

## Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

### Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – 6 November 2022

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Tina Kemp, retired Minister, for her thoughts on the twenty-second 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.

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Job 19:23-27a.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Psalm 17:1-9 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Luke 20:27-38.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sermon ideas .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Prayers .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Musical suggestions .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Useful links .....</b>	<b>14</b>

## Introduction

The nervous tourist was afraid to get too close to the cliff. *“What would I do,”* he said to the guide, *“if I fell over the edge?”* *“In that case, sir,”* said the guide enthusiastically, *“don’t fail to look to the right. You’ll love the view!”* (Anthony de Mello, *The Heart of the Enlightened*).

When I first read today’s passages, I felt a bit like I might fall off the cliff as, at first glance, they seemed a bit doom and gloom. But I took the opportunity to look to the right and there emerged into view some strong, heartfelt, honest, open and wonderfully faithful words.

Relationship with God now, and in whatever lies ahead – death included – is the overriding theme of these passages. Each, in its own way, is a reminder that ours is not a God enshrined solely in Scripture or to be found inside the walls of an institution, but a living, moving, acting, listening, responding partner in our faith journey.

Many of the words of Job, David and Paul especially resonate with the circumstances in which we as a nation and world find ourselves in a rather disappointingly wet June when I write. They also embrace, in this season of remembering, our resurrection hope in Christ. More of that later. I have tried to let these words sink in, with the help of online and physical commentaries, and have hopefully given you a few hooks from which to work.

I always find stories are a helpful way in which to introduce or illustrate a theme and Anthony de Mello is one of my ‘go to’ authors. He has a story for every occasion. I suggest you check him out. Happy worship preparation.

### [Job 19:23-27a](#)

Chapter 19 occurs in the midst of the exchange of conversation between Job and his friends. Here, Job details how God’s actions have hurt him. Despite proclaiming his innocence all along, it seems clear to Job that both God and his friends have turned against him. Job is determined not to be remembered as a bad man who received his just rewards and sets out to prove his innocence and be vindicated, even in death.

Job turns to the language of the court, seeking written and permanent evidence to document his case, ensuring he is heard not just now, but in the future. If Job’s claims of innocence are recorded, in stone, then future generations will remember his words, perhaps investigate his situation, and finally clear his name.

There is some debate over the use of the word 'Redeemer' (in Hebrew 'ga:al') in verse 25, a verse many will recognise from the libretto of Handel's Messiah. Some commentators argue we might understand this as affirmation that Job will experience a post-resurrection encounter with the living Jesus. Others, however, emphasise that the Hebrew word refers to the practice under Jewish law which made provision for the Israelites to redeem family members in dire straits. A 'ga:al' was a relative who could step in to release someone from their obligations.

Regardless of how we interpret this verse, what is clear is Job's vociferous declaration of his innocence, his determination to be vindicated in this life or the next, and is another example, despite his many doubts throughout the book, of his self-assurance and refusal to give in.

Job is doing the unthinkable – standing up to and challenging God. It's something many of us do, when faced with tragedy on a personal or global scale. The question 'why?' is one many of us will have been faced with when asked what is God's role in human suffering.

In this passage we are confronted with the deep and difficult questions of who we understand God to be and how God relates to humanity.

### [Psalm 17:1-9](#)

In this psalm we hear echoes of its author David's many prayers and pleas to God throughout his life. There are echoes too, of many of the other psalmists who engage in open and honest communication with God.

Here, David straightforwardly details the pressures and attacks coming from enemies who are intent on destroying him, and increasingly appeals to God to pay attention and to act to provide deliverance, protection, and vindication from those who threaten him.

David emphasises the fact that he has lived a good life and invites God to examine the evidence (verses 3-5). Even in the midst of his anguish, David is confident God will find nothing but confirmation that he has followed a righteous path.

This psalm first calls for attention, then declares the author's personal faithfulness and ends with a plea for God to act. This shows that the relationship between David and God is an active and not passive one; one in which both parties have an obligation towards one another in order for it to be healthy and fulfilling. The structure and language indicate further that the relationship is rooted in vulnerability and honesty.

The imagery in verse 8 serves to underline this symbiotic relationship between the author and a living God who is actively involved in the world.

This is one of many psalms throughout the Psalter which reminds us we can approach God with confidence and openness, believing our relationship with God is mutual, not individualistic.

As one commentator puts it: “... *this relationship is best expressed not when we view God as a celestial Santa Claus to whom we turn for help when we are in trouble, but when we maintain our part of a mutual and familiar covenant: to claim God as our own and to walk in the ways of God whether we find ourselves in good, bad, better, or even the worst of situations.*” (Eric Mathis, Working Preacher).

## [2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17](#)

Paul is writing here to deal with a crisis of faith and to urge the Thessalonians to ‘keep the heid!’. Evidently, they think that the second coming of the Lord is so near that it is as good as present. Having begun in one direction based on the teaching of Paul while he was with them, this new teaching has pulled the rug from under them and they no longer know what to believe and how to act. Paul says that wherever the rumour came from, it is wrong.

Paul’s aim is very practical – to remind them not be thrown off balance or lose their equilibrium. They must be calm, composed and clear-thinking despite the upheaval around them. He also wants to comfort them with reassurance of the future hope that lies in the Gospel.

Paul reminds them that before Christ’s return, certain things must happen – first, ‘the rebellion’ and secondly, the revealing of ‘the lawless one’ (verse 3).

In verses 13 to 17, Paul says that strength in the face of persecution and affliction is a mark of true faithfulness. It’s not so much about enduring trials *with* faith but *by* faith.

This new teaching about the end times may not be of much concern to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century after Christ’s death and resurrection, but to this young congregation it was alarming. And so most of Paul’s effort goes into encouraging people to keep trusting in God and doing good, rather than obsessing about the end.

Paul reminds us that we can be confident, encouraged people because we are held in Christ. No matter how strong the opposition, we are secure, set free to live according to the Spirit's sanctifying work. Paul's confidence rests not in his people, but in the God they worship.

The concluding prayer in verses 16 and 17 binds all fears and hopes together in the love and grace of God in Christ, serving as benediction, encouragement, and inspiration.

### [Luke 20:27-38](#)

Jesus is having another argument. And for the first and only time in Luke's Gospel it's with the resurrection-poo-hooing Sadducees.

What sets the Sadducees apart is their reliance solely on the Torah. The Pharisees and others also read the Prophets and Psalms, where they find justification for trusting in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees believed this world to be the only one in which God would act as keeper of covenantal promises. The Pharisees believed in justice being dished out beyond the boundaries of this world, which was important – especially in the case of the Romans, who didn't look like they were going to get pay-back in this lifetime.

The Sadducees' question here isn't a serious one. They are intent on making the idea of resurrection look ridiculous. They are taking an ancient practice to the extreme in order to show that the whole idea is foolish.

Jesus deflects the question on two fronts. First, He shows how they fail to understand that resurrection life is different from life here and now. Second, He demonstrates their failure to understand Scripture by alluding to the story of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush and the revelation of God's holy name. The passage, He says, declares that God *is* — present tense — not *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God will raise the dead because God cannot fail to keep the promises to them that God *is*, and *will be*, their God; from whom they draw life and who is therefore the God of the living and not the dead.

Once again, as so often, Jesus' focus is not on the small stuff, the detail, the legalities, but on the bigger picture of the Kingdom, and on the living and life-giving relationship of the faithful with their God.

## Sermon ideas

A monkey and a hyena were walking through the forest when the hyena said: *“Each time I pass by those bushes there, a lion jumps out and mauls me.”* *“I’ll walk with you this time,”* said the monkey, *“and side with you against the lion.”*

So they started to walk past the bushes when the lion pounced on the hyena and nearly mauled it to death. Meanwhile the monkey watched from the safety of a tree that he had run up the moment the lion appeared.

*“Why didn’t you do something to help me?”*, moaned the hyena. Said the monkey: *“You were laughing so much I thought you were winning.”* (Anthony de Mello, *The Heart of the Enlightened*).

There is much happening on a global and national scale that we can focus on in our reflections. As I write, war continues to rage in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis is causing fear especially among those on lower incomes, IndyRef2 is back on the agenda, questions remain over the actions and morals of those in leadership in the governments of both the UK and Scotland; and our Church, at local and national level, faces tough decisions about its future. As you prepare for Sunday worship, I don’t doubt there will be other concerns on your mind.

The story above, told by the spiritual leader Anthony de Mello, is a reminder that we all face the lion in the bushes at times in our lives; the worry that grabs and gnaws away at us while the world – and perhaps God – simply stands by and watches. Our Scripture passages this week focus on the theme of remaining faithful and steadfast in the face of trials and tribulations.

Job, unwavering in his belief in his own innocence, and in his faith, despite the trauma which has befallen him, refuses to give up and demands of God vindication and justification. David, in the psalm, asserts his faithfulness and seeks action from God in his time of need. Paul spends time reassuring the faltering Thessalonians to stay strong in faith and centred on the path to which God has called them. And Jesus, whose own torture and death are imminent, reaffirms the promises of the living God to His people.

Faith, we are reminded, isn’t about passive acceptance. Our relationship with God is one of mutual respect and growth, one that is not afraid to ask difficult questions of and to challenge God, to be open and honest in our conversations with God and, above all, to

continue to trust God, even in the darkest of times. All this, in the knowledge that we are a resurrection people.

Above all, our passage reminds us that ours is not a God contained in brick and stone, but a living God who engages with people in all of life, good and bad, through the work of the Holy Spirit. A God who *is*.

## Prayers

### Call to worship

(based on Psalm 145:1-8, [Source, re:Worship](#))

Come, let's praise God together!

**For God is great, and worthy of our praise!**

Let's tell stories of God's power and majesty,  
God's mighty acts throughout history:

**for God is great, and worthy of our praise!**

Let's remember the compassion God has shown toward us;  
God's mercy and unfailing love, generation after generation:

**for God is great, and worthy of our praise!**

Let's pass these stories to our children and grandchildren,  
so that they, too, may come to know and love our God.

**For God is great, and worthy of our praise!**

Let's worship God together!

### Prayer of approach and confession

For ever and ever, Lord God.

That is Your promise to us.

A promise made before time began.

A promise kept until beyond eternity.

A promise that brings us here today.

Because forever starts today, God.

It rose with the first glimpse of dawn.

It breathed in the stirring of the morning air.

It sang in the waking chorus of creation.



And it lives in all of us  
because You, in Your goodness,  
have made it so.

This moment in time, God,  
is nothing in the grand scale  
of Your awesome plan.  
But it is our opportunity  
to recognise that every second,  
of every minute of every hour,  
of every day is everything,  
because of Your limitless love.

We praise all that You are, Creator God.  
We stand amazed at all that You give  
and we celebrate Your faithfulness  
to us in our failure to appreciate  
the price of Your promises  
and the cost of Your creativity.

When You created the world, Lord,  
You presented it to us as perfect.  
A place of growth and fruitfulness.  
but we misused it and left it broken and disjointed.

When You breathed life into humanity  
You chose and cherished us.  
But we broke away from Your gentle arms  
and dismissed Your love.

When You came to us,  
You wept with us, You suffered for us  
and You gave up Your all for us.  
But we forgot the vastness of Your sacrifice  
and took it for granted.  
We cannot fathom the scale and the nature  
Of Your forgiveness  
Yet still we seek it and need it.  
And still You offer it.

For ever and ever, God.  
That is Your promise  
as proclaimed in Your Son, Jesus Christ.  
So here today, we proclaim ourselves  
a forgiven people,  
refreshed by Your grace  
and ready to serve You.  
We proclaim ourselves forever people.  
Committed to sharing in Your work.  
We proclaim ourselves Your people,  
now and always.

**Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession**

Thank You, Lord God,  
for promises made and kept  
even when we have failed to keep  
our side of the bargain.  
Even when it feels the world teeters  
on the brink of disaster  
we know that You will never  
abandon Your people  
for You have shown us again and again  
that You are a faithful God.

Hanging in there  
can be tough, though.  
We often feel like giving up.  
at those times when life  
seems too hard or too painful;  
when those around us suffer.  
Remind us of the words of prophets  
that have sustained Your people  
throughout generations  
and have come true again and again  
in Christ Jesus.

Today, loving God,  
we pray for all those who are troubled

in body, mind and spirit.  
May they know Your presence,  
and be reassured by Your words.  
We pray for our world,  
its leaders, its policy makers  
and its protectors.  
Help them to make wise decisions  
based on justice and tolerance.

We pray for ourselves  
that we might see light  
in dark and difficult places  
and that we might be the light  
when others grope for meaning.

And we pray for one another here, Lord.  
Those beside, behind and before us,  
that we might wait in trust and love together  
and that we might go from here  
to share Your promises  
with all we meet.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Blessing**

Go to celebrate the God  
who is our home forever.  
Go to follow Christ's example  
in loving God, self, and neighbour.  
Go with the Holy Spirit  
to change the world with love.  
Go to seek God's kingdom  
in all you say and do.  
And the blessing...

## 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 124 – “Praise to the Lord” – a hymn encompassing the whole being of God and God’s relationship with us
- CH4 479 – “View the present through the promise” – an invitation to see the bigger picture
- CH4 562 – “Through the love of God our Saviour” – a hymn offering encouragement and reassurance
- CH4 547 – “What a friend we have in Jesus” – an old favourite which speaks of our ability to be open and honest in our conversations with God
- CH4 727 – “In the bulb there is a flower” – evocative words in this ‘Hymn of Promise’
- CMP 1008 – “The Lord’s my Shepherd” (Stuart Townend) – a setting of Psalm 23 which speaks of trust in this life and the next
- “Here I am to worship” – (Tim Hughes) a gentle, reflective hymn which acknowledges God’s glory  
[https://hymnary.org/text/light\\_of\\_the\\_world\\_you\\_stepped\\_down\\_into](https://hymnary.org/text/light_of_the_world_you_stepped_down_into)  
<https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3266032>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b\\_KNvkk2G-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_KNvkk2G-Y)
- “In Christ alone” – (Getty and Townend) affirmation of Christ’s power and presence in all of life, now and in the future  
[https://hymnary.org/text/in\\_christ\\_alone\\_my\\_hope\\_is\\_found](https://hymnary.org/text/in_christ_alone_my_hope_is_found)  
<https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3350395/in-christ-alone>  
<https://youtu.be/16KYvflc2bE>

## 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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