

## Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020

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

Today is the fifth Sunday after Pentecost. May we hear God's word and be filled with his Holy Spirit.

#### Call to Worship: Psalm 148:1-6 & 11-13

Praise the Lord

Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights above.

<sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

<sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars.

<sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens  
and you waters above the skies.

<sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for at his command they were created,  
<sup>6</sup> and he established them for ever and ever –  
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the Lord, kings of the earth and all nations,  
you princes and all rulers on earth,  
<sup>12</sup> young men and women,  
old men and children.

<sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

Song: [Moring has broken](#) *Click on the link*



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

"Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.  
Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory  
and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.  
Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all." \*



God of love and life, for your presence with us every day, we praise your Holy name.  
For your transforming power changing and renewing us, we praise your Holy name  
For your provision that sustains our earthly life, we praise your Holy name.  
For your Word that teaches and challenges, us we praise your Holy name.  
For sending your Son to be our Saviour, we praise your Holy name.  
For raising him to new life, we praise your Holy name.  
For the gift of your Holy Spirit who lives within us, we praise your Holy name.  
For your promise of life beyond death, we praise your Holy name.  
For upholding and strengthening and comforting us when we are sad, anxious, or face the  
challenges of earthly life, we praise your Holy name.  
For the joy of human relationships, the wonder and magnificence of your creation, and all that is  
a blessing to us, we praise your Holy name.

Generous God, you have done so much for us, but we have done little in return.  
We are often deaf to your call to service, blind to the needs of others, dumb when we should  
witness to your work in the world. We are often too busy to be channels of your love, too proud  
to stoop and wash feet, as Jesus did; and too reluctant to speak out against injustice and to  
speak up for the voiceless. Forgive us.

We are often too quick to doubt you, too swift to ignore you, too hasty to forget your purpose  
for us. Forgive us.

We thank you that you are merciful and loving and that you do forgive, heal and restore. Draw  
us ever closer into your family and fill us with your Holy Spirit to walk life's journey alongside us.

Heavenly father we sing your praise, offering you these prayers in the name of Jesus our Lord  
and Saviour. Unite us with your family who kneel in prayer across the world today, as we pray  
the prayer Jesus gave us;

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

*(\* 1 Chronicles 29:10-11)*

### **A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus**

Holy God, as we continue to live in this time responding to the pandemic of COVID-19, we come asking for strength and grace. It has not been easy for us to live in a state of physical distancing. We cannot greet friends and loved ones. We cannot offer an embrace to comfort, a handshake to greet, a pat on the shoulders to encourage.



To keep ourselves and each other safe we must keep apart. Lord we are unable to greet our elderly and seniors because we need to keep them safe.

Give us strength to keep each other safe. Give us love that will seek to do the highest good for those who are vulnerable. Give us the grace to seek for new ways to be social even as we keep distance. When others overwhelmed and unable to go on, help us be the brother or sister or friend who will channel your grace. When we feel frustrated and impatient because we are tired of staying away from others, give to us the love that sees the need to keep each other safe.

We remember the medical professionals, who even now continue to work for our health. Give to them the gifts they need to do their work. Give to them the strength to continue when things are hard. Give to them the energy when the day is long. Keep them safe so that they may be able to continue. Surround their families and keep those that they love within your safekeeping.

Help us, the people they serve, to be grateful for their service. Stand beside those who have been tested positive for COVID-19, give to them peace to know that you are with them. Calm their anxiety, comfort them in their distress, assure them and their families that you will neither leave them nor forsake them.

Holy One, we know that the race is not for the swift, and we sense that this race will be a marathon. But in this race, remind us that we are not alone and that you have promised to provide the things we need. So, we run with perseverance mindful that you journey with us. Amen.

*(Rev Dr Paul Douglas Walfall,  
United Church of Canada  
from World Council of Churches.)*

## Bible Passages

### Romans 7:15-25

<sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup>but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

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## Matthew 11: 16-30

Jesus said,<sup>16</sup> 'To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,<sup>17</sup> "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

<sup>20</sup>Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent.

<sup>21</sup>'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup>But I tell you, on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>23</sup>And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup>But I tell you that on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.'

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup>'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

That section of Paul's letter to the Romans is quite downbeat until the final verse where he gives thanks to God. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul recognizes that in Christ we are a new creation, old ways and attitudes, values and habits are a thing of the past. He writes, "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). Our next song is based on this and reassures us that we are recreated through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Song:** [I am a new creation](#) **Click on the link**

## Bible Study

### Matthew 11: 16-19

I wonder if you've noticed how difficult it must be to be a Prime Minister or First Minister? During these past weeks as our governments have sought to ease lockdown they have taken all sorts of criticism, yet whatever they do they can't get it right for everyone. Whatever the government decides someone asks, "why didn't you do that sooner and why haven't you gone further?" Yet, others say, "you've gone too far too soon". We've seen it with the two metre rule, some want it relaxed others want it kept. Jesus faced similar criticism.



John the Baptist led a life of simplicity. He wore clothes of camel hair, ate locusts and wild honey<sup>1</sup> and never drank wine<sup>2</sup>. He called people to a life of repentance, and a life of devotion, turning away from their old ways and turning back to God. People found all that difficult to take, he wasn't like one of them. People even suggested he was possessed.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was the exact opposite. He was often in people's homes having a meal; he even turned water into wine! He mixed with tax collectors and sinners – riffraff. People criticised him for being a glutton and a drunkard, but, as we will see, that meant a great deal more than simply eating and drinking too much.

Neither John nor Jesus could get it right in the eyes of those who were set in their ways. What these people had been taught by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, what they had learned in their equivalent of Sunday School, was well ingrained.

Before the Israelite nation entered the Promised Land of Canaan they were given instruction on how to be examples to other nations by the way they lived with one another. The book of Deuteronomy records warnings of the kinds of people they were to be. One part, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, warns parents of wayward sons. If sons failed to obey their parents, the parents were to bring them before the priest and say; "this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard", and then the son would be stoned.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:4

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:15

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 11:18

The point is that Jesus spoke of God's lavish bounty, his unlimited love and forgiveness, but this didn't fit with people's understanding about Law keeping and punishment, so he was accused as a false prophet. When Jesus was referred to as a glutton and drunkard people were saying Jesus was a wayward son of Israel.

People don't like change, we find change difficult, we get set in our ways. We don't like our actions, thoughts, values, attitudes and all we are comfortable with, to be challenged.

John the Baptist was doing just that challenging people by pointing them in a different direction. Jesus was challenging them by revealing a side to God's nature to which the people had been blind. Indeed, the word 'reveal' in Matthew 11:27 is the Greek, '*apocalypse*' which has connotations of something earth-shattering, amazing, and dramatic. It was like a breath of fresh air; but to many it was challenging and uncomfortable.

### **Matthew 11: 20-24**

Jesus had some of the strongest warnings for those who rejected the message.

Most of Jesus' miracles were performed in the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, he'd have known the places and the people well. He knew they would continue in their old ways, following their own vision of God and his Kingdom. Jesus' warnings are striking. Even the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, so often condemned by the prophets for their Baal worship and egotistical materialism, and Sodom (generally regarded as a "sin city"), would have repented if they'd witnessed his miracles.

Jesus was offering a chance to embrace a Kingdom of love and compassion, the kind of Kingdom he'd set out in his sermon on the Mount. But the people were wedded to the idea of violent revolution; an eye for an eye kind of kingdom where God's law was enforced with stoning, a kingdom that fights God's battles with the devil's weapons.<sup>4</sup>

### **Romans 7: 15-25**

Today's passage from the Romans is probably not Paul's most eloquent piece of writing.

We need to remember Paul learned from the Pharisees and studied under one of the leading teachers of the time, Gamaliel.<sup>5</sup> Paul was well read, and at one time (prior to his Damascus Road encounter with Jesus) he was like those in Chorazin and Bethsaida - he upheld the Law, even to the persecution of Christians.

Paul stresses the importance and good nature of the Law, but he emphasises it is impossible to keep. Indeed, if the Law could be perfectly kept then faith would not be required. Yet it is precisely because we are human and weak that we fail to keep the Law and so need faith, faith in Jesus Christ. Paul concludes the passage on a high note, praising God for Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase is Tom Wright's in his *Matthew for Everyone: Part 1* SPCK (2002) p134

<sup>5</sup> Acts 5:34

## **Matthew 11: 25-30**

Keeping the Law was a burden, because the Law couldn't be kept in its entirety. If it could it would be like a football match where there was never a foul, off-side, handball or any other infringement; have you ever seen a game like that? Keeping the rules perfectly isn't possible. You might detect in that passage from Romans the stress Paul's feels for not being able to keep the Law that he was taught and fought to uphold.

Indeed, the Law was such a burden with all its commandments and ritual requirements that the Pharisees spoke of people being called to carry "the yoke of the Torah", or the yoke of the Law.

By contrast Jesus offers something different. He says, if you are burdened down with the weight of the yoke of the Law on your shoulders then put it down and hook up with me. "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus' yoke is not a burden, it is not heavy because it's not about rule keeping, it's about relationship. In that relationship Jesus bears the weight and walks in step with us (like two oxen yoked side by side) as we journey together. It's when we get out of step with Jesus we find the going difficult.

Our next song reflects some of this understanding that what we thought was important isn't, it is a relationship with Jesus that is the most important thing. The song reflects the message of the Letter to the Philippians 3:4b-11 but is equally relevant to today's Bible passages.

**Song:** [Knowing you Jesus](#) [Click on the link](#)

## **A new normal or back to normal**

For many it's been, and remains, an anxious time as people worry about their health and that of their loved ones, or about their financial situation and the longer term impact COVID-19 will have on our economies. I heard recently that even some church Ministers are anxious about the pressure to maintain the on-line recordings, devotions and alike whilst returning to the traditional formats and picking-up once again their duties around the parishes.

The grief over the loss of so many lives to the coronavirus is a hard weight to bear for our families, our communities, our nation, across the world, and for our churches. Around the world over 500,000 have died and the number will continue to rise.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light", says Jesus.

The shops are now open. There is a sense of returning to some kind of normality, although we still need to be careful, stay safe and ensure we behave in ways which protect ourselves

and others. The lockdown has given, and still gives, us an opportunity to reflect on ourselves, the future, and what the new normal might be like?

A couple of weeks ago there was a YouGov poll that found only 6% of the population want to return to life as it was before the lockdown. Six weeks or more ago we were reflecting on what a new normal might look like. We recognised our interdependence and how the actions of one person had an impact on others and indeed across the world. We recognised the value of many we took for granted. We applauded our health workers, carers and all who work on the front line at risk to their own health and that of their families. We marvelled at the selfless actions of those raising money and those who reached for the old Singer to make face masks and alike. We were amazed at how gin distillers could produce sanitizer (click [here](#)) and shower manufacturers, ventilators. (click [here](#)).

So, now things have eased a little, and around 94% of us want a new kind of normal, are we beginning to experience a more compassionate way of living together treating one another with dignity and respect? Are we more conscious of our reliance on one another, not only for the physical things we need but also for our mental and spiritual wellbeing, particularly keeping ourselves and one another well? Or are we slipping back into old ways? To use Paul's language are we finding that, we do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do.

Certainly, in these past few weeks there have been raised racial tensions. Following the merging of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office there were comments that raised questions about the purpose of aid; is it for the benefit of the giver (the UK), or the recipient (those in need across the world)? We've also seen images where social distancing seems to have been forgotten along with its aim of avoiding unnecessarily burdening the NHS. Locally, there has been inconsiderate parking at local beauty spots with scant regard for local residents accessing their properties, during car park closures. Are these the symptoms of a self-centred back to normal?

Are we like the cities of Korazin and Bethsaida? Have we seen God's vision of a new kind of world but reverted to our old ways?

Our scriptures remind us today that regardless of our best intentions, how easy it is to return to speaking and acting according to the rules that society sets for us, rather than in accordance with what we know is right and Christ-like.

The pandemic has thrown a light on many inequalities, in education, health, and housing. It also highlighted the impact we have on the natural environment, carbon emissions plummeting as lockdown confined people to their homes and closed international borders.

In the world of the old normal, as people of faith, we allowed ourselves to be boxed in, squeezed out, pushed around and marginalised by much of modern society. We were told faith is something for individuals to practice and enjoy, but not to share with others, we're not to speak of Christ or pray for others for fear of giving offence.

The vision of the Kingdom that our Lord gives to us is one of sacrificial giving, sacrificing freedom of movement for the sake of others, sacrificing the desire not to cover our faces when doing so reduces the risk of infection (for ourselves and others), sacrificing our desire to be at a funeral for the sake of the living.

The vision of the Kingdom that our Lord gives to us is one of loving neighbour, giving someone your coat when you've only been asked for your shirt; and the poor ... the meek ... those who mourn, being blessed.

Yet, what is the "new normal" we are returning to? Will we live more sustainably with a reducing carbon footprint? Will we deal with racism, abuse, exploitation and inequalities? Will we treat one another with dignity and respect, with love and empathy regardless of who they are or where they come from, or where they live? Will the church speak out against injustice and speak up for the voiceless? Will the church truly be a channel of God's love for everyone, supporting people in need by prayer and action in Christ's name, helping people find salvation through faith in him.

We'll not always get it right. As we seek to keep our eye on Christ, the healing and hope he offers and his vision of the Kingdom, we will feel the forces of the old ways pulling us back to what we learned and became ingrained within us. We will feel like Paul, knowing what we should do, but doing what we don't want to do as if it is no longer ourselves doing it, but the sin within us.<sup>6</sup>

The old ways are burdensome. They weigh us down. Perhaps that's why nearly all of us want something different as we move forward. We know better. We know God's word is true and good. We know that only through faith in Jesus we find true forgiveness. So, we become sad and angry that people suffer from social and political injustice and inequalities. We become exhausted and frustrated, that there are those who fail to see the miracles that Jesus works in the lives of human beings. The old ways are burdensome because no matter what we do we can't work, or buy, our way to salvation. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest", he said.

Those who have given their time making face masks haven't found it burdensome, but life giving. Those who have raised money, like Captain Tom, haven't found it burdensome but life giving. Patrick Hutchinson, the black man who, after clashes broke out at a Black Lives Matter protest near London's Waterloo station recently, carried to safety an injured white man reported to be a rival protester, didn't find it a burden but life giving (possibly, literally lifesaving). Jesus' yoke is light not because we simply love our neighbour and do the compassionate thing, but because he offers us salvation simply as a free gift of God's grace, that we accept through faith. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light", said Jesus.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 7:20

God promises a new normal, a new heaven and a new earth, a time when all people will share in the abundance of God's creation, "when all tears will be wiped away, and death, mourning, crying and pain will be no more, and the old order of things will have passed away"<sup>7</sup>.

"Thanks be to God through Jesus our Lord."<sup>8</sup>

**Song:** [Help us to help each other Lord](#) *Click on the link*

This song was written by Charles Wesley. Often sung to the well known tune, "Dunfermline" the arrangement here is by Mark Templeton.

### Prayers of the People for the People

God of love and forgiveness, there are so many who struggle to cope with change in the shifting scenes of life – growing from children into adults, changing family relationships, transitioning from school to work, the advancement of technology, cultural and social change, growing from independence to dependence once again as we age and become frail. Grant us a sense of hope, a glimpse of eternity, knowing that each person is precious to you and that you hold each of us in the palm of your hand.



Transform our struggles into victories.  
Convert our doubting into certainty.  
Turn our timidity into confidence.  
Change our sorrow into worship and praise.

Loving God we are saddened by the way people treat one another. You made all the nations of the world to be a family, and your Son taught us to love one another. Yet our world is riven apart with prejudice, arrogance, and pride. Help the different races to love and understand one another better. Increase among us empathy, tolerance, and goodwill, and enable us to learn about, and appreciate, the gifts that other races bring to us. Enable us to see in all people our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. Remove from us jealousy, hatred, and fear, and help us to live together as members of one family at home in the world, sons and daughters of one Father.

In a world which cares more for the needs of self than others, and is increasingly becoming more inward-looking and fractured, give us a heart for the weak and marginalised, people poor and voiceless, the refugee, the person abused or exploited, people ignored or forgotten. Give us a heart that is based on yours, poured out for the needs of many and not for the comfort of a few.

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<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:4

<sup>8</sup> Romans 7:25

Give us a heart which looks out and sees your beauty in all people, and welcomes them as a friend.

Be with the leaders of nations and all who make decisions that impact on others. Help us to treat one another with respect and dignity, regardless of what those others may be able to do for us, or the wider community. Help us remove all that causes people to be reliant on foodbanks or to scavenge for food. Help us feed those who worry every day that they cannot feed themselves or their families. Help us remove all that causes people to sleep rough on the streets, on in temporary hostels, or refugee camps. Help us remove hatred and vengeance, which never resolves competing claims or difference of opinion, and help us erase all that causes strife and conflict turning people to violence and war.

We pray for all of the people whose lives have been traumatically cut short, whether on the battle field, city street or domestic home, and for their families, friends, and loved ones who are left to bear the hurt and the pain of that loss.

Help us to use our resources of time, energy, and productive capability not to kill maim and destroy but to feed, house, educate and provide medical care.

Pour out your healing power on all who are sick and fill them with your restorative Spirit. May your resurrection life bring healing and wellbeing. May your grace carry them through challenging times into a place filled with hope and joy. Bless the work of doctors, surgeons, all in the medical profession and staff in support roles.

Bless, too, all who devote their lives to working with people who are unable to care for themselves.

We ask your comfort for people sad or lonely and that all who grieve may know the eternal hope we have through faith in your Son our Saviour Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**Benediction** *Click on the link*



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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.

