be humble people of faith, who will serve God with faithfulness and obedience, behaving in the way God intended.

Jesus realised that His friends would need help and support, and that they would make mistakes and be tempted by the ways of the world. He encouraged them to be humble, and to ask for forgiveness, but also to show forgiveness to others, no matter how many times they need to be forgiven. The disciples realise that this is going to take more faith than perhaps they had, or expected. This passage highlights that it isn't great faith we need, instead it is faith in a great God!

This passage had a big impact on me when preparing for worship. Ministering in a Priority Area is a humbling experience, because the people here show their faithfulness in all that they do. We may not have a lot of material resources, but there is a humility and dedication that inspires me daily, and is at the heart of the Gospel. The issues we face, such as addictions, loneliness, low self-esteem and hopelessness are challenging, but the difference a congregation can make by being at the heart of a community like this can be life changing, and that is priceless.

Sermon ideas

There are different themes in these passages, but all link together and relate clearly to the challenge of poverty in our communities. Lamentations expresses the need for comfort as the Daughter of Zion is feeling abandoned, and her sorrow and shame is poignant. Today poverty brings sorrow and shame for individuals and families, not having the basic needs for living means worry, disappointment and a low self-esteem at not being able to provide. Since the closure of the mines in our area in the 1980s, two generations of families have struggled. The mental health of men in particular is low because they haven't been able to take care of their families in the way they would have wanted to.

The passage from 2 Timothy 1 focusses on another important theme in Challenge Poverty Week, and that is faithfulness. For our church family, being faithful to God's call to serve this parish is vital, and we do that by supporting those seeking comfort and support, as highlighted in the Lamentations reading. The dedication and faithfulness that has been shown over countless years, including during a very long vacancy between 2001 and 2010, is an example of God's faithfulness to the people who have lived out their faith in practical ways; giving generously of their time, skills and resources to help others, even when they have little themselves.

The Gospel reading speaks of the humility shown in people's faith and obedience, as well as the need to forgive generously. Taking this theme would allow me to highlight the work we do, and why we do it. For example, our 'Hope Chest' project has been set up in our old church hall, after beginning in the Manse garage! Furniture, household goods and clothing, plus starter packs of food, cleaning materials and other essential items are provided on a referral basis for those in need. This project provides practical help in a non-judgmental, open way. The donations we receive are humbling, often from people struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Our mental health support groups, assisting people of all ages, our pastoral care and the fellowship groups we run all highlight these themes of comfort, faithfulness and humility and assure the church family that no matter what trials and temptations we are going through, we are putting our faith into action, and helping those who have the least in this community.

Poverty is a source of shame for many in Methil – through the teaching of these passages there is an opportunity to show that sorrow can be turned into joy, abandonment can become friendship, trials can bring happiness, and humble service is fulfilling.

Prayers

Call to worship

With humble thankful hearts we gather to worship God

May we be united in love and praise

With generous, faithful minds we open our hearts to hear

May we be filled with the knowledge of Christ's teaching

With the trials and temptations of life in our thoughts

May we lay them down and prepare to freely worship God

Adoration

Eternal and Loving God,

We are in awe as we worship You today.

Your generosity knows no bounds,

and we are humbled by the breadth, length and depth of Your love for us,

which extends to the people of the whole world that You made so creatively.

How wonderful it is that You brought variety, colour, vibrancy and beauty to this earth,
for You have been a generous and caring master
who wanted to provide for Your children.

We are blessed with continents, countries and areas that range from the high mountain to
the deep ocean,

the small rural village to the bustling city.

All of this has been made perfectly, a loving gift to be experienced and lived to the full.

Creator God,

You have showered upon us all the resources we need for a fulfilling life,
including families and friends who love us,

work and leisure that inspires us,

and a faith that brings meaning and purpose day by day.

We are truly thankful for all You have done, and continue to do for us, day by day.

Hear our prayers, in Jesus' name

Amen

Confession

Almighty God,

You know everything about us.

The thoughts we have, the desires we fight against, and the words that are spoken that cause distress, worry and fear.

Our faults are many, our failings emerge more often than we would like.

Our minds are influenced by those around us.

We even drift away from the path You have set before us.

We believe the publicity that says we should be ashamed of our lack of money, resources and ability, and our minds become burdened with what we have not done or achieved.

We confess the mistakes made, the actions taken, or not taken, and say sorry ...

Sorry because we let others gain the upper hand, instead of turning to You.

Sorry that we have not been as faithful as we could have been.

Loving God, forgive us, assure us and empower us as we move forward in faith, renewed and forgiven,

knowing You are with us, urging, encouraging and driving us on.

Amen

Thanksgiving

Living and loving Lord Jesus,

with joy and happiness, we thank You for the blessings of life seen in our community, in our homes and within the people who mean the most to us.

We are grateful for the moments that encourage and bring us hope and peace in our hearts.

We are thankful for the countless volunteers and staff who make a difference to people living in poverty by running foodbanks, clothing banks and other projects, and we appreciate the time given to challenging why this is necessary in a country like ours in the 21st century.

We know that this work is needed because people are being treated unfairly and without respect, and so it fills our hearts with thankfulness when we see and hear the effect of a listening ear, an encouraging word, and the practical help that makes all the difference to someone who has little or nothing.

We give You thanks

for those who give, even when they have little themselves,
for every gift makes someone's day, meeting needs in communities that are struggling.

We praise and thank You
for the work of the Church that changes lives,
that challenges why people are living in poverty,
and leads to new policies or extra funding that turns lives around.

With grateful hearts we offer our prayers to You.
Amen

Intercession

This prayer works well if two people share the reading, with one person reading the refrain each time.

God of the poor, friend of the weak,
hear us as we remember in this Challenge Poverty Week
all those who bear the scars of poverty, and live with its effects on a daily basis.
We think of the young people in our communities
who may not have decent shoes, or a coat, or even school uniform to wear,
may there be an equality for all.

Lord hear our prayer

We pray for the people who have no idea where today's food will come from,
how a power card will be paid for,
or whether they have shelter and a bed for tonight.
We ask that no one will go to bed hungry today.

Lord hear our prayer

We lift before You those who are living without the essentials of life,
a bed to sleep in, towels to wash with, and a chair to sit on.
Humbly we pray that there will be a fair way of living for all.

Lord hear our prayer

We give thanks for the groups and organisations
that make a difference to people living in poverty,

especially those who provide practical help, advice and support.
May their work grow and extend, despite the challenges of the cost of living today.

Lord hear our prayer

We pray for the people who are in power at local, national and international levels, asking that they would act with integrity, generosity and humility, ensuring that there is fairness and justice for all, regardless of age, creed or colour.

Lord hear our prayer

Lord God, surround with Your love
the countless individuals and families who are treated unfairly because of poverty,
who are not given the chances others are given,
and who are held back or rejected because of their situation.

Lord hear our prayer

Generous God,
we pray that there would be an end to the scandal of poverty in this country,
for You understand the effect this has on people living in our community.
May there be a turning point that sees renewal and investment in our poorest communities,
providing a better future for people of all ages.

Lord hear all our prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen

Blessing

As our service of worship ends, our service to God begins.
May we make the difference, challenge the preconceptions,
and show God's love in action, now and always,
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.

Lamentations 1:1-6

- CH4 54 – “Lord, you have always been our home”
- CH4 191 – “Do not be afraid”
- CH4 274 – “Comfort, comfort now my people”
- CH4 547 – “What a friend we have in Jesus”

2 Timothy 1:1-14

- CH4 111 – “Holy, Holy, Holy!”
- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness”
- CH4 465 – “Be thou my Vision”
- CH4 555 – “Amazing grace!”
- CH4 561 – “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!”

Luke 17:5-10

- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness”
- CH4 356 – “Meekness and majesty”
- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting”
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness”
- CH4 624 – “In Christ there is no east and west”

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'.
- While singing in our congregations is still 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

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

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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