

Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 17th May 2020 The Sixth Sunday of Easter

To be able to access the links, go to the bottom of this page and left click on the date. This will download the pdf in a new window, then simply click on the links as indicated.

Welcome

Call to Worship: Psalm 66:1-5 (NCV)

*Everything on earth, shout with joy to God!
2 Sing about his glory! Make his praise glorious!
3 Say to God, "Your works are amazing!
Because your power is great, your enemies fall before you.
4 All the earth worships you and sings praises to you.
They sing praises to your name."
5 Come and see what God has done,
the amazing things he has done for people.*

**Prayer of Praise, Confession,
Assurance of Forgiveness and Lord's Prayer**



Lord God, we proclaim your greatness and majesty and come to worship you the King of heaven and earth, the judge of all, the One who has created all that is, from nothing. The One who holds the vastness of universe in the palm of your hand. You spoke and it came to be. You commanded and it stood firm.

We cannot begin to understand your power, we cannot conceive of how great and amazing you are. Your word is right and true, you are faithful and just and righteous, and the earth is full of your unfailing love.

As we think of your glory and power, it seems incredible that you could be bothered with all the stuff of our little lives; yet you love us as your children and desire a loving relationship with us encouraging us to come to you to find mercy and grace, and help in our hour of need.

We come, confessing our failures, our sin, our disobedience, our indifference to you. We confess that we have not always served you as we should, we have not always been gracious to one another, we have not always trusted and obeyed you. We have chosen to ignore your voice and chosen our own way. We have cared more for ourselves than we have for others, for your world, for your honour and glory.

And, so we now take time to reflect on this week that is passed to confess to you all that we have thought, said and done that was not worthy of our being called your children, and all we have failed to do or say that would have brought you glory and praise.

Loving and merciful Father forgive.

Almighty Father, we acknowledge that we have nothing in ourselves that could make us right with you, nothing that we could do or bring that could ever make us good enough to come to you. We know that Jesus, your Son, is the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to you except through him. We thank you that through faith in him you forgive us all that is past and count us worthy to stand in your presence.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that we might be guided into all truth and equipped to do the work you have called us to do in the world.

We pray in the name of our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave us this prayer, prayed by your children throughout the world;

Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name. Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Song [Lord I give you my heart](#) *Click on the link*



A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus

God of heaven and earth, in these times of isolation, apart from loved ones and distant from friends, thank you that there is nothing in all of creation, not even coronavirus, that is able to separate us from your love



Thank you for medical workers here and around the world, embodying sacrificial love in these challenging times. We thank you that they put the welfare of others before their own working to heal and restore people who are ill, comforting and reassuring people concerned or bereaved, anxious and vulnerable. Be their guide, strength, wisdom and hope.

Bless and guide employers and their staff transforming their production to produce PPE and ventilators and other equipment. Grant wisdom and understanding to those in authority to do what is right in these difficult and demanding times.

Awaken us all to the reality of how connected we all are and our need to work collaboratively and co-operatively to make the deep and necessary changes to how our world works. May we go forward with a greater concern for each other, a greater understanding of what is important and a greater care for the world, and knowing that neither death nor life, nor things present or things to come can separate us from you. So help us, God. Amen

(Adapted from Christian Aid)

Bible Passages:

It is Luke the Gospel writer who recorded the Acts of the Apostles in the early church. Our first reading today is Luke's account of Paul addressing the Areopagus in Athens. Athens was the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world. The Court of the Areopagus was a long-established body with extensive authority over the civil and religious life of the city. It would have included Epicureans (people who believed God was far away and had very little to do with human beings) and Stoic philosophers. Romans and Greeks had their gods but also erected alters and shines without inscription so as not to offend a god that was, as yet, unknown to them. Paul takes the opportunity to make known to the men of the Areopagus the true God whom they do not know.

Acts 17:22-34 (ESV)

Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring.'

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Our Gospel reading is set in the upper room at the time Jesus met with the disciples for the Last Supper. He has been speaking of his leaving this world, but that they should not be troubled by that because he's going to prepare a place for them and then will come back to take them there, where they can be with him for ever.

Jesus assures them he will not leave them completely unsupported but will send his Holy Spirit to live within them.

John 14: 15-21 (ESV)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Song [Be still and know that I am God](#) [Click on the link](#)



Today, in these times of trial and challenge, we face uncertain futures. We have begun to speak of a 'new normal' but we do not know what that looks like.

There have been many times in the past when individuals or communities have faced uncertain futures and been troubled by events that adversely impact upon them but were powerless to change.

The Romans and Greeks believed in many gods. They seemed to have a god for everything, but none of them were ever quite good enough and, just to make sure, they even worshipped at shrines to a god they admitted they did not know. They made images out of silver, gold and stone, although how it is possible to make an image of a god you do not know is quite beyond me.

I've often thought that mission was relatively easy for Paul. People in Paul's day believed in gods, albeit false gods; but today they don't. Last year the British Attitudes Survey reported that fifty-two percent of the population say they do not belong to any religion. That compares

with 31% in 1983 when the BAS began tracking religious belief. Indeed, a quarter of the UK population say they do not believe in God at all.

God seems to be unknown, but do we create gods of our own?

In our imagination we might envisage aliens from space looking down on us reporting back that, “these humans have constructed great cathedrals on the edge of every town where they go to worship, some many times a week. They take back to their homes all sorts of artefacts that they believe will make their lives better, make them happier, and improve their wellbeing”.

Of course, it's not only materialism that has become a god. We idolise all sorts of things; fame, wealth, power, family, work, possessions, status. However, just like the gods the Greeks and Romans worshipped, the idols we construct today never seem to be sufficient. When faced with real challenges, when faced with matters of life and death, to what or to whom do we turn? What, or who, can provide an inner strength in times of trial, real comfort in times of sorrow, and hope for a future?

Over 3,000 years ago the Psalmist wrote these words, which have been a source of comfort to people in challenging times ever since;

“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
you are with me;
your rod and staff comfort me.”

You'll recognise these as words from Psalm 23.

God walks beside us even in the most difficult of times. He never leaves us. Jesus walks beside us, even when we fail to recognise him, and we often do when we are grief stricken, or caught up in our own thoughts about our own situations and predicaments.

But Jesus is there, just as he was for Cleopas and his companion on that first Easter day as they walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmausⁱ. Jesus is there with us as he was for the Samaritan woman he met at a wellⁱⁱ, and for the widow of Nain about to bury her sonⁱⁱⁱ, and for the centurion whose servant was about to die^{iv}, and for blind Bartimaeus^v who wanted to be able to see once again. Jesus was there for John Newton^{vi} (who wrote “Amazing Grace”) transforming his life from a slave trader into a minister of the church, and for Dietrich Bonhoeffer^{vii} the German Christian pastor who spoke out against the Nazis, dying at their hands in 1945. Jesus was there for comedian Bobby Ball^{viii} (of Canon and Ball fame) in his most darkest moments.

One of the events in Jesus life was when he was with the disciples in a boat on Lake Galilee and storm blew up that even frightened the experienced fishermen among them.^{ix} Life isn't always plain sailing. We face rough seas and can get tossed around in the storms of life. But Jesus is always in the boat with us to bring us safely to the other side.

Sometimes, we do find it difficult to tune into God. Sometimes we have to look hard for God.

In his address to the Areopagus, Paul is emphatic that it is possible to know God since God has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. Our understanding of God, our need of forgiveness and our future hope, all revolve around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone on which we build our lives, giving us the certainty that suffering, evil and even death, do not have the last word.

God has promised that he will be with us always. That is not a promise that we will never experience pain, or hardship, disaster or grief, but that he is with us in and through our adversities, agonies and misfortune. He is ever present, but not only when life goes against us, but when life is good, and fun and joyful. He is there with us even when we forget that he is there.

As the Psalmist says,

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.^x

Today, there will be many who are anxious because they have fallen ill, or someone they love has contracted the virus. Others will be anxious for their financial situation and we are hearing of an increasing number of incidents of domestic violence. Others will be concerned about the longer term impact on lives and livelihoods.

As the letter to the Philippians 4:6,7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Nothing can separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not Covid-19, nor economic suffering. Hope is not in vain because Christ conquered death, and thus no enemy is invincible.

The concluding sentences from John's first letter are appropriate today;

"We know that Jesus Christ the Son of God has come and has shown us the true God. And because of Jesus, we now belong to the true God who gives eternal life. Children, you must stay away from idols."^{xi}

Song

This song is based on Paul's letter to the Philippians 3: 1-11 where Paul writes that everything the world considers to be important pales into insignificance when compared to knowing Jesus.



[All I once held dear](#) **Click on the link**

Prayers of the People for the People



Father God, you made the world out of love, creating order from confusion. You made each one of us in your image, your fingerprint is within each of us. Help us to treat each person with respect and dignity, with compassion and love. Remind us that sometimes we entertain angels without knowing it and that what we do for the least of people we do for Christ himself.

We thank you for our senses to experience the world and to see your hand at work in nature and in people's lives. We thank you too for opportunities to tell of the wonder of your love.

Be with our political leaders and all who represent us in Parliament in Edinburgh and London. Grant them wisdom, insight and understanding that through their discussions and decisions we may enhance the well-being of this and all nations and achieve together a more just and compassionate world that recognises the blessings and responsibilities you have given us.

Father God we bring to you those in need today, people with mental illness and all disturbed and troubled; be to them, a light in darkness, their refuge and strength in time of fear. Place your healing hands on all who are sick - ease their pain; be present with them in the support of family and friends and in the care of medical professionals. Give special skills and tender hearts to all who care for people unable to care for themselves and show them how best to assist in your work of healing.

God our Father you created a world of plenty and placed us in it to work and care for it. We place before you the needs of:

- all who are working and those without work;
- people with homes and all who have no home;
- those with plenty and all who go hungry;
- people with education and all who are prevented from learning;
- people fulfilled in their lives and those frustrated;
- lives confused and cluttered with material things and lives that are no life at all, but simply survival;
- people with power and all exploited and abused;
- people of faith and people of no faith.

Loving God fill us with your Holy Spirit that in our lives on earth we will be equipped and energised to make Christ known in the world and leave it a better place.

God of eternity, strengthen, comfort and give your peace to all facing death and all who mourn the loss of loved ones. May they be upheld in the knowledge that by your love and grace you enable us to share in life eternal with you and all your faithful people.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Benediction and Blessing

Almighty Father, help us to grow in our relationship with you and one another. May we, as members of the body of Christ here on earth be a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration under the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Bind us into a community with you at the centre of our mission, that we may proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and be channels of your love, that your Kingdom will grow, to your praise and glory. Amen.

[Blessing](#) [click on the link](#)

One of the consequences of us not being able to worship together is that the church anticipates a fall in income. However, we will continue to incur costs, of insurance etc. There will be little financial saving to our not meeting, yet revenues could be severely hit. Please prayerfully reflect on this and, if you are able, continue to put aside your financial offering so that you can make your contribution for the work of the church when we next meet together. Thank you.

Thank you too if you already give by standing order or by bank transfer, that is much appreciated.

ⁱ Luke 21:13-35

ⁱⁱ John 4:1-42

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 7:11-17

^{iv} Luke 7:1-10

^v Mark 10:46-52

^{vi} Read John Newton's story - *John Newton From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* by Jonathan Aitken & Philip Yancey; Crossway Books; Reprint edition (May 2013)

^{vii} Read Bonhoeffer's story - *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* by Eric Metaxas Thomas Nelson; New Edition (2011)

^{viii} Read Bobby Ball's story - *Rock On, Tommy!* by Tommy Cannon, Bobby Ball, et al. HarperCollins; New Edition (2011)

^{ix} Mark 4: 35-41

^x Psalm 139:7-10

^{xi} 1 John 5:20-21