

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 18 August 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank the National Worship Team for their thoughts on the thirteenth 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
1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14	3
Psalm 111	4
Proverbs 9:1-6.....	4
Psalm 34:9-14	4
Ephesians 5:15-20	5
John 6:51-58	5
Sermon ideas	6
Prayers	7
Musical suggestions	10
Reflecting on our worship practice	12
Useful links	13

Introduction

Wisdom is a gift from God, and it is a gift that is needed in many different places in our world and our lives.

During our discussions around today's readings, we explored the relationship between the passages and how they challenge our ideas around wisdom in a rich and full way. The passages seem to build on each of their ideas about what wisdom is, as we finally land on the familiar passage from John, where they come together in Jesus' visceral description that helps us to understand how embodied wisdom truly is.

Sermon ideas are presented as a series of questions that challenge us to think about what living wisely looks like – for us, our communities and the wider world – and how we can be discerning in our decision-making, worship practice and engagement within and beyond our own communities.

Throughout the prayers we re-visit this idea of wisdom being embodied. This week's musical suggestions feature new songs from *God Welcomes All* (GWA) on the theme of wisdom.

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)

At the start of this passage, David is laid to rest with his ancestors after 40 years on the throne, with Solomon taking his father's throne as King. A lot of the back story is not included in this week's readings, but the trials and tribulations of getting to this stage culminate in verse 12, when Solomon's "kingdom was firmly established." There is a lot being said in a few words in verse 3 of Chapter 3: "Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; *only*, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places." The practice of worship in these places was problematic, and yet this is where God meets Solomon. What does this tell us today about God's willingness to connect with us, wherever we find ourselves spiritually?

It is in these unlikely places of worship that God appears in a dream to Solomon and prompts him to consider what he should ask of God. Solomon not only asks for a listening heart (or 'understanding mind' in some translations), but does so with humility – comparing himself to a child who does not know how to go out or come in. Both phrases are intriguing and they offer an insight into what and how we 'know', and into what wisdom really is. Wisdom does not necessarily come with age, and we will know many young people who are wise beyond their years. Solomon also refers to the heart and to the best of David's

character, despite his many apparent character flaws that we have been reading about in the past few weeks. Perhaps there is something more to wisdom than pure knowledge; are we given an insight here into how, when we are wise, it is accompanied by values such as justice, equity, compassion? Can we take from this text that wisdom is truly a gift from God?

Psalm 111

This psalm sets out many of the characteristics of God, and coupled with the Kings reading, we are given a flavour of what power and authority look like. As Solomon seeks to lead the people, he recalls the character of his father, hoping that he has inherited these traits – but he goes further, seeking to be wise and to please God. This psalm ends by saying that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. As we again consider what this word ‘fear’ means (see Psalm 34 section), we can begin to see the ways that our worship and reverence of God lead to healthy faith formation and a discipleship imbued with Godly character.

Proverbs 9:1-6

Here is Wisdom, depicted as a woman, in powerful contrast to the many male characters that we have met so far in the Old Testament readings. This woman is no frail creature, but strong, down-to-earth and able to turn her hand to all the tasks of running and governing a household. Wisdom is actively seeking people – particularly the “simple” and “those without sense” into her household to dine and become part of her community. There is a hint of the communion table in the invitation to share in the bread and wine she has prepared. While the invitation is extended to all who lack wisdom, there is work to be done – immaturity is to be laid aside, and to change the paths we have been walking. This points us towards recognising that Wisdom is an embodied way of living, not just having knowledge.

Psalm 34:9-14

What does it mean to fear the Lord? This is often a phrase that we can struggle with; how can we love, adore and worship that which we find terrifying? “Those who fear the Lord” is often interpreted as those who worship God. What dynamics does this bring to our understanding? Fear can also be read as reverence – does that change how we understand it? How does this affect our attitude to God?

The reference to young lions here is not a positive one of strength or a powerful image, like the 'Lion of Judah', but rather is a negative reference to those who are full of pride, or who seek something other than God.

The call in verse 11 to "children" to listen and learn resonates with the notion of immaturity in the Proverbs reading, and with the passage from Samuel, where Solomon describes himself to God as a child. We are given a glimpse of what it means to fear/worship God and how that becomes evident in how we live in response to our devotion to God: do good, seek peace. These words remind us of the passage in Micah 6 that are familiar to many of us.

Ephesians 5:15-20

This passage asks what it means to be rooted in worship. What is wise versus foolish living? Being wise means living a life that flows from being in tune with the Spirit. How do we discern, become wise in our understanding of God and our living out of God's will? The common task of worship is one that should not only be intentional, but one that is full of care. Our lives should intentionally look different from those that are not centred on serving God.

What do we choose to fill ourselves with? Whether we are filled with wine or the Spirit, we might lose self-control. We must make wise choices to fill ourselves with things that bring life and fulness and that keep our focus on God. Paul reminds his readers that as they are filled with the Spirit they are to remain focused as they sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and make melody to the Lord in their hearts. The passage describes the importance of creating a pattern and rhythm of thankfulness in our worshipping lives. There is richness in 'our song' blending with and building on the 'wisdom' of past generations. The songs and music we learn tend to lodge in our memories far longer than words, shaping our theology and they can be an important source of help and comfort when words fail us.

John 6:51-58

Jesus is talking about a faith that is utterly embodied. This is not simply a metaphor, He uses imagery and language that is visceral, that goes beyond our understanding. The promise of Jesus is not for those who know – who have head knowledge – but rather for those who are prepared to eat, and chomp and grind and get the flesh stuck between their teeth. It might appear gruesome, but this is something that is to be felt and to be at our very core, not just something that is to be known about. The Eucharist is filled with mystery, and regardless of

the theology surrounding it, is something that is to be practised, embodied, sensory. More than something that is simply to be remembered, it is beyond utilitarian; those who believe are entwined in an everlasting relationship with Jesus through the Spirit with God the Father.

In the midst of our regular worship, when neither baptism nor communion is taking place, where do we recognise and celebrate the font and table?

Sermon ideas

There is a focus on wisdom throughout today's passages, and as you prepare your worship you might consider the following questions. You could invite people to discuss them in pairs or small groups, or to share their experiences of wise behaviour or living.

- How do we understand wisdom in this time of great debate about truth and an often simplistic and unsophisticated approach in the media around what we need to know?

Wisdom can be recognised as a gift from God when it is sought for the benefit of community. Solomon shows wisdom by asking for a level of discernment to govern the people justly, and also shows humility in referring to himself as a child. What other characteristics or values do we associate with wisdom?

- How are we seeing these characteristics and values develop in our discipleship? And in our community/leaders/etc.?
- What might the differences be between heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom?
- What is wisdom?
- How do we get it? Is it purely a gift from God or can we become wise through practice and effort?
- Where do we see wisdom? How do we recognise it?
- Where do we need to see wisdom?

This material is being written as we are gearing up for the General Election. In the midst of TV debates and lots of different political grandstanding, where do we see leaders who show the traits of wisdom? What characteristics might we want to see in our leaders – either in government or other areas of society? In the wake of the General Election, or Presbytery changes, be careful to keep any discussions objective and not slide into debate or argument.

- How might this influence the ways we seek to live as “wise people”? (Ephesians 5:15)

Prayers

Gathering

God – Father, Son and Spirit – gathers us together to worship.

We come, hungry to meet You,
Bread of life, feed us we pray.

We come, with thankful hearts to praise You,
Lord of life, bless us we pray.

We come, open to Your presence,
Spirit of God, fill us we pray.

We come as we are, seeking Your wisdom, Your care and Your touch,
Giver of life, Redeemer and Sustainer, meet with us now. Amen

Call to worship

Loving God, Threefold One;
You have gathered us in,
welcoming us and making Yourself present among us.

We come to dwell –
**We come to dwell
in the presence of the Threefold One.**

Giving God, Creator;
our source, our goal, our life,
create in us a wise heart,
open to all that is good and that brings life.

We come to dwell –
**We come to dwell
in the presence of our Creator.**

Saving God, Redeemer, Suffering Christ;

we entrust to You all that is unresolved,
leaving it behind for a time,
and trust to Your care all that is beyond our control,
as we open ourselves to You.

We come to dwell –

**We come to dwell
in the presence of our Redeemer.**

Abiding God, Spirit, Sustainer;
inspire us, refresh us, renew us and revive us
as we look to You for wisdom and mercy –
in Your grace, move among us we pray.

We come to dwell –

**We come to dwell
in the presence of our Sustainer.**

Enfolding God, Trinity of love;
let us be open to the richness and miracle in meeting,
to the blessings found in surprising places.
You have opened wide Your deep heart of love to us,
Your blessed children,

and so, we come to dwell –

**We come to dwell
in the presence of the Trinity of Love. Amen**

Prayers for others

Generous and loving God,
You feed Your children,
You care for all the earth,
You dare to dream a future for us that is filled with hope and justice.
Yet,
there are those who go hungry,
there are parts of this world that are battered and bruised, torn and tormented,
there are those who are imprisoned in despair.
Help us to discern how to respond.
Give us wise hearts and compassionate minds,

as we seek to pray, to serve and to live well in these challenging times.
Where there is conflict – may it cease and be still,
where there is poverty – may there be fullness,
where there is inequality, maltreatment and transgression – may there be justice and compassion.
May we all know Your tending and empowering touch,
through the presence of Your Spirit,
and through our work with You,
in making Your dream come true here on earth as in heaven.
Amen.

Prayer/Confession

God
You know us and You love us beyond anything we can comprehend;
our rising and lying down,
our going out and coming in.
You know our thoughts and You know our hearts.
As we have leant on our own understanding,
making decisions that are unwise or harmful.
Forgive us.
In Your mercy
bless us with wisdom to discern Your will.
Bless us with grace to forgive others as You forgive us.
Amen.

Thanksgiving/Gratitude

Thank You for Your welcome, that does not depend on our wisdom or knowledge.
Thank You that You want to use us in Your kingdom, through relationship with Your Son, Jesus.
Thank You that we can come to You in our immaturity
and ask for understanding in how to live well, to discern between good and evil,
and that You welcome us and feed and nurture us.
Thank You for all Your works ...
(Invite people to say something they are thankful for – allow sufficient time for this)
Amen

Sending (A Franciscan Benediction)

May God bless you with discomfort
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,

so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears
to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in the world,
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done
to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.
Amen

Blessing

May we know the blessing of Your wisdom
as we seek answers to our questions,
as we seek to live deeply in the ways of peace and justice,
as we pray with and serve those around us.
For the glory of Your name
and the building of Your kingdom here and now. Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

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.

- GWA 28 – “Wisdom cries out in the streets” – this song refers to many of the characteristics and contexts of wisdom. Based on Proverbs 8.
- GWA 70 – “As once you served a waiting crowd” (Bread) – a vision of our life and work influenced by Christ, the Bread of Life.
- GWA 95 – “Holy, holy, holy, O Wisdom from on high” – a song of praise rooted in wisdom.
- GWA 132 – “As a mother comforts her child” – a song that leans into Wisdom as female, based in Proverbs 9.
- GWA 159 – “Earth is full of wit and wisdom” – this song speaks of the wonder of creation and how it testifies to God’s wisdom.
- GWA 163 – “We know the earth belongs to you, O Lord” – a song that speaks of the depth and impact of seeking to live wisely.
- GWA 188 – “O God of strength and everlasting kindness” – A song that addresses the difficulties we might facing in navigating life wisely and being discerning.
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”
- CH4 465 – “Be thou my vision”
- CH4 599 – “Holy Spirit, hear us”
- CH4 616 – “There’s a spirit in the air”
- CH4 763 – “God bless to us our bread”

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the Covid-19 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

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

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. If you would like to reproduce this material for commercial purposes, please contact the copyright holders, the Faith Action Programme, for permission: faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk

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.

©Faith Action Programme

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

www.churchofscotland.org.uk