



# Weekly worship resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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## Today's readings

### **Joel 2: 12–17 (“A call to repentance”)**

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.  
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord, your God? Amen. (NRSV)

### **Mark 6: 1–6a (“Jesus is rejected at Nazareth”)**

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

Here are five hymns to keep you in touch with your Christian faith over the coming week:

*Morning has broken, like the first morning* (CH4: 212)

*It's a world of sunshine, a world of rain* (CH4: 245)

*How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is thy name!* (CH4: 4)

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways* (CH4: 485)

*O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end* (CH4: 644)

## *In the Name of the Father and of*

**H**ere's a story from a long time ago: a story about a funeral of a very fine person whose influence was felt in many ways by many people. It's a story I have made up, though it is based firmly on a real experience.

The service had been enormous, with people coming from far and wide to celebrate a wonderful life. The tributes had been glowing, with speakers recalling a glittering academic career followed by long years working with and for all sorts of people. Those in attendance listened with smiles and nods of appreciation (plus the occasional tear). The picture being painted was of someone they recognized from their own long experience of his many gifts.

After the church service came the committal at the crematorium: a much smaller and more intimate act of worship though, even yet, the list of achievements and attributes was long and impressive. As the family stepped out into the sunshine, the young grand-daughter of the person whose funeral it had been was approached by a total stranger who bent down and gently said: "I just want you to know that your grandfather was a really, really fine person."

And in response, the little girl, maybe nine or ten years old, just looked back at the man blankly, and said nothing at all.

Why, I ask myself, did that little girl react in the way she did? Possibly she was shy and unsure of herself in such an alien, adult setting. Maybe the experience of losing a family member had left her numb. And no doubt there would have been a mix of emotion, anxiety and fear at work that day. (Any of these reactions would, of course, have been be natural.)

But I wonder if she also found it impossible to relate to the image of a person whose public reputation was glowing, when her own experience spoke to her of someone who was simply "Grandpa", nothing more and nothing less. This was the actor who told her stories in his funny voices. This was the woodworker who had built her dolls' house. This was the man she had seen so many times joking with other grandparents in the playground at 3.20pm.

If we know someone really well, our view of them will be different from those other people who stand some distance back. And that, of course, is exactly what we see in our story from Mark's gospel today. We find Jesus in his home town, which might very well imply Nazareth: a small place where everyone would have known everyone else. It would have been the kind of place where nobody could hide away: the sort of community where children would have been raised communally, with a wide circle of dependable aunties and uncles, and countless cousins of one type or another. All would have played their part in family life.

So this is where we find Jesus, the local boy made good. Here is someone whose fame would have gone before him, as family and neighbours would have been made well aware of all that he had been doing on his travels: the teachings and the healings, the miracles and – goodness me! – even that band of followers! Would you credit it? Our Jesus, Mary's lad!

These people were so close to him that they quite simply could not see the bigger picture. For them, Jesus was all about Nazareth, and his parents, and his wee brothers and sisters, and his place in the wider community's pecking order, as the carpenter's lad. Their view was very much a close-up: a macro shot of someone whose every trait and foible they had known – and known so well – ever since the family had wandered back to Nazareth from Egypt.

I don't know what would be the Aramaic equivalent of that great Scottish put-down, "*I kent 'is faither!*", but I feel fairly sure that people would have been whispering it among themselves that Saturday in Nazareth's synagogue.

## *the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*

And if we are in any doubt as to the impact of this communally held attitude towards Jesus, Mark lays it out for us in his typically terse style, using these few words: “And they took offence at him.” Actually, I prefer the harsh directness of the wording found in the Good News translation where we read: “And so they rejected him.” Either way, Mark wastes no words in making clear that Jesus suffered greatly at the hands of his nearest and dearest.

“Enough. . . . On your way. . . . You can take your flashy ideas and peddle them in the big city. . . . We’re honest country folk and you’ll not be fooling us.”

The writer Matt Laney has summed up neatly the plight of the good people of Nazareth on that sad sabbath day:

*It wasn't a lack of faith. It was a lack of vision. Their experience of Jesus way-back-when blocked their ability to see him here-and-now.*

This little story about Jesus is set in the middle section of Mark’s gospel. He’s already written all his introductory stuff, but he’s not yet arrived at the main section of the book: the long journey towards the cross. So here, in the middle of his book, Mark is relaying stories to help his readers understand what Jesus is like, and also what following Jesus would be like for those who decide to follow him. This part of the gospel concerns the meaning of discipleship, showing readers what they can expect if they come on board with Jesus.

Perhaps Mark is keen to provide us with a big truth to contemplate. If so, just what can this story of rejection teach us? Well, one thing it shows clearly is that if a person believes they need to pursue a call from God, they can expect some folk around them to take offence, and maybe even start asking hostile questions:

- You? Why *you*, of all people?
- Heading off to the bright lights, eh? Our wee village not good enough for you then?
- After all we’ve done for you, is this how you repay us?
- When will we ever see you again?
- You’re the oldest child. Your dear departed father (God rest his soul) taught you everything he knew, and *here’s* the thanks he gets for his efforts?
- And anyway, who’s going to run the business once you’ve gone your own sweet way?

Mark’s purpose in telling us this little tale about hostility is, I am convinced, to lay before his readers just what following God’s call can mean. It won’t be a bowl of cherries or a bed of roses. It will involve incredulous looks and pitying glances from people who know they are right. People who know you but – tragically – simply do not share in your vision.

What are you to do in that situation? Jesus models for us the right reaction of the true disciple. Remember that Jesus could have pulled some rabbit out the hat to make his cousins go “wow!”. He could have resorted to a convincing miracle or a totally persuasive act of healing. But no. Jesus takes it on the chin (quietly, thoughtfully) . . . and then he moves on.

As Matt Laney so wisely puts it:

*“He didn't need affirmation. He needed to be about the Lord’s business.”*

In our faith, lived out day by day, may we share in the calling of God, in the confidence of God, in the vision of God, enabling us in peace and in patience to follow where Christ leads.  
AMEN.

# Praying for others

Patient God, you call us to follow.

Sometimes we hear your call and set off boldly,  
ready to play our part in the mission of your Kingdom.  
Sometimes we are less sure, wondering what others will say,  
or what obstacles we might encounter along the way.

In these difficult days, we ask that you would speak to us,  
showing each one what our calling at this time might be.  
Guide us so that our actions might be true to your claim upon us,  
and show us how we, as your church, should meet the needs of our neighbours.

We pray for those neighbours now at this troubling time: *[names here]*.

Grant to each one all that they need.  
Keep each one close to your great Love,  
and surround each one with the knowledge of your gracious presence today.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## And finally ...

*Abigail Morrison considers silver linings:*

Goodness, here we are in May already. When lock-down began, May seemed a very, very long way away. But it is upon us. We will all (!) have been up having our annual face-wash in the dew on Friday morning. Refreshed, it's a good time to consider where we are.

The end of March and all of April have been the most bizarre weeks of most of our lives, I suspect. Sometimes it has felt like we have been living under a metaphorical huge, dark, grey cloud. Around us there is real hardship and despair: so many people furloughed or unemployed; so many businesses struggling to survive; so much grief; so much anxiety.

But they say every cloud has a silver lining. I don't want to belittle the cloud we live under – it is real. But some good is coming out of all this. Air pollution has reduced significantly because we are barely using planes or cars any more. For example, Southampton air pollution levels almost halved in the first couple of weeks of lock-down. They will probably be even lower now. This is good news for all of us insofar as it affects global warming.

Naturalists report that many animals are benefiting from our quiet urban streets. Wild boar have been foraging in Haifa in Israel; dolphins have been spotted in the Bosphorus; pink flamingo populations in Albania have increased by a third in the peace and quiet.

Many families have found renewed pleasure and joy in one another's company now they are confined to their homes all day. Many of us have learned to keep in much closer contact with kith and kin than before.

The grey cloud is real but so is the silver lining. Once the cloud has passed and the sun shines again (as it surely will) let's keep the silver lining too.