

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 30 June 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Tom Gordon, writer, retired parish minister and former hospice chaplain, for his thoughts on the sixth 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.

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Introduction

It is clear – from the content of the individual Lectionary readings and the way they have been combined for this Sunday – that a focus on lamentation is a necessary part of the journey of the people of God. This lamentation is not solely confined to the cries of mourning from those who are bereaved – the lamentations of grief we know so well – but illustrates how the concept of distress, and the accompanying expressions of lamentation, are wider than that. They are lamentations that arise from a sense of distance from God ... or that the evils of the world are overwhelming ... or that God doesn't care how hard life is for the faithful pilgrim ... or that the burdens of living are simply too hard to bear.

A number of important things arise from this:

- The writers of, and central characters in our Lectionary readings are being honest. Their honesty illustrates three things: that distress is basic to the human condition; that these people are no different from you and me; and that God understands – and seeks – our honesty and will not ignore it. Distress, therefore, cannot, and should not, be ignored. Might this be a lesson from our somewhat 'closed down' Western society, and the way that Christians might feel that lamentation isn't a good thing because it might be a sign of a lack of faith? (See Geoff Walters: *Why do Christians find it hard to grieve?*)
- 'Lamentation readings' – particularly the OT lessons, from the Psalms, the Wisdom of Solomon and the Book of Lamentations – were integral to the worship of the people of God. They were public expressions – the corporate voice of the people – for the grief and yearnings of the whole community. The story of David's cries of mourning is the archetypal example of this: he expressed his personal grief, but also expresses the grief of the nation. There are times when it is appropriate that lamentation is kept personal and times when it needs to be corporate. There has to be a necessary balance between the two.
- All the readings – emphasised by both the NT lessons, for example – offer the balance to the necessary lamentations of the people. This is the constancy of God, and the recognition that lamentation is *not* faithlessness, but an expression of the pain of humanity. Lamentation, and its accompanying cries of distress, are not, and should never be seen as, the antithesis of faith. There is no failure in honesty. And perhaps we are closer to God when we are prepared to tell it as it is.

Background to 2 Samuel

This book continues the story of ancient Israel. It's set during the reign of King David, considered to be around a 1000 BC, and follows the course of David's 40-year rule as king of Israel. It opens with David learning of the death of King Saul, harking back to the introduction of the monarch to Israel as outlined in 1 Samuel, and goes on to chronicle the establishment of the dynasty of King David, Saul's successor, and the expansionism of Israel under God's chosen leader. Highlighting King David's personal struggles as well as his victories, the book is as much about personal issues – for example, David's grief for Saul and Jonathan, as well as his flaws and tragedies, including his adultery with Bathsheba – as it is about the historical development of God's people. For example, victories in battle, compassion for the sick and the poor, the eternal Covenant with God. The book, therefore, is a fascinating insight into the human condition, both personal and corporate, and does much to contrast human frailty and failure with God's purpose and faithfulness.

[2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27](#)

This specific section of 2 Samuel needs little explanation, for it is simply a heart-rending expression of grief, a deep lamentation, for the death of Saul and his son, the beloved Jonathan. It doesn't need me to analyse the content in detail, for in this reading you find all the devastating expressions of grief and loss that we have ever known. You can pick out your own examples of that as the text of the passage unfolds.

Two further things to note: firstly, the combination of the personal and the corporate that is the theme that runs through the whole of 2 Samuel. The King's lamentation is expressing his own loss, but also voicing the grief that his nation will carry. Here, if you like, is the purpose of public mourning – witness the death of the late Queen Elizabeth, for example – where one person or event might express public grief on behalf of a wider community, *and* the personal grief that is inevitable for everyone, held together in the public acts of mourning we know so well.

Secondly, the humanity of the King. Here you have all that is real and honest in the personal life of David, a forerunner, perhaps, of the personal flaws and struggles which will become clear later. Here is no distant King, performing in a stately, formal, remote fashion, as might befit his position. Here is truth, humanity, emotion, authenticity. And here, perhaps, is a lesson for us all – that God wants us to be real, and not clothed in the protection of personae, regardless of how much faith we have.

Sermon hint: David's cry of lament for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan; his personal mourning is also an expression of the grief for the whole people.

Psalm 130

This is one of the Songs of Ascent, a collection of psalms also known as the Song of Degrees, Pilgrim Songs or Gradual Psalms. These were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they travelled up to Jerusalem for the great feasts. Underpinning these psalms are expressions of the oppression of the people during their exile in Babylon, their yearning for a return to their homeland, and for the future peace and prosperity for their nation, for which the peace of Jerusalem is a powerful metaphor.

Psalm 130 is real and it is honest, for it permits the people to call out to God from the depths of human suffering, all the while hoping for, expecting, indeed insisting on, God's hearing. Here are God's people expressing their humanity at its fullest and their faith at its deepest. Here is no pretence – such as, “We are God's people so everything will be fine, and we should not complain.” Instead, here is all that we feel, or should feel, in the face of human suffering. And as we rail against God or plead for a release from our pain and sorrow, we do not do so outwith our faith, but in the full belief that God wants God's faithful people to be honest and true.

The writer of this psalm, therefore, speaks on behalf of the whole people of God – and all of us – with confidence that God will hear and respond to every cry of pain, because that is God's promise. The focus of the psalm, therefore, is waiting with hope. This is a psalm of trust, echoing Isaiah's words: “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). God wants both honesty and faith from God's people.

Sermon hint: The cry of the Psalmist, on behalf of the whole people of God on their pilgrimage of faith, to the holy places of Jerusalem.

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

The Book of Wisdom comes to us in Greek and was likely written about 100 years before the birth of Jesus. It's addressed to a people struggling to maintain a cohesive religious identity against cultural forces, and the temptation to give in to their oppressors. The people, therefore, are suffering, and the book aims to offer the hope of a vision of justice and eternal life with God despite the evil of the world around them – the 'covenant with death' of which they are well aware.

Solomon – a metaphor for Wisdom, it appears – reminds the faithful that God is not the author of evil, and that “God did not make death” (v13). Rather, everything God has made is good, and has an integrity, ordered to a justice that does not die.

Like Jesus, the Wisdom asserts that, contrary to what may appear to be the case – that suffering will be overwhelming – the truth is that God will remain faithful to the covenant made with God’s people. Here is an encouragement to cling to the promises of God. “Righteousness is immortal”, the writer affirms in verse 15. The people, therefore (all of us), are encouraged to hold to that and believe that the temporary anguish of humanity – real and honest though it is – will always be embraced by the everlasting Covenant of a loving and merciful God.

Sermons hint: Before the writer turns to the positives of faith in God, they acknowledge pain and distress.

[Lamentations 3:22-33](#)

The Book of Lamentations was composed during the fall of Jerusalem to the invading Babylonian armies in the early years of the 6th century BC. Hope seems distant, and God appears to be silent.

The first four chapters are acrostic poems. Each succeeding line or series of lines begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order: an aid to memory, as the poems were chanted and sung in places of worship.

Chapter 3 is a classic lament. Like many psalms (e.g. Psalm 22 and 88), the poem begins with painful and heartfelt statements about the horrors of the writer: darkness, pains, broken bones, desolation, arrows, etc. However, in the first part of the chapter, when the poem is connected to the fall of Jerusalem and the apparent end of the nation of Israel, the language is all the more powerful. The use of words and phrases that come from aspects of classic warfare – “besieged,” “walled in,” a way “blocked with stones,” and “arrows shot into the vitals” – are surely powerful expressions of the cries of despair we all know – both personal and corporate. When hopelessness seems complete, the writer cries, “Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord” (3:18).

But just three verses later, there is an astonishing transformation. “*This* I call to mind; and therefore I have hope” (v21). What “*this*” is becomes the key to the whole chapter. Here is the pivot. I am in pain, but ***this*** I still believe. For here is an unbreakable devotion to the promise of the Covenant with God. In the midst of life’s certain pains, we fix our minds on

the unbreakable and active love of our God. Only in that love will we find hope in our hopelessness, the promise of joy in our sorrows. “New every morning: great is your faithfulness” (v23). The 1923 hymn, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, beautifully captures the wonder of these convictions about God in its stirring words and tune.

My hope is in God, because “the Lord is my portion” (v24). God has convinced the writer that God is fully present. Even in the deepest despair, faithful waiting is justified. Silence in the face of realities, however difficult, suggests that accepting the situation for what it is can be the first step to wholeness and renewed hope. However dark the night, however deep the fear, however hopeless the situation, we rely on the steadfast love of God and give ourselves over to the One who is always the source of our hope. Great is God’s faithfulness indeed!

Sermon hint: Why would the Book of Lamentations be included in the Canon of Scripture if lamentation wasn’t integral to the human condition?

[2 Corinthians 8:7-15](#)

This section of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is often confined to Sundays when stewardship is the theme, with its focus on the use of our resources to the benefit of those in need. And yet there is much more to it than that. For here is Paul going to the heart of the Gospel, that, in Christ, we must be aware of the needs of others, and use all our resources to alleviate their suffering. This is as much their spiritual anguish (cf. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see the Kingdom of God”) and, therefore, an understanding of the reality of cries of spiritual distress, as it is about practical and material issues. Paul wants the Corinthians’ actions to be a reflection of the Gospel in which they believe.

The Gentile churches are collecting money for believers in Jerusalem whom they have likely never met. Yet, this offering binds the Jerusalem community to the Gentile believers who are now serving as benefactors. To use Paul’s language, this collection shows the believers’ indebtedness to one another and ultimately to the God who is working among them.

There are those, therefore, who appear to “excel in everything” (v7) and are exemplars of Christian commitment. All the more reason why they – and we – must be constantly aware of those who are in need. There are many who do *not* excel, and who may be experiencing a time in a spiritual wilderness – the “poor in spirit”. Being aware of them means we must not judge or condemn, but use what we have and what we are to alleviate their distress.

The Corinthians are urged to give generously with the knowledge that God has already provided abundantly for them for this very purpose: “And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work” (9:8).

If God can overcome boundaries such as this in Paul’s day, surely the Spirit can act in new and startling ways in our churches today. How will the Spirit ask us to make use of our time, our talents, and our resources to display the gospel in our world, and to those most in need?

Sermon hint: An acknowledgement by Paul that there are times when the Christian community is hard pressed.

[Mark 5: 21-42](#)

This passage from the Gospel of Mark describes Jesus’ healing “two daughters of Israel”: a young girl and a mature woman. After casting out a demon from a non-Jewish person, Jesus returns to the Jewish side of His ministry, and is faced with a large crowd of people. Mark cleverly places one story inside another, and in so doing, offers a powerful narrative of Jesus’ power over sickness and death, and a pointer to His power to bring salvation even to the most hopeless of circumstances.

The passage begins with a vivid portrayal of the real world in which Jesus, God incarnate, is placed. This is a world of need, of clamour and distress. And the cries of this needy world are epitomised by the pain and devastation of the leader of the Synagogue. This ultra-religious man would have been expected to be the *last* person to ask for help, or to express his distress. But here he is, representing us all.

The middle section – the story within a story – is placed there for obvious reasons. For it offers us a powerful metaphor. On the one hand, a religious leader asked for help, honest about his suffering. And, on the other hand, an ‘ordinary’ woman clamours for understanding. Both honest, both distressed, both at the end of their tether, both seeing Jesus as the “sufferer’s last hope”, as William Barclay describes it. Here, in these two people, you have the whole of humanity crying out in their needs.

And it is interesting that you also have the contrast – or, indeed, the connection – between the formality of the raising of the little girl from the dead; a set piece event, and the informality of the woman in the street grabbing hold of the hem of Jesus’ cloak; healing on the hoof. Is this not a pointer to the healing and restoring power of God: in expected ways,

the set piece elements of our faith, which we can interpret and even understand; and in unexpected ways, the moments of wonder, when newness and restoration breaks in when it's least expected, and which we may not even understand? God is not to be confined!

Note, too, the cost of healing. Jesus was aware that some power had gone out of him (v30). Can we be aware of that too?

Through all of this, you have the reality of despair and hope, not in contrast to, or the anthesis of, each other, but both of them seen as real and honest parts of the human condition. For, at the conclusion of the story, you have the difference that faith makes. It permits us – and indeed places demands on us – to be honest, and to recognise that faith will see us through.

Sermon hint: Jesus is surrounded by distress – at the death of a daughter and a woman with a life-limiting illness – and is fully immersed in the suffering of the human condition.

Sermon ideas

It's hard preparing a sermon on lamentation, but it's necessary. The late Professor Bob Davidson, Professor of Old Testament in the University of Glasgow, has told us, "There are more verses of lamentation in scripture than there are verses of praise." Lamentation is part of who we are. If it's there, it shouldn't be avoided.

Lamentation is not the anthesis of faith. It is fundamental to our humanity, the humanity which was fully embraced by our God in the Incarnate Christ, who cried out on the cross the classic words of lament of the Psalmist: "Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani!" "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

The poet Shelley, in *Otho*, affirmed the reality of this when he wrote, 'Dark is the realm of grief.' We cannot – we should not – ignore that darkness.

You may want to focus on lament. The examples here begin with a global focus and move through to a space for personal reflection.

- Lamenting the pain of a broken world: Gaza, Ukraine and the like, along with other current issues.
- Lamenting the sins of our world: Current experiences of bad things being perpetrated by bad people.

- Lamenting what has affected the worshipping group: Recognising events within the community and church that have called for a corporate expression of sorrow.
- Lamenting personally: An opportunity for the preacher to be personal – as much as they feel they are able.

But in all our scripture lessons there is a flip-side, like the dual process model of grief (see below). We can, as a people of faith, live in two rooms at the same time: the lamentation room, and the faith-affirming room, and one is not the anthesis of the other:

- David lamented – and yet called people to worship in an ancient ritual, The Song of the Bow.
- The Psalmist lamented – and yet said: “I wait for the Lord [...] In His word I hope ...”
- The writer of the Lamentations lamented – and yet said: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases ...”
- Paul lamented – and yet said: “I am testing the genuineness of your love ...”
- Jesus, in the fullness of His humanity, lamented – and yet said: “Your faith has made you well ...”

Here is the duality of faith – lamentation and trust in God’s constancy.

Six stories of lament for reflection

Illustration 1

A single father had one daughter, who was his whole life. A devout Roman Catholic, the two of them worshipped regularly on their local church. The young lady was diagnosed with cancer, and, in time, was hospitalised for ongoing treatment. Her father visited her every day, and before he went on to the ward, he would visit the hospital chapel, sometimes kneeling before the Crucifix in prayer. Despite his daughter’s deterioration, he kept to his faith. One day, on his daughter’s birthday, he had brought a cake to present to her and to share with other patients and staff. After his usual prayers in the chapel, he went to the ward, to discover screens drawn around his daughter’s bed. When the Consultant emerged, he knew, instantly, from the look on her face, that the news wasn’t good. Without waiting for confirmation of his worst fears, he turned on his heel, went back to the hospital chapel, went up to the altar – and rammed the birthday cake into the face of Christ on the cross. This story was told to me by a Church elder, who’d just lost his only son in a horrible car accident. And, when he was done, he said, “That’s the only thing that makes sense to me at the moment.”

Illustration 2

Stan Grant is an Australian, a distinguished journalist and author, and one of Australia's most influential public intellectuals. Here is an extract from his 2023 Deakin University Indigenous Oration:

“Lament is a cry to a silent God. An absent God. A God who does not hear our prayers. And if God does, then God does not answer. The God who makes us wait. Who waits for us – at least, we hope. Lament is described in Paul’s Letter to the Romans as “sighs too deep for words” (8:26). I know that sigh. I know lament. “Lament” is a word that has fallen from favour. We speak of reconciliation, of rights, of justice. Sometimes we speak of healing, or even of truth. But these words fall short for me. They are simply too convenient. They are words designed to convince; to measure ourselves by. I am a person of faith. I am a person of belonging. And I *am* a person of sorrow. Lament is a place of deep sorrow. It is a place of cries. But there is something sacred about sorrow. It is the way we reach towards God. But we have lost the words of lament, haven’t we? The language of lament is unfashionable so I try to reclaim these and other words that have passed out of circulation or have lost their true meaning.”

Illustration 3

There’s a theory in bereavement work called the Dual Process Model, developed in the late 1990s by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut. This validates people’s experience of grief, in that they swing from sadness to coping, from resolution to despair, in short bursts, as well as over a longer time frame. It’s a normal reaction to loss, like moving from a lounge to a dining-room and back again, we go back and forwards as necessary. We don’t live in the one room all the time. Stroebe and Schut suggest: “It’s important to take time off from grief to help us make sense of learning to live again.” Grief, and its accompanying pain, will still be there for us to return to. But we also need to have a ‘hope’ room, which reassures us that all is not lost.

Illustration 4

Horatio Spafford was a successful mid-19th-century Chicago lawyer. His son died aged four, and Spafford was then ruined financially by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and the economic collapse two years later. In 1873, he planned a trip to Europe with his family, but was delayed by business. His wife and daughters went without him. Their ship was struck by another vessel in mid-Atlantic and all four of his daughters were drowned. Shortly afterwards, travelling to be reunited with his wife, Spafford was inspired to write a hymn as a statement of faith as his ship passed near the spot where his daughters had been lost: *It is well with my soul*. Published in 1876, Spafford’s hymn is a remarkable example of faith in the midst of sorrow.

“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll ...”

https://hymnary.org/text/when_peace_like_a_river_attendeth_my_way

Illustration 5

The Psalmist asked, “How can I sing the Lord’s song in a strange land.” The land of lamentation is perhaps the strangest for the Christian. And, yet, even there, we can trust in the presence of God. In 1868 The New York Observer published the lyrics of a new hymn, *How can I keep from singing*, by an American Baptist Minister, Robert Wadsworth Lowry. This hymn has become so familiar in religious and popular culture that it’s often labelled ‘traditional’. That’s because Lowry captures the basic need to find and sing our new song, in whatever strange land we find ourselves, including the land of deep sorrow.

“My life flows on in endless song
above earth’s lamentation: ...”

https://hymnary.org/text/my_life_flows_on_in_endless_song_above

Whatever our Rock is, we can cling to it in our storm. Whatever our lamentation, our life can flow from it in a positive way.

Illustration 6 (From Tom Gordon’s ‘Thought for the Day’)

During the first Covid-19 lockdown, I was at a really low ebb. Then, out of nowhere, I found myself remembering a General Assembly I’d attended some years before. My memory wasn’t about any of the business, but of the worship. With nearly 1,000 people in the Assembly Hall, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up when we sang Psalm 42 unaccompanied, from the metrical version of the 1929 Scottish Psalter, to the wonderfully evocative tune, *Invocation* by Robert Archibald Smith.

“Why art thou then cast down my soul?
What should discourage thee?
And why with vexing thoughts are thou
disquieted in me?
Still trust in God; for him to praise
good cause I yet shall have;
He of my countenance is the health,
my God, my God,
my God that doth me save,
that doth me save.”

In the middle of lockdown, with all the churches closed, struggling with my mental health, spiritually at as low an ebb as I can remember, and like the Psalmist, deeply disquieted, I was back in the Assembly Hall singing Psalm 42.

How can we sing such words in worship and at the same time give credence to downbeat thoughts? Because if we can't express our disquiet, we are less than human. If we deny our heavy-heartedness, we hide ourselves from our God. If we do not give ourselves to lamentation, how can we truly give ourselves to praise?

The hairs on my neck stand up – even now – not just because of the power of the singing, but because the honesty of the Psalmist gives me a voice. In the depth of my disquiet, and in the mystery of faith that I don't really understand, I know again the saving closeness of my God.

Prayers

Call to prayer (*from Psalm 8*)

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!
When I consider the heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars which You have set in place,
what is humankind that You are mindful, human beings that You care for them?
Let us pray.

Prayer of approach, confession and supplication

Living God, Your name is majestic in all the earth, and so we worship You.
God, who takes the name of shepherd,
You are our provider and safeguard, our sustainer and protector.
What are we, this wandering flock, that You are mindful of us?
For Your constant care, we give You thanks.
God, our shepherd, we worship You.

God, who takes the name of parent,
You are our creator and watcher, our constancy and security.
What are we, these wayward children, that You are mindful of us?
For finding in You the best of motherhood and fatherhood, we give You thanks.
God, our blessed parent, we worship You.

God, who takes the name of glory, You are King above all kings, Lord above all lords.
What are we, unpredictable people of Your kingdom, that You are mindful of us?
For a glorious yet approachable God, we give You thanks.
God, King and Lord of all, we worship You.

God, who takes the name of might and power, You are strength to our weakness,
steadfastness to our frailty.
What are we, these failing creatures, that You are mindful of us?
For believing in humanity and forgiving our sinfulness, God, we give You thanks.
God, our hope and trust, we worship You.

God, who takes the name of mystery, You are beyond our understanding,
and even, though we would try, beyond our naming.
Even majestic doesn't begin to cover all that You are.
So, what are we, this searching, probing, questioning people, that You are mindful of us?
For a God beyond naming, we give You thanks.
God, for what we know and all that is beyond our comprehension, we worship You.

Living God, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!
The very heavens are the work of Your fingers.
You've even set the moon and stars in place for our benefit.
You are mindful of us.
And, in our worship, You come to us with blessings once more.
Amen.

Prayer of intercession

When I was a young man, I was brought up in a culture where public prayers were expected to be extempore. Then I learned in college the importance of structure in prayers. So, putting these together, I find that I can still offer extempore prayers in public if I have a structure in my head. I use two such structures, outlined below, with guidance in italics.

1. Using our fingers as a guide to prayer

Living God, You call us to prayer, because You set us in community, surrounded by people in need.

We carry their needs in our hearts,
and we cannot leave them at the door of our church when we come to worship.

They are part of us.

You have made us one with them.

And so it is our responsibility, and our privilege, to bring them to You in our prayers.

- *Guided by our thumb, closest to us as we hold out our hand ...*

We remember those who are closest to us ...

[This might include the needs of the congregation, local circumstances, aspects of church and community life we have in common.]

- *Guided by our index finger, the one that points ...*

In our prayers we remember those who lead and teach, who point us to the ways of truth ...

[Petitions for teachers, role models, Church leaders, and all those who set us examples of righteousness and goodness.]

- *Guided by the longest of our fingers.*

We pray for those the world places in positions of responsibility ...

[The 'big people', those with important and public roles (politically and otherwise) locally, nationally and internationally – especially anyone who is currently in the news – but could also include scientists, innovators and many people who do special things or offer us new insights.]

- *Guided by the weakest of our fingers ...*

We pray for those whose lamentations are real, and honest, and painful ...

[The 'weak people', the sick, the dying and the bereaved, all those in need, for whatever reason, and once again, local and world situations can be highlighted.]

- *Finally, guided by the smallest finger – and the last one ...*

Living God, we have needs too – sometimes because we have to help others; often because our responsibilities weigh us down; regularly when we are struggling with our own faith; or just because we are often last in the line ...

Lastly, but no less importantly, we pray for ourselves, whatever our needs might be.

And, living God, as we pray for others at this time, we give thanks that we are sustained, right at this moment, by the prayers they pray for us.

2. Using concentric circles as a guide to prayer

The second model is to see prayer as a series of circles, beginning small, widening out, then coming back in again. Possible examples are given below.

- Issues the congregation knows about – in church or community.
- The Church locally (including Presbytery issues) and nationally.

- National situations – political leadership, current news stories, national events.
- International issues, including prayers for peace, alleviation of suffering, and the like. This might include Missionary Partners or links we have throughout the world.
- Finally, return to personal knowledge and needs, with prayers for the people – named, if that is our custom – we will carry with us in the next week.

Final blessing or benediction

Go now in peace.

In your lamentations, may you be blessed.

In your tears, may you find consolation.

In your yearnings, may you know acceptance.

In your questions, may you have renewed hope.

And all, and always, in the presence of a loving God,

in the companionship of the Incarnate Christ,

and in the lasting embrace of the Spirit's comfort.

Amen.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All – the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition launches on 19 May 2024. The book is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

It will be released as full music version and words only books; and in due course digital resources including expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website; streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos.

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.

Grief:

- CH4 7 – “How long, O Lord, will you forget”
- CH4 75 – “I love the Lord because he heard”
- CH4 344 – “And Jesus said: ‘Don’t be afraid’”
- CH4 393 – “We turn to God when we are sorely pressed”
- CH4 451 – “Where high the heavenly temple stands”
- CH4 691 – “Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side”
- CH4 720 – “There is a longing in our hearts, O God”
- CH4 729 – “Hear me, dear Lord, in this my time of sorrow”

Searching for God when times are hard:

- CH4 30 – “I waited for the Lord my God”
- CH4 31 – “I waited patiently for God”
- CH4 464 – “Though hope desert my heart”
- CH4 518 – “Lift up your hearts!”
- CH4 539 – “I want Jesus to walk with me”
- CH4 556 – “I need thee every hour”
- CH4 565 – “My life flows on in endless song”
- CH4 570 – “When the storms of life are raging, stand by me”
- CH4 719 – “The one who longs to make us whole”
- CH4 721 – “We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet”

Affirmations of faith overcoming distress:

- CH4 161 – “O God, our help in ages past”
 - CH4 197 – “As we are gathered, Jesus is here”
 - CH4 554 – “Rock of Ages, cleft for me”
 - CH4 718 – “We cannot measure how you heal”
 - CH4 724 – “Christ’s is the world in which we move” (“A touching place”)
 - CH4 754 – “Be still and know that I am God”
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- CH3 381 – “I will sing the wondrous story”
 - RCH 443 – “Like a river glorious”
 - CMP 446 – “Lord, thy word abideth”
 - CMP 555 – “Peace, perfect peace”
 - CMP 702 – “Through all the changing scenes of life”

- CMP 704 – “Through the love of our God”
- CMP 1008 – “The Lord’s my shepherd” (“I will trust in you alone”)

Additional resources

“Why do Christians find it hard to grieve” Geoff Walters

There is an excellent review of this informative book at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/why-do-christians-find-it-hard-to-grieve/>, where the reviewer also offers helpful insights into the theme of today’s worship.

“When Grief is Raw” John L Bell and Graham Maule

These can be used as items of praise, choral pieces (solo or group), spoken reflections or as parts of or contributions to prayers:

“God, give us life” p.54; “God was here” p.34; “Who is there to understand” p.10; “How long, O Lord” p.14; “I cry to God” p.22; “Let your restless heart be still” p.37; “O Christ you wept” p.50; “Sing my soul” p.40.

“New Journeys now begin”, and *“Whispers of wisdom”* Tom Gordon

Both books contain material appropriate to the theme of today’s worship, as well as a series of poems / prayers / reflections at the conclusion of each chapter that might be suitable in worship or for personal reflection. (Available from www.ionabooks.com)

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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