

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – 29 October 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank members of the Worship Team at Granton Parish Church for their thoughts on the 22nd 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.

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.

Introduction.....	3
Deuteronomy 34:1-12	3
Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17.....	4
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8	5
Matthew 22:34-46	7
Sermon ideas	8
Prayers	9
Musical suggestions	12
Reflecting on our worship practice	13
Useful links	14

Introduction

This week's material was put together by a team of people involved in worship at Granton Parish Church. At Granton one of our four core values is, "Everyone is valued and everyone has gifts that can be offered to God."

We try to put that value into practice in our Sunday Services. This means giving as many people as possible the chance to be involved. On any given week you will hear different voices leading worship, saying prayers, reading scripture, preaching the word, and sharing stories. And, since lockdown, we do so as a hybrid congregation, with people contributing live from around the world.

We value participation and allowing people to grow and express their gifts. As a result we may not have the most polished worship services (something will inevitably go wrong every Sunday), but it reflects the breadth of talent and experience we have in the pews.

To create this week's resource we gathered together as a worship team to discuss all the passages and explore the themes emerging from them and different people have taken the lead on preparing the different parts. The writings reflect a range of opinions and perspectives, but centres around the common themes of obedience and love. We hope it will be a blessing to you in your congregations.

David Moodie, Parish Assistant

[Deuteronomy 34:1-12](#)

What a bitter-sweet moment for Moses as we see him here at this pivot point in history. Called by God to lead Israel to freedom, Moses probably had no idea that the task would consume a generation.

For 40 years Moses had led a rebellious, complaining, and often faithless people through the wilderness. While he remained faithful to God, he was only human, and when his patience ran out and his anger with the people surfaced, God decreed that he would never enter the land of promise (Numbers 20:1-20).

Now he stood with the desert at his back and the fertile land of Canaan before him. Israel was about to enter their inheritance in the land God had promised them (see Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:8; 26:3; 28:4, 13). Journey's end was in sight, but for Moses this was the end of the line.

What were Moses' thoughts and feelings? Gratitude to have at least seen what he could not possess, or was it like rubbing salt into the wound? Bitter at this high price for one slip in a lifetime of service?

Maybe he had a sense of wonder at seeing the physical outworking of those covenant promises? Was he relieved, or excited for the people who had been under his care, or concerned for the challenges ahead as a nomadic people learned to live in settled communities? Did he have compassion for those already living there, those they would dispossess – did he think of them at all?

This was the end of his mission. The next chapter of Israel's story would be in someone else's hands. That someone was Joshua – a faithful spy in sent into Canaan 38 years previously and, with Caleb, one of only two who remembered Egypt. Mentioned in verse 9, he had served a long apprenticeship with Moses, been faithful in a subordinate position all that time, and this verse alerts us to his status as Moses' successor.

How was it to realise that someone else would see the fruit of your labours? Was Moses grateful that God had prepared for the future, or was it galling to realise that he was no longer needed? Was Moses proud of Joshua, excited for him, or resentful in that moment? And how would Joshua feel as he emerged from Moses' shadow? Was he anxious at facing the future without his mentor and guide, or gratified that he was finally being recognised?

Both men exemplified patience and faithfulness over many years. Imagine working for a year with no visible results – or 10 years, or 20! For 40 years they played their respective parts and were honoured, not for results, but for the quality of their relationship with God, their faithfulness and obedience.

The passage ends by eulogising Moses as the greatest of all prophets – the one who met God face to face and revealed God's power to the nations.

Lesley Hamilton Messer

[Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17](#)

A group from the church met after the Sunday service to read and discuss Psalm 90. Below are some of notes and observations that came from our group discussion of this passage.

- After reading the passage together immediately a question was raised. Why are verses 7-12 are left out of the lectionary reading? We found it interesting that the

selection seems to sidestep God's wrath and anger. Are we avoiding verses that make us most uncomfortable?

- This passage made us reflect on the fleetingness of human life. This can of course be a tragedy, but at times can be a blessing. Good and bad, all is temporary. Yet through everything God is faithful.
- We observed how, like many psalms, Psalm 90 manages to hold both the vastness of eternity ("from everlasting to everlasting", v2), with our everyday needs ("Satisfy us in the morning", v14). It can contemplate the biggest questions, yet also bring things down to earth.
- Another way to put it is that Psalm 90 bridges the gap between human time and God's time. Human time is short, obsessed with what is happening right here and now. God exists in a totally different understanding of time: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (v4). Yet both come together in the psalm.
- We were stuck by how frank the Psalmist is about the difficulties they face. It made us reflect on how difficult it can be when God is dealing with our lives. Christian life is not always full of joy. The Holy Spirit can ask us to honestly look at things we would rather ignore.
- As we discussed the passage, we often came back to the fact that the Church, both locally and nationally, is going through a time of change and transition. Even though change is necessary and sometimes for the best, it is still a painful process. Being obedient to God in times of transition is hard, but we all agreed that it is through difficulty that we grow.
- When considering change and transition, an analogy was made to the seasons, how winter turns to spring to allow seeds previously buried to grow. One participant drew a comparison to poppies, which can exist underground for 40 years. Only when the ground is disturbed do they then shoot up (hence why they grew so well on the WW1 battlefields). Likewise it can be in the times of most disruption and pain that we experience the most growth.

[1 Thessalonians 2:1-8](#)

This passage refers to the outrageous treatment of Paul and his companions in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40) and then his time in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). Paul now reminds the Thessalonians of what occurred in the past so that they may be spurred on to see him and the teaching of the Good News for what it is. Having been flogged with Silas in Philippi he was undeterred and went on to speak of the Gospel in Thessalonica, where the reception

was not positive either. Paul does not twist his words to flatter or be greedy. Instead, he says that they cared for the people and loved them and shared not only their message but their lives too. Paul and Silas then left under the cover of nightfall.

As a church we approached this text by reading it in private from different versions (NLT, NIV) and associated Study Bible notes. We then read the passage together and looked at it within the context of the rest of that chapter and the previous chapter too. Ten of us then reflected as a group on what each person saw as the meaning and significance of this section of the letter, which resulted in four general themes:

Obedience to God – As a result of being entrusted with a task by God, just like Moses was. Acting without fear, happily and yet faced with troubles. The metric is obedience and not the results.

Open – “Sharing our own selves” (v8) demonstrates the massive personal investment by Paul and his companions, yet their message was doubted and opposed by many.

Opposition – Received when the Gospel is shared, but this did not stop Paul and his companions from sharing. Jesus also experienced opposition and so did Moses, yet their obedience continued.

Ongoing – Paul did not get a reward in financial terms and he and his companions did not see the fruit of their labours in the short term. Seemingly relevant to contemporary justice struggles such as fighting for something that is right, even if you don't see the consequences immediately, e.g., climate change.

Understanding Paul in the context of these four themes holds Paul up as a commendable example, yet he was not praised at the time for his continued obedience. The majority of people in Philippi and Thessalonica did not treat Paul and his companions well. This speaks volumes when we, as followers of Christ, profess to present the Gospel to this broken world but don't always have the tenacity to do so. Paul's depiction of himself within this letter would have been recognisable to the Thessalonians for his ongoing obedience and openness even when he faced opposition. Would those who know you recognise you similarly for your furtherance for the Gospel? Even within the context of today's society Paul would have been equally unrelenting in delivering the message of Jesus Christ.

Paul Stevenson

[Matthew 22:34-46](#)

The Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament as we commonly know it, is a compilation of 39 books, divided into 929 chapters and 23,145 verses. It opens with the mythic telling of the origins of the world and then follows thousands of years of history, with tales of Kings and Pharaohs, Prophets and Priests, Shepherds and Servants. It contains poems, parables, histories, legal codes, wisdom sayings and much more. It is a vast, sweeping book, the work of many authors and hundreds of years of tradition.

And yet Jesus claims that all of it, the whole of the law and all the prophets, it all boils down to these two commands: Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself. There is a stunning simplicity to this, and an incredibly bold statement about the meaning and purpose of a whole religious tradition. It's a reminder that law must serve love, not the other way around. This is clearly relevant to us today. We are going through a time of upheaval in the Church. So much of our time and energy is spent on buildings, unions, and internal politics. Is there a risk that love is being sacrificed for law? As one of our group said, "people are trying to save the Church rather than simply being the Church." All our traditions, institutions, and practices – that we rightly value – must always be in service to love.

Surprisingly, Jesus's bold claim about the purpose of the law was not the thing that caused the most controversy. The Pharisees, the leading religious scholars of their day, would have agreed with Jesus that the true meaning of the law was love; love of God and love of others.

What they took offence at was Jesus's unconventional interpretation of Psalm 110. It had long been thought that the Messiah, the promised one who, like a new Moses, would lead God's people into salvation, would come from the line of King David. Psalm 110 was accepted to be a Messianic Psalm, a promise of victory over God's enemies. In the opening verse David, the author of the psalm, refers to two people. The Lord (Yahweh) and my Lord (Anonai). That second Lord was thought to be the Messiah.

But wait, how can David be referring to my Lord in the present tense if the Messiah is to come from his lineage? And why would the elder David refer to his junior as Lord? Here Jesus is telling them something about the true identity of the Messiah. People had expected the Messiah to be David round two. Like the first David, just better and more successful. But Jesus was pointing to something completely different, a lord who even David bows the knee to.

Jesus was an unexpected Messiah. Instead of leading the people in battle, He gave Himself over to an all-powerful empire, accepting the death of a common rebel. Yet He rose victorious, showing that God's Kingdom cannot be contained by any power on Earth or in Heaven. This is the Messiah we follow: the Servant King who brings life from death, hope from despair, and turns tears into joy.

David Moodie

Sermon ideas

Reflecting on all these passages, one theme that is woven through them all is **living in obedience to love**. Our Gospel reading reminds us that "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Everything hangs on love.

The Deuteronomy reading and our psalm share a sombre tone as they reflect on death and the fleetingness of human life. Compared to the everlasting God we are dust. Even Moses, the greatest prophet of them all, eventually died, passing on the torch to a new generation. Yet in his eulogy we are reminded that he led a life of obedient service to God. Perhaps most strikingly of all Moses knew that he would not see the Promised Land. It's one thing to serve when you are expecting a reward, it's a completely different thing when you know that you won't see the benefit. Yet Moses was obedient, because he loved God and he loved the people he was called to serve.

It's an obedience we also see in Paul. He too was given the responsibility of leadership. He even turned down the chance of financial reward so that his work would be all the more impactful. His love for God and love for others drove him on to keep sharing the Gospel. As he worked, I wonder if he ever prayed the words of Psalm 90: "Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands."

Obedience to love can often bring with it challenges. Paul was often slandered and mistreated by the very people he came to help. Jesus was constantly having to defend Himself against other religious leaders. Sometimes being loving means being willing to take risks for the sake of others. One of our group shared a quote that has stuck with him: "A Christian is someone who is without fear, happy, and always getting into trouble."

What keeps us going is the experience we have received of God's love. As Psalm 90 says, "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." The experience of God's love fills us up and gives us strength. This is what allows

us to achieve what Eugene Peterson called “long obedience in the same direction” – a life of faithful obedience to love.

David Moodie

Prayers

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

Loving God,

It is by You that all things are held together.

As we gather here today, both in person and by the wonders of technology, help us to see all the ways that You are at work in the world.

Draw us ever closer to You so that we may see each other as You see us.

Encourage us to look out not only for ourselves but also for others,

as we all continue our struggles in these strange, unprecedented times.

You promise us that whenever we call on You, You will answer us with Your presence.

We know that we can trust in Your promise and are thankful for it,

especially at a time when promises made by so many various people who have an impact on all our lives, are broken with impunity.

Be with us today Lord and accept our worship,

in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Stuart Mitchell

Confession / Repentance

Faithful God

You honour Your promises day to day and age to age.

We can be a forgetful people, living our lives unheeding of You.

Forgive us when we are inclined to forget You,

and help us to trust in You more fully.

Patient God

Your purposes span the centuries and time is in Your hands.

We can be an impatient people, craving instant gratification.

Forgive us when we are impatient with You and with others,

and help us to move to at Your pace.

Merciful God

You are slow to anger and quick to forgive.

We can be a resentful people, aggrieved when others offend us.
Forgive us for when we hold on to our anger,
and help us to extend Your grace to others.

Loving God,
You love us passionately, and gave Your all for us.
We can be a hard-hearted people, withholding ourselves from others.
Forgive us for the meanness of our love
and help us to love generously as You do.

Perfect God
You are holy and lack nothing.
We are an imperfect people, flawed and full of faults.
Do not hold our failures against us
and help us each day to be changed more into Your likeness.

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Amen

Lesley Hamilton Messer

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

Dear God,
Thank You for the many blessings You have given us.
Thank You that You are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times.
Thank You for the food on our tables and while doing so we remember the hungry,
for the roof over our heads and we think of those not as fortunate as us.
Thank You for our health but we remember the sick in mind, body and spirit,
for the opportunity to spend time with our family and friends,
but remember those who are alone.
Thank You for the freedom to worship and pray without fear,
but remember those who are persecuted.
Thank You for each precious new morning and for our rest at the end of each day.
Renew us and fill us with Your joy and peace.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Anne Macintosh

Prayer for others / Intercession

Every week at Granton 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. To see how this works please see a recorded service at <https://www.youtube.com/@GrantonParishChurch>

Loving God,
We thank You that You are a God of such abundance and gracious love.
We lift before You a world deeply in need of love and care.

We pray for the most vulnerable people around the world.
For the people of Ukraine, Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia living under the shadow of war,
we pray for peace.
For all those who have fled their homes seeking sanctuary,
we pray for protection and comfort.
We bring before You all those living under the threat of debt, poverty, climate destruction,
and violence.
We pray that they may experience justice within their lifetimes.

We pray for all those in need in our own society:
those without homes, people experiencing bereavement, people who are marginalised
and discriminated against, and for everyone who feels as though they cannot cope.
Bring comfort and rest where there is none, and guide them to sources of help.

And finally we pray for those closest to us.
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 we might carry Your love and light out into the world.
Help us to be healers, menders, guides, and friends to all we meet.
And remind us that You are with us every step of the way.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

David Moodie

Blessing / Closing prayer

Now go in peace,
And may the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be with you all, now and always.

And all God's people said
[Everyone] **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.

Deuteronomy 34

- CH4 159 – “Lord, for the years”
- CH4 161 – “Oh God, our help in ages past”
- MP 702 – “Through all the changing scenes of life”

Psalm 90

- CH4 132 – “Immortal invisible, God only wise”
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness”
- CH4 352 – “O for a thousand tongues to sing”
- “10,000 reasons” – Matt Redman (CCLI Song Number 6016351)

1 Thessalonians 2

- CH4 506 – “All I once held dear”
- CH4 555 – “Amazing grace!”
- CH4 694 – “Brother, sister, let me serve you”
- MP 1 – “A new commandment I give unto you”

Matthew 22

- CH4 115 – “Love is the touch of intangible joy”
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind”
- CH4 519 – “Love divine, all loves excelling”
- CH4 550 – “As the deer pants for the water”

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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