

## Second Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

### Second Sunday after Pentecost – 11 June 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Jo Love, member of the Wild Goose Resource Group, for her thoughts on the second Sunday after Pentecost. We also thank Dr Murdo Macdonald, Policy Officer, Society, Religion and Technology for his reflection and prayer for this SRT week of prayer.

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](#).

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>Genesis 12:1-9.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Hosea 5:15-6:6 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Psalm 50:7-15 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Romans 4:13-25 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sermon ideas .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Prayers .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Reflection and prayers for Society, Religion &amp; Technology Week of Prayer ....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Musical suggestions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Useful links .....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Introduction

Whatever the summer holidays we may be looking forward to, not many of us may be gearing up for a long hike with a tent in our backpack and the prospect of wild camping by night. But if that's your thing, you have a great advantage in grasping the common thread of this Sunday's readings!

Journeys happen in stages. Not only physically from place to place, but in emotional stages and learning stages, and probably hardly ever in neat, progressive steps of increasing wisdom. In fact, the only sure 'linear' factor going through life, is our ageing!

Journeys happen in stages. But sometimes we forget that's the norm, the reality. We forget that we don't grow all at once. We don't learn everything in one lesson. We don't understand the Bible in one sermon. Repetition is normal, though it never is the same the second, third, fifteenth time. Stopping places are essential. Surprises, and frustrations, are inevitable.

So, for maybe the third or the hundredth time, we meet Abram, hear Hosea, watch Matthew, and try to make sense of a letter from Paul. Their journeys meet ours and it won't be quite the same as the last time we met them. Each one of us is somewhere new.

Talking of stages on journeys, this Sunday is also the one nearest Columba's Day, 9 June. So there is scope for including Saint Columba's story in your worship service. His journey to Iona and then all over Scotland, bringing the gospel to our islands, is worth celebrating.

There are some ideas that can be adapted for sermons in each section of the exegesis below.

### [Genesis 12:1-9](#)

This chapter is often understood as the point where the 'real story' of the Bible begins; when God and one particular person with his little family tribe, get into relationship, and the 'real history' of the Old Testament takes off.

So it's worth noticing a few things about this launchpad story. Abram is continuing a journey already started by his father. The record tells us, but does not explain to us, that Terah had his sights on Canaan when the family set out on their previous travelling from Ur as far as Haran. It's good to bring our imaginations to this knowledge. How curious that God's call does not name the land. Was it so obvious it could only mean Canaan? How did Abram

‘hear’ this non-naming? As an affirmation that this God already knew the family trajectory; as God’s unseating of Abram from any assumption about the path ahead; as God taking up position as leader and guide of Abram’s life?

Have we ever heard a call and promise like this? What if we did? How might it feel; how has it felt? Notice no words are put in Abram’s mouth about any of this. All we see is that he does as God told him.

What do we hear in God’s words? There has been a lot of displeasure in God’s feel for humanity in previous tales, from Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden to Noah getting drunk after the flood to the halted tower building at Babel. Now there is a change, as God’s call shows genuine pleasure towards Abram. He is to receive significant blessings – of land and family, even as the latter looks impossible – and more than that, he is to *be* a blessing for future generations. All this towards someone not picked for his prowess, youthful energy or procreative potential. All this towards an ordinary, elderly, married, childless man, bereft of a brother and father, settler in a town he’d made home.

God, it seems, is trusting Abram, and Abram returns that trust. He does it neither as a solitary hero nor leaving all the familiarity he knew, but taking family, possessions and slaves. And he didn’t do it in one go, but journeyed by stages – stopping and starting; passing through and pausing. Robert Alter’s translation of the Hebrew verb in v8 is “pulled up his stakes” and Alter comments that ‘the Hebrew vocabulary is meticulous in reflecting the procedures of nomadic life’. Further in v9 the ‘journeyed’ verb also ‘derives from another term for the pulling up of tent stakes, and the progressive form in which it is cast is a precise indication of movement through successive encampments.’

Consider how to make visible this staged journey in worship, perhaps with a large cloth, tarpaulin or suchlike, repeatedly laid out then rolled up and carried, laid in a new place, and so on. Or repeatedly held aloft by four people at the corners, forming a makeshift ‘tent’ while stationary, then folding up and moving on.

### [Hosea 5:15-6:6](#)

In a less positive light than the Abram story, Hosea describes quite a stop-start relationship between God and God’s people, as he speaks out the people’s perspective and then God’s. Vacillating love meets constant love. The stark contrast uses powerful pictures from the natural world – showers and spring rains for God’s sure help; a morning cloud or dew that goes away early for the fleeting nature of human faithfulness.

The implication is that people only turn to God when crisis hits. They will be cut to pieces by the prophets' words which demand constancy and commitment.

Yet Hosea is a prophet keenly able to show God's longing to be known and loved. There is anger because of that love which cannot be indifferent but cares deeply. Who among us has never cried, "What shall I do with you!" about someone we love, when we feel exasperated and helpless to improve or resolve some predicament they are in.

Consider taking time to let people share such 'what shall I do with you' experiences, in small group conversations. We might touch the heart of God, and Hosea, in tangible ways through hearing such real-life parallels.

### **Psalm 50:7-15**

Wouldn't it be fascinating to know exactly what prompted the writing of each Psalm! Which of these prayers or songs or poems was inspired by one particular experience, and which by repeated observable patterns of human behaviour?

Offering sacrifices was a part of worship in Israel. The Psalmist is not expressing God's rejection of the people's sacrifices, but is refuting any idea that God has need of sacrifices! This is emphasised by the extensive reminder that all the beasts or birds that might be brought to God, are already God's own creatures. God has no need to feed on the world that belongs to God!

What might have been going wrong in the people's worship practices or ways of thinking, that inspired this poem, strange as it is to our ears? The poem builds towards the instruction to offer thanks and keep the promises made to God. Be as good as your word! The final climax is God's declaration of promise-keeping, as like the other passages today, the emphasis is on God's initiative in acts of saving and caring.

We are continually reminded that God is ahead of us, and that we love the One who has always first loved us.

### **Romans 4:13-25**

Like the well-known passage of Genesis 12, this revisiting of Abraham's story paints him in a very positive light as the spiritual father who trusted God. However, alongside today's other readings encouraging us to see that most journeys happen in stages, it might be good to

have a reality check on Paul's assertion that "no distrust made him waver"(v20)! That simply does not bear out in the continued Genesis narrative between God's first call to Abram and the eventual birth of Isaac recorded in Genesis 21.

The promise of land and family is repeated by God six times, and a seventh time after the near-sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham questions what God will give as he remains childless; expects that a slave will be his heir; asks how he will know the land will be his; laughs at and questions a further repeated promise of a son.

Abraham's trust is yet another imperfect, two-steps-forward-one-step-back, story of relationship with God. This is good news! Abraham's story shows what trust looks like – not the absence of questioning and doubting and complaining, but being honest with God at every stage, while God in turn makes repeated reassurances and never condemns Abraham for asking. There might be more relief and hope for us that this is the story as given to us of our 'spiritual father'.

### **[Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26](#)**

There are all kinds of journeys at different stages happening here. Two people approaching Jesus for healing. One suffering what has been a lengthy illness with all its stigma; one shocked by the sudden death of his young daughter. We can only imagine their thoughts and emotions as they made the decision to seek out Jesus and walked from wherever they were to find Him – one intending her action might remain a secret; the other a public figure ready to risk a very public request.

This intersection of encounters is, by implication, Matthew's early experience as a recognised disciple of Jesus. What kind of shock to the system did he get, fresh from his tax booth to hosting dinner for former fishermen and fellow tax men – a challenge in itself without disgruntled Pharisees demanding to know why this Jesus mixed with 'bad company'.

Where did each character start out from, and where did they get to, over the course of these events? What changed for them, even the crowds of unnamed witnesses?

One idea for exploring this would be to invite people to listen to the story 'in the shoes' of a particular person mentioned – Matthew, another tax collector, one of Pharisees, the synagogue leader, the woman, one of the flute-players, someone in the crowd.

What might each one have thought of Jesus? If these events were a 'stage on the journey' for each of them, what might they say as they looked back with some hindsight on this day?

## **Sermon ideas**

You will find sermon ideas and themes that emerge in the treatment of the readings.

## **Prayers**

### **Adoration**

God of our ancestors,  
You have wanted relationships with people  
ever since the dawn of humanity  
You have reached out in love  
right from the beginning of our existence.  
You are glad to be known as the God of Abraham  
and as our God  
You want us to know ourselves  
as Your children, Your people.  
You are the Ancient of Days  
and as fresh as summer rain.  
Steadfast and Surprising God,  
You are younger and older than all that is  
and before Your face,  
we bow in wonder at You again.  
What a gift  
that You make Yourself known  
and call us to You  
and call out the best in us.

### **Confession**

Dear Lord,  
what a puzzle we are to ourselves  
when we shut off the flow of Your Spirit;  
when we become disconnected from You  
and do not even think to say, "Help!"  
Forgive us  
our futile, self-defeating cycles of despair.

Forgive us  
when we hurt others because we are hurting.  
Forgive us  
when we sit too long in the certainty we are beyond repair.  
Help us, Jesus, to let You come near,  
to let You lay Your hands upon us,  
to speak to us clearly, saying,  
'My beloved child,  
I forgive you,  
I love you,  
go on in peace.'  
Holy Spirit, fire up Your pilot light within us again,  
come alive in us with new warmth and energy!  
Mended and hopeful,  
keep us on your way.  
Amen.

### **Thanksgiving and intercession**

Jesus,  
today we are thankful  
for all that we know of journeys You made –  
heaven to earth  
conception to birth  
growing up in years and in understanding  
into the water of baptism and the wilderness of testing  
into villages and out among fields,  
teaching, storytelling, healing, confronting, discipling;  
walking to Jerusalem,  
sweating in a garden, stumbling under a cross.  
You pitched Your tent and moved among us.  
Thank You for Your courage and Your compassion.  
Thank You for Your trusting and Your questioning.  
Thank You for Your sorrow and Your integrity.  
What an example You are, of how to walk,  
how to face each stage as it comes,  
how to know what is finished and what is unfinished.

Pilgrim God,  
from long ago You have called people



to leave and arrive,  
to move and to settle down.  
Thank You for the saints of Scotland,  
spreading the gospel here  
especially Columba of Ireland and Iona,  
for the community he led  
the missions he undertook,  
his prayer and peacemaking and evangelism.  
Thank You for the unsung saints of our own lives,  
those who have crossed our paths just when we needed each other,  
convincing us of Your grace and timing and mystery.

Today we bring our prayers  
for people we know and people we don't know  
who are at a difficult stage of a journey.  
For those in anguished questioning,  
God meet them.  
For those in trembling doubt,  
God, reassure them.  
For those in endless, unfulfilled waiting,  
God, bear with them.  
We pray for those at times of change and transition,  
not knowing what lies ahead –  
approaching retirement,  
beginning a new relationship,  
preparing to move home,  
applying for a new job,  
summoning courage for a lonely decision...

God, come close as You came to Abraham,  
go ahead and come behind,  
make camp with Your people, and lead on.

Gracious God,  
when we call on You in the day of trouble,  
You deliver us.  
So we call on You  
in these moments of prayer  
naming in silence the people

for whom we carry a special concern today...

*(short silence)*

You are with us as we trust,  
as we waver,  
as we trust.  
Thank You, God.  
Amen

## **Reflection and prayers for Society, Religion & Technology Week of Prayer**

### **Introduction**

For more than 50 years, the Society, Religion and Technology (SRT) project has sought to help the Church to engage with ethical issues in science and technology. During this time, SRT has covered a wide variety of topics; these have ranged from stem cells to synthetic biology, and from economics to environmental issues.

SRT was set up in 1970 by the Church of Scotland to examine the implications of new and emerging technologies. It seeks to stimulate ethical understanding by engaging with those working in research, industry, government, NGOs and many other organisations. Its expert working groups provide a forum for multi-disciplinary interaction between scientists and specialists in ethics, theology, sociology, ecology, risk and other fields, to look together at wider dimensions of emerging technologies. Bringing insights from Christian ethics, it has built up a reputation for the quality and balance of its work on complex and vital issues.

SRT also seeks to act as a catalyst of public debate on current issues, and promotes practical action in response to the ethical challenges which technological advances sometimes bring.

The SRT is very conscious of the prayer support of the people of God, as we wrestle with often complex and controversial issues, which may have far-reaching implications for the whole of society. While we value your prayers at any time, we particularly encourage you to pray during our annual Week of Prayer, which takes place this year from 11-17 June.

Materials in relation to this can be downloaded free from the Church of Scotland website:

[https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/104618/4135-srt-a5-week-of-prayer-leaflet-v2.pdf](https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/104618/4135-srt-a5-week-of-prayer-leaflet-v2.pdf)

Thank you for your prayers and for your ongoing support for SRT.

## Reflection on [Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26](#)

### Touch

Isn't technology amazing?

I was interested to read recently about a new development which allows people at a distance to both feel that they are touching each other (see <https://newatlas.com/wearables/e-skin-sends-receives-touches/>).

The sense of touch has been replicated through haptic technology for some time. The advance here is that the sense of touching and feeling has been made mutual: people wearing the special 'skin' patches can feel both that they are touching and that they are being touched. It is currently only in experimental form, of course, but it's easy to see some of the uses that it could be put to.

Many of us, during the Covid pandemic, experienced 'window visits' with loved ones in care homes and other settings. We were able to see and (to some extent!) hear each other – but imagine how much more complete an experience it would have been had we also been able to feel the touch of each other's hands? Or if we have grandchildren in Australia, in the future this kind of technology may allow us to interact more profoundly with them.

The disease of leprosy makes us very aware of the importance of touch. As part of this disease, leprosy sufferers lose their sense of touch. This leaves them vulnerable to the disfiguring injuries which we associate with the disease, when, for example, they pick up something which is too hot, or walk with a stone in their shoe.

My work in a leprosy hospital in Nepal for a number of years helped me to appreciate that it works the other way, too. The stigma associated with the disease meant that many leprosy sufferers who came to the hospital had not experienced being touched by another person for many years. For that reason, one of the ways in which staff showed their care was to reach out and touch them.

As we read the Gospels, we note that touch is an important aspect of Jesus' ministry. We see that people brought their children for Jesus to lay His hands on them (Luke 18: 15). He reached out to touch the man affected by leprosy (Mark 1: 41), and we are told that He touched the disciples to reassure them, frightened as they were by His transfiguration (Matthew 17: 7). It worked the other way, too: as we see in this episode, the woman with uncontrolled bleeding, who knew that if she touched the edge of Jesus' coat, she would be healed (Matt 9: 21).

Even without the assistance of haptic technology, we have the ability to reach out and touch those around us. This can be especially true of those who are stigmatised and rejected by ‘respectable society’ – as was the case for the woman in the Gospel story.

As the old children’s hymn puts it very simply but profoundly: “Jesus’ hands were kind hands, doing good to all”

And ours should be, too.

## **Prayer**

Holy God,

You are the majestic and infinite one.

As we look up into the skies,  
we see something of Your glory  
in the innumerable stars  
and endlessness of the heavens.

But we know that You are so much greater than all we can see,  
so much more than we can ever imagine.

Loving Lord,

You have placed us in a beautiful and endlessly fascinating world.

We ask that we, Your creatures,  
may always treat the creation  
which You have entrusted to our care with respect.

Gracious God,

who has blessed humanity with curiosity,  
inventiveness and a spirit of innovation,  
we give You thanks for all the blessings which science and technology bring to us.  
Grant that we may always use these gifts wisely,  
to the benefit of all humanity,  
and in ways that do not harm Your creation,  
and also lead to a positive flourishing of all of fellow creatures.

Forgive us, Lord,

for the times when we fail to live up to Your standards  
of holiness, integrity and love.

Forgive us when we turn our backs on others  
who are crying out in need.

May Your people always be prepared to reach out  
in kindness, gentleness and love,  
to show Jesus' love –  
especially to those who are stigmatised, rejected, and on the edge of society –  
unable to speak up for themselves.

Our prayers we bring to You  
in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through the power and inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,  
and for Your eternal glory.  
Amen

## Hymn

A science hymn, to the tune of "My song is love unknown" (CH4 399)

Praise for the depths of space,  
its endless scope and scale:  
in such a vast embrace  
our words and numbers fail.  
For what are we,  
that mortal mind  
should seek and find  
infinity?

Praise for the rules that show  
the patterning of time,  
creation's ebb and flow  
expressed in reason's rhyme.  
Can these great laws  
contain our awe,  
a formula  
for wonder's cause?

Praise for the complex codes  
each spiral strand conveys,  
as chemistry explodes  
to life in myriad ways.  
Can we compare  
what's ours alone

if we are known  
through all we share?

Praise for the drive to know;  
from human nature springs  
a need to learn and grow,  
to understand all things.  
Yet wisdom's prize  
is never won:  
from all that's done  
new questions rise.

Praise to the one whose Word  
breathed purpose into chance,  
for whom all matter stirred  
to join creation's dance.  
For love made known  
in every thing  
in praise we sing  
to You alone.

## 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 39 – “God the Lord, the king almighty” (*Psalm 50*)
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go”
- CH4 539 – “I want Jesus to walk with me”
- CH4 555 – “Amazing Grace!”

- CH4 680 – “You are called to tell the story” – definitely not a song limited to ordination!
- CH4 742 – “Rejoice in God’s saints”
- CH4 786 – “May the God of peace go with us”
- “God it was who said to Abram” – found in ‘*Love from Below*’, ‘*One is the Body*’ and ‘*Known Unknowns*’: Wild Goose Resource Group)
- “Science Hymn” – see above <https://reverendally.org/2017/06/18/science-hymn-2/>  
Written for Ely Cathedral’s 2017 Science Festival – tune ‘Love Unknown’ (CH4 399)

## 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](#)

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., but reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted.

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.