



Weekly worship resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Today's readings

2 Corinthians 4: 1-6 ("Spiritual treasure")

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Amen. (NRSV)

Mark 6: 6b-13 ("Jesus sends out the twelve disciples")

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

Here is your selection of hymns for this week. Enjoy reading (or singing) them, whether on Sunday or throughout the week to ahead.

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land (CH4: 167)

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name (CH4: 533)

O Lord, thou art my God and King; thee will I magnify and praise (CH4: 100)

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak in living echoes of your tone (CH4: 542)

You are called to tell the story, passing words of life along (CH4: 680)

In the Name of the Father and of

The world of politics is, as we know, a sophisticated place, where the stakes are high and the pressure to perform is intense. Speeches are packed with attention-grabbing sound bites, and parliamentary debates often look like they are designed merely to grab some headlines on the evening news. Or am I just as cynical as the politicians I am seeking to criticise?

One of the more depressing parts of 21st century politics is election time, not least the horrors it invariably brings. What with glitzy election broadcasts and gleaming battles buses, you have to wonder just how much money is wasted whenever the nation goes to the polls.

It wasn't always that way, of course. There was a time when a parliamentary candidate would simply throw down his or her soap box in a market square or on a street corner, and just start orating long and loud to anyone who would listen: supporter; opponent; or (more likely) heckler.

I recently read about a political campaign from nearly 50 years ago, where a party leader decided to do things cheaply and simply. Instead of booking luxurious hotel suites in prime locations, he laid down the law to his team that wherever possible they would stay with families. So, at the end of a long day of campaigning, he would be taken to the home of party activist, and there he would relax and chat and get to hear some of the local issues of the local community.

And you know what? It worked. He and his people were elected. It is impossible, of course, to say with any certainty what impact his overnight stays had on the polls, but I like to think that his very human approach would have done him no harm at all.

By entering people's homes night after night, he got to meet the voters and they got to encounter the real person, warts and all. More than this, by presenting himself as an ordinary human being, he was almost certainly able to leave lasting impressions with host families and maybe even with surrounding communities, long after he had moved on to the next town.

Where did this novel approach come from? Perhaps it was dreamt up by a candidate who simply didn't want to pay for hotel accommodation. But actually, we also see it in the pages of Mark's gospel. In our reading today, we discover Jesus telling his disciples how they are to pass on the Good News. "Wherever you enter a house," he says, "stay there until you leave the place."

When we stop to consider this instruction, we can see that it makes perfect sense. The disciples were not asked by Jesus to have lots of literature produced for putting through people's doors. They were not expected to take on a public relations consultant who would come up with all sorts of "on-message" branded products which would make a big impression. Rather, Jesus told his friends simply to go out and to be with folk, so that those families would see for themselves what it meant to be a follower of what was soon to become known as "the Way".

This house-to-house policy, as we know from last week's sermon, would have presented something of a challenge to the disciples. If you recall what we were saying seven short days ago, Jesus knew from his own personal experience that not everyone welcomes the Gospel with open arms.

But this much he was convinced of: the message of the Kingdom of God had to be communicated in ways that were personal and engaging and genuinely convincing for those who would listen. And that meant presenting any message as a deeply *personal* message offered by a trustworthy and reliable messenger. This was a world away from merely posting a piece of worthless junk mail through a letter box, to be discarded as soon as it hit the mat.

For Jesus, the "what" of the message had to be seen together with the "who" of the messenger.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

If last Sunday's passage from Mark chapter 6 taught that followers of Jesus can expect opposition, this Sunday's passage (from the same part of the same chapter) goes one big step further. It teaches Christians that their task is to reach out with the message of Christ, no matter the consequences. Here's the Good News, so let's share it ... *person to person*.

Today Jesus seems to be saying that we are not to worry when people dislike us or dismiss us or revile us or recoil at our message. We are called to reach out near and far. That doesn't sound like much of a dream job by any standard – and, of course, that's true. In a world where people seek out power and wealth and security and certainty as though they were gold dust, it is the role of the Christ-follower to point people in a different direction: the direction of service; the direction of personal sacrifice; the direction of vulnerability; the direction of possibility.

What is Mark showing us here? Firstly, that Jesus calls people to a role in life which may very well be unattractive in a variety of ways. More even than this, the faith of Jesus may actually prove to be divisive, straining relationships within families and across friendships. Walk with Jesus, says Mark, and you might very well go down a rough and tricky path.

But despite all this, Mark gives us one really big sign of encouragement here – and it is a sign we should note carefully. In this little gospel which, time and again, presents the friends of Jesus as being utterly hopeless in their astonishing inadequacy and wild incompetence, we see Jesus openly and deliberately placing his trust in such a strange band of failures:

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

Three things are going on in this section. First, Jesus is sending out six parties rather than 12. Perhaps he knows that teamwork counts for a lot. Instead of spreading his human resource thinly over a dozen different journeys, he prefers to give each disciple a pal, a buddy, a person to be a support on the road and a friend in time of trouble. We are not on this journey alone.

Secondly, even though Jesus knows what human frailty is all about, he still places huge trust in his followers, giving them his very authority to heal people wherever they might go. What if they get it all horribly wrong? What if the whole thing turns out to be a disaster? What if? *What if?* These clearly are not the prime concerns of Jesus. He is bold to send his friends out.

Lastly, we see Jesus issuing the people with that very big test: they are to travel light. Remember that this is the same Jesus who called the disciples away from their homes, their incomes, their careers, their security, ushering them into a life of near-overwhelming uncertainty. This is the same Jesus who will go on to invite his followers to take part in a life not of “firstness” but of “lastness”. And, let's not forget, this is the same Jesus who will tell his circle of friends:

How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

(Do you think he means us?)

Take nothing, he says. Take nothing except a staff, a pair of sandals and one tunic. (That's one tunic, mind, not two.) The implication – a rather unnerving implication: unencumbered by power or wealth or position or possession, you will be set free: free to live the Good News.

Let us pray:

We will proclaim your bounty and your blessing, O Lord. We will sing to one another the song you have put in our hearts. Our feet will bring good news to the ends of the earth. Help us then Lord, to live out our promises. Amen.

Praying for others

Sunday 10th May sees the start of Christian Aid Week 2020.

Merciful God, whose grace encircles the globe,
We give thanks to you for the work of Christian Aid
in so many parts of our world.
We especially remember before you
those individuals and families around the world
who must face the Covid-19 pandemic:
in cities that are overcrowded and unsafe;
with hospitals that are ill-equipped
to meet the challenges of this time;
and in communities which already
endure a lack of nourishing food,
clean water, and other vital resources.

Bless all who are facing illness in these days,
and be with medical staff and carers
as they face their daily struggles.

In this Christian Aid Week,
we ask that you would inspire us, your Church,
to align ourselves with the suffering of your children,
and to respond in love.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally ...

Abigail Morrison considers beginnings and endings:

When Churchill famously said, "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but is, perhaps, the end of the beginning," he was talking about the Battle of Egypt in 1942. As we know, the end of the war in Europe was another three years later (though that was not the end of the end – we had to wait for VJ Day for that).

On Friday, we remembered Victory in Europe Day, which was 75 years ago. That anniversary plus all the talk about possible lifting of some aspects of the Coronavirus lock-down made me think of Churchill's comment. We are far from the end of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on so many lives. But we may be at the end of the beginning. We can see a glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

By the time you read this we may be clearer on what restrictions, if any, can be lifted and when. Even small changes to the lock-down limitations will seem like a real dose of freedom. Maybe we will be able to meet family and friends outside, two metres apart. Maybe we will be able to go out for some exercise more than once a day. Maybe more people can return to work with all that this will mean for their livelihoods and our economy.

I don't think we will be able to dance in huge crowds on the streets like they did on 8th May 1945 but I can believe a time will come again when we could. And when it does, I suspect most of us will feel very much like dancing.