

## **Wednesday Worship— Remember who you are - ‘a small part of something so much bigger’—General Assembly 2023**

### **Short song for the day**

Act Justly (McLarty)

### **Call to Worship (Based on Deuteronomy 6: 4-9)**

**Leader:** Hear O Israel, listen, you that have assembled, pay attention, people of God, wake up, those who would walk the way (not just talk about it) The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. What does that mean?

**All: We shall love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our might.**

**Leader:** What does that mean?

**All: We will keep these words today in our hearts. We will recite them to our children and talk about them when we are at home and when we are away, when we lie down and when we rise. We will bind them as a sign on our hands, fix them as an emblem on our foreheads, and write them on the doorposts of our houses and on our gates.**

**Leader:** What does that mean? Choose to ask the question and let us worship God.

### **Song**

CH 96 You are before me, God, you are behind (to Sursum Corda)

### **Prayer**

Inspired and Inspiring One, you knitted us together in our mother’s wombs, you crafted each never-to-be-repeated creation and called each brand-new breath a breath-takingly beautiful miracle. Then you knitted us together as one humanity and set us spinning on one tiny, fragile, intricately inter-related planet. As much as we are yours, we are each other’s.

Inspired and Inspiring One, when we come to you, asking sincerely that you shoulder the burdens of the world, that you step into those overwhelming, vast, unjust places on our behalf, thank you for gently reminding us that we are part of the body supporting the shoulders and that we are not alone. Your fire is in our belly, your heartbeat connects us

one to another, your will is what will be done when we stand together for love and justice. The burdens of the world do not exist outside of us, distant and hidden. They are ours.

Inspired and Inspiring One, when we come to you, whispering our secret fears, hurts and struggles, the ones that lay us low and lonely, thank you for the listening love we feel in friends and strangers who find us and hold us up; in the ones who sit with us long after there is anything else to be done and those who walk with us, and slow down so we can share. Together we find the resolve to love our way back to justice.

Inspired and Inspiring One, sometimes our deep temptation is to resign and retreat from the world, to shelter in our handmade harbours and hide from the storms. In these times, thank you for your recalling spirit. By resigning from the world, we become disembodied, floating adrift on the seas of change, but having no purchase. You bring us back and remind us that storms are best braved together.

Inspired and Inspiring One, there is brokenness in this beautiful, fragile, intricately inter-related planet but there is so much beauty too! As you knitted us together in our mother's wombs and wove us into a common humanity, we pray our prayers not in resignation or despair, but with renewed resolve and determined hope. Together, we are your body, shouldering today's burdens, lifting our collective voice, walking a well-worn road and striking out on new paths. Together we share this one world as one body. Yours, ours, always. (From *Rage and Hope*)

## Readings

### Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the Lord  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### Matthew 22:36-40

36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

## Reflection

When I was a kid, growing up in rural/small town South Carolina, church on Sunday morning was not a choice. It’s just what happened – and the old adage, children should be seen and not heard – was real. I’m not bemoaning the fact or complaining – just stating the facts as they were. So, my brother and sister and I had to find ways to pass the time. I’d love to say I hung on every word the preacher uttered, but I do remember ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness’ so I’ll avoid that pitfall. In the sanctuary, there was a stained-glass window of Jesus. He was standing in a beautiful, kind of overgrown garden, knocking on a door. I could easily disappear myself into that window for an hour. Where was the garden? Who was on the other side of the door? What did he want, anyway? Why didn’t he just open the door and go in – he was Jesus, for goodness sake! Endless conversations in my imagination, so many questions and ponderings and wonderings about little things in the image. As I got older and realised the significance of where Jesus was from, his whiteness made me uncomfortable – I’d simply accepted it as a child, but seeing that picture of a blond-haired, fair-skinned man in a robe every Sunday gave me a chance to begin to ask why?

And there was no handle on the outside of the door – was that significant? I decided maybe it was because you had to open your mind and spirit and life to what he had to say to you ... that still challenges me today.

So, when I came to explore the text we have in Matthew, I was intrigued by the door-image. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” It’s easy to miss, but the original word is not hang, it’s hinge – like the hinges of a door. Everything hinges on these two things – love God and love each other. Without both, the door doesn’t open right, or it slants, or sticks closed halfway – it makes it hard to get in or out.

Last year’s Assembly invited The Right Rev. and Rt Hon. Lord Sentamu to address it. He prefers simply to be called Sentamu, was Archbishop of York, is a member of the House of Lords and Chair of the board of Christian Aid. But really, that’s not important – he is just a lovely, insightful, funny human being. And he comes out with these extraordinarily ordinary sounding statements that, if you’re listening, hit you right between the eyes. Every human person, he said, is a ‘stand-in’ for God. In Micah, we are told what is good/ what is important – ‘and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.’ Sounds so extraordinarily ordinary, so beware!

Because, if we're listening, that should hit us right between the eyes. So, if every human person is a stand-in for God and we are to walk humbly with God, we are called to walk humbly with each other because, not to see ourselves as more important, not to view any other person as 'less than'. Quite the opposite actually. How do we do that? We won't always get it right, but what a challenge and a humbling request – in every encounter, in every situation, with every decision, to ask the question – am I treating this person the way I would treat God? And if not, why not and what could I do differently? What a recalibrating concept!

Today, we are honoured to share time with Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis. Today we are bringing a Jewish/Christian glossary to the Assembly. This has been a labour of love between both communities – a sincere attempt to listen and understand each other, and I am humbled to be here today and to welcome the Chief Rabbi. One of the insights shared by the Jewish community explains the huge individual and communal significance of the term 'chosen people' - chosen-ness, not chosen in the sense of a privileged position, but the obligations that come with choosing to embrace the radical love of God and live a different way.

The articulation of this lived-call by the Jewish community is beautiful and empowering and challenging. It is part of the path that led to these dialogues – we have chosen to find new ways to bring ourselves closer, we have chosen to sit side by side and discuss, not only what unites us, but to engage with what potentially divides. That is a brave outworking of love in real life, and it is being a blessing to the nations

So, I go back to the question in the call to worship - what does it mean to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our might? What does it mean for the Church of Scotland as we seek to serve our neighbours locally, nationally and globally? What does it mean to be a small part of something so much bigger – God's vision for God's oh-so-loved creation. Interesting, the text in Micah isn't emphatic – instead, it insists on a question mark. Maybe giving us the answer would be too easy; maybe we need to continually revisit who and who's we are. God has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? Well?

Amen.

## **Song**

CH 253 Inspired by love and anger