



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Sunday 10th January 2021

Today's readings

Today we are marking "Souper Sunday", when our thoughts turn to the work of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme. Whatever else you might eat at lunchtime on Sunday 10th January, please consider adding a bowl of soup to the menu!

1 Corinthians 12:14–31 ("One Body with many members")

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?

Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *O worship the King, all glorious above* (CH127)
- 2 *O laughing light, O first-born of creation* (CH135)
- 3 *The King of Love my Shepherd is* (CH462)
- 4 *How sweet the name of Jesus sounds* (CH461)
- 5 *To God be the glory, great things he has done* (CH512)

In the Name of the Father and of

In our reading today, St Paul is telling the church in Corinth that they should be ready, willing and able to work as a team: a team in which different people with different gifts co-operate together to be exactly what the church is called to be: the Body of Christ.

What Paul is saying to this young church is that everyone has their part to play: a part that is given to them by God so that God's plans might be made real through each one of us, and through the church as a whole. What we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 sounds a little strange, maybe a wee bit funny, although it actually comes round to a very serious point:

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

God chooses the parts that make up the body. And in exactly the same way, God chooses the parts that make up the church, with everyone coming together to do whatever they can do, to the glory of God, for the building up of God's Kingdom here on earth.

It's a little bit like a cook who makes a great big pot of spicy lentil soup. The cook knows which ingredients to use, and is completely aware of exactly how the recipe should go: a couple of onions, some carrots, a big pile of lentils (of course!), plenty of stock, cumin, coriander, salt, pepper and a bay leaf. *Et voilà !*

Soup is great: it's tasty; it's nutritious; it's simple; it's filling; it's fun. And think how international soups have become over the centuries, from home-grown Scotch broth, cock-a-leekie and Cullen skink, to the more exotic French onion, Italian minestrone, Russian borscht, Indian Mulligatawny, Chinese chicken noodle and American clam chowder. Truly, soup has global appeal. (And quite right too!)

Just as the cook knows all the many rich and wonderful flavours that go into making soup, from lentils to onions to carrots, and from salt to cumin to coriander, so too God knows the amazing range of ingredients – gifts! – that come together to make the Church.

Some people bring this ability. Others bring that skill. And before long we are working together as the Body of Christ in our world, showing our neighbours that God's Love is real, and is for them.

Today, on Souper Sunday we have a great opportunity to remember together the worldwide Body of Christ that spans the entire globe, from the Middle East down to Africa, over to Asia in one direction and Europe in the other, and out even further to America and Oceania. North, south, east and west, the Church is there, to love and care – and to do that loving and caring in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Just as the Church is active all over the world, so too the HIV virus knows no bounds. This may seem hard for us to grasp in a country where it is comparatively simple to avoid the risks posed by HIV. But in many areas people are still becoming infected in large numbers. If they are fortunate they will receive high quality medicines and have professional counselling available. Yet for a shockingly high number of people such luxuries still lie out of reach.

That is why the Church of Scotland HIV Programme's work is still as vital as it was when it came into being at the start of the century as our denomination's millennium project. There is a great deal of work that needs to be done today. But why should the Church be involved at all? Put simply, we want to stand up for those people who are edged out by ill health, poverty, stigma and discrimination: people of all ages who find themselves left on the margins. While other people might "walk on by", the Church of Scotland wants to "step on up".

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Over the last 20 years, the Church of Scotland HIV Programme has raised its funds in a range of ways, predominantly at congregational level. Back in 2009 it was our own Presbytery of Lothian which set the ball in motion for an annual service intended to place HIV in the heart of Sunday worship. This would be followed by a simple lunch of soup and bread, with participants invited to make a donation which would go to the Programme, supporting its partner projects at home and overseas. And so Souper Sunday was born.

The person who unwittingly sparked the original idea was the Rev Dr Robert Calvert who at that time was minister of the Scots International Church in Rotterdam. In his church magazine Robert had written a piece reflecting on a very unusual little passage from the Book of Revelation, which goes like this:

I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16)

Interestingly, Robert thought about the world Church as being a bit like soup, whether hot or cold. Soup, wrote Robert:

“... has many different colours, tastes and consistencies. It comes from every nation, tribe, people and language of the world. Good soup has lots of different ingredients and lots of ‘goodies’ in it! ... As the church we can be spicy, sweet and sour, and served hot or cold. It doesn’t do for Christians to be lukewarm in the face of human need. At this time, a deep lack of hopefulness is a reality for so many families, and the poorer you are, the more difficult is it going to be. What would not be acceptable would be to be bland or lukewarm!”

No, a lukewarm church could never be an effective church. Yet a church which walks with Jesus and seeks the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit is a church which will be ready for action. As the only British denomination with a dedicated HIV Programme, the Church of Scotland has been a beacon of hope for many other churches, particularly in Africa and Asia, who simply do not have the resources to reach out in hope to those people who are struggling to live with the virus.

For many millions all around the globe, HIV will pose a major threat in this day and in time to come. HIV and AIDS may not be on your mind or mine very much, but in sub-Saharan Africa, in Eastern Europe, in many parts of Asia and the Americas, and – yes! – right here in Scotland, the virus continues to present a real challenge to people’s health and well-being, to self-esteem and to viable employment.

The Church of Scotland’s HIV Programme exists to help, both by educating people at home and abroad about HIV issues, and by channelling much-needed funding from individuals, congregations and presbyteries to partner projects, near and far.

Today, don’t allow yourself to be lukewarm. Stand with your sisters and brothers in Christ as together we seek to tackle one of the world’s greatest public health issues, addressing it in faith, hope and love. Amen.



Praying for others

God of light and God of love,

We thank you today for the hope you give us
in the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he lived our human life,
that he shared in our happiness and our sadness,
that he knew the pain of grief and despair.

In Christ we find the bright hope of New Life.
We see that your love is stronger than any human suffering.

Bless the Church of Scotland HIV Programme
in all its life-changing work,
and bring justice, we pray, to all who struggle
against a pandemic which has continued for nearly 40 years,

Help us to place our hope and our trust in you
at the start of this new year,
and help us to be your light in our world's darkness.

In Jesus' Name we pray.

Amen.

And finally . . .

Robin Hill recalls a visit to Africa with the Church of Scotland HIV Programme:

My friend Carol was characteristically firm (some might say “pushy”): “Whatever you do when you get home, don't talk about Malawi for a week or so; give your memories time to bed down!”

This turned out to be sound advice. Carol and I would spend 11 days touring round central and northern Malawi, visiting partner projects that were being funded by the Church of Scotland AIDS Project, as it was then known. We did all the predictable stuff, visiting health service administrators and calling in to international organisations with greetings.

But we also spent time in hospital wards, clinics, self-help groups, classrooms, orphans' clubs, mothers' groups and the homes of many families. It was a visit like I had never experienced, and having Carol there with me was a bonus and a blessing. She served as guide, translator and passport: getting me into places I could never have visited on my own.

Arriving back in Scotland I just wanted to talk and talk and talk, but recalling Carol's sound advice I stayed (reasonably) quiet for a week or so. Then – my memories by that stage firmly slotted into place – the flood gates opened, with tales of amazing people whose working lives were spent engaging with folk of all ages who would struggle without proper assistance made possible through the work of the Church of Scotland.

What did I come to learn from my African odyssey? First, that Scottish people, however rich or poor we may be, enjoy a most amazing National Health Service that works wonders every day. And second, that the Church of Scotland has a most amazing set of partners in Malawi (and many other countries around the world) who know how to take limited resources and use them in life-changing ways in the midst of unimaginable hardship.

In such ways, God is surely working his purpose out among his beloved children.

