



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Today's readings

1 Corinthians 6: 12–20 (“Glorify God in body and spirit”)

‘All things are lawful for me’, but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me’, but I will not be dominated by anything. ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh.’ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. Amen. (NRSV)

John 1: 43–50 (“Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael”)

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *When Jesus saw the fishermen* (CH:340)
- 2 *Sing of the Lord's goodness* (CH:157)
- 3 *Be still, for the presence of the Lord* (CH:189)
- 4 *For the beauty of the earth* (CH:181)
- 5 *Crown him with many crowns* (CH:459)

In the Name of the Father and of

In the last few days the world has been getting acquainted with the idea of “President” Joe Biden. This name, I feel, has a natural ring to it as for four years Americans had spoken of “Vice” President Biden. In stepping up to become leader of the world’s most powerful nation, he only needs to lose that one, single, tiny prefix. After all, his experience at the right hand of President Barack Obama should stand him in very good stead.

How good it is to see a person of calibre and commitment in the Whitehouse. Joe Biden will, I believe, be a conscientious American President worthy of trust and support, unlike his predecessor whose tenure in post is perhaps best summed up in the single word: “over”.

Now in the aftermath of the Trump era, we are surely entitled to ask just how it could be that a nation with more than 200 million adults could vote for Trump in such huge numbers, electing him to high office once, and coming close to electing him to the same office a second time. Just how it was that this half-Scottish tycoon and media personality managed to come to power will be an issue of real public interest in time to come, with many a book being published, no doubt, and many a documentary made. But when the historians get into their subject, I feel certain that his electoral success will be credited in large measure to the 81% of white evangelical Protestants who threw in their lot with Trump in 2016 (and – quite astonishingly – the 75% who continued to stick with him four years later).

Professor Lerone Martin of Washington University, Missouri, is an expert in the field of American religion and politics. In a *Guardian* interview a few weeks ago, Professor Martin noted that across several decades white American evangelicals have often been attracted to a political candidate who is male and muscular, who is anti-Communist, who is in favour of reducing the size and scope of government, and who is committed to free-market economics. No great surprise. But – crucially – to get the evangelical vote a candidate would do well to take a hard line on certain moral and social issues: on abortion, on same-sex marriage, on immigration, and so on.

Maybe boxes actually need to be ticked by conservative US candidates on a diverse range of topics from prayer in public schools, to racism and nativism, to the use of the death penalty. A smart politician on the right wing of their political spectrum would know which buttons to press in order to build a narrow-minded but enormously effective coalition of religious supporters. And that, I suspect, is exactly what Donald Trump managed to do.

It apparently didn’t matter that Trump’s lifestyle was at odds with that of the majority of his religious supporters. Many evangelical voters seemed to be allured by the prospect of “making America great again” while looking the other way when media reports spoke of Trump’s personal defects and flaws. God, they might argue, can use anyone, saint or sinner, to bring about the divine will. So why not Trump?

That’s a good question, and one which is able to be brought into the spotlight through today’s reading from the gospel according to St John. In the first chapter we come across Jesus’ calling of two disciples. There are not many words used in the process whereby Jesus invites Philip and Nathanael on to the great journey of faith. As we see with other gospel writers, the call is very simple: “Follow me.” Two words which first changed lives and then changed the world. Two very simple words which seemed to be sufficient to make fishermen leave their nets, tax collectors their booths, and terrorists their swords.

“Follow me.” Plain and simple.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

When we look at this call story, we find Jesus in conversation first with Philip and later with Nathanael. In neither conversation do we find much of substance, and certainly not enough to constitute a convincing argument for following Jesus ... or so we might think.

What we see in this little passage amounts to something of a chain reaction. It all starts with Jesus' two words, "Follow me." These are received by Philip and acted upon with immediacy. He is clearly deeply moved by the invitation because when he finds Nathanael, Philip doesn't hold back: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

At this point, Nathanael's response is worth noting, because he is clearly uncertain – even sceptical – about this intriguing Galilean. 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?', he glibly asks. But Philip persists. He keeps going and provides his friend with one of the best missional statements one could ever hope to hear: "Come and see."

Come and see. Plain and simple.

With these words, Philip is telling Nathanael that he really needs to *experience* Jesus for himself, not just to be told about him as some kind of second rate, second hand exercise. 'Come and see.' It's direct. It's full of excitement. And it's ultimately successful because Nathanael, unsure as he is, makes the decision to move himself from A to B, to shift himself from uncertainty to investigation. And so he comes ... and he sees Jesus *for himself*.

Nathanael holds quite a distinction in John's gospel, as he appears in the first chapter, and he appears in the final chapter, yet he doesn't appear anywhere else in the entire book. This though, is enough to show us that his encounter with the carpenter's son had a huge impact upon him. He went with Philip and he saw Jesus for himself. And in seeing Jesus, he knew.

What does all this tell us about Donald Trump? To be honest, probably not very much. I will say this, however: anyone who wants to live and work within the Christian faith needs a whole lot more than a second rate, second hand telling of who Jesus is.

To understand Christianity, whether evangelical, liberal, high, charismatic or whatever ... *to understand Christianity* needs experience – experience of Jesus Christ. And that is very much what today's reading tells us. Remember the "Follow me", and the "Come and see"? These were invitations into a life of true relationship; true discipleship. And that, if I am to be bold about it, is what I fear Donald Trump lacks. Look at his lifestyle. Look at his policies. Look at his attitudes. Look at his agenda. Look at his rhetoric. And, above all, look at his actions. Just take a look at his track record across four years in the Whitehouse.

It's one thing for Trump to wave a leather-bound Bible outside a Washington DC church. He might even have used the services of professional speechwriters to make his moral arguments all the stronger. But words mean nothing unless accompanied by the kind of actions which are rooted in a personal love of Christ – a love which is found in response to the call of God, just as Philip and Nathanael came to see very clearly for themselves.

Perhaps Donald Trump will hang around the world of politics, or maybe he'll focus on TV or on his golf swing. I know which I am hoping for. Meanwhile, that brave partnership of Biden and Harris has arrived in town, with a treacherous journey ahead of them: theirs will be a hard slog if they are to win back public respect for the constitution of the United States.

God bless America. God bless Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the challenging term which most certainly lies ahead of them. Amen.

Praying for others

As Covid-19 infections reach new highs, we turn to God seeking his guidance and care.

God of light in the darkest of days,
these are hard times for so many, with the pandemic bringing grief and anxiety
across our nation and around the world.

Be with those who are so very ill, whether at home or in hospital.

Bless family members and friends who feel powerless to intervene
and who are unable to know what the future might hold.

Be with those determined hospital staff who are inundated with patients
and who see no light at the end of a very long tunnel.

Now, with pandemic conditions closing schools and businesses once more,
huge uncertainty looms large in the minds of so many.

In the stress and heartache of these times we seek your goodness
and we ask for your great wisdom.

And in all things keep us ever mindful
that the true, clear light of your Love remains undimmed;
for us and for all.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers the wrong trousers:

Have any of you seen the wonderful Wallace and Gromit film *The Wrong Trousers*? It's one of the stable of Aardman Animation films made by Nick Park. If you haven't seen any of them, you really must. It's possible *The Wrong Trousers* is still on iPlayer as I watched it again recently. This charming, and very funny, film is the story of the inventor Wallace who makes an electronic pair of trousers which are then taken over by penguin, Feathers McGraw, for nefarious purposes.

Gromit is hapless Wallace's very clever dog. There is a truly wonderful scene where Gromit is chasing Feathers. Both are on toy railway tracks and Gromit's track runs out. He picks up a box of extra track pieces and lays them in front of the train as fast as the train goes so he never runs out of track. The scene ends with Feathers captured inside a milk bottle.

Lately I have felt a bit like Gromit. It sometimes seems as if, as soon we get closer to the end of the Covid-19 pandemic tunnel, someone lays more tunnel between us and the light as fast as we travel towards it. The new, more infectious, variant of the virus has taken us several steps backwards and we are again in a lockdown almost as severe as the one 10 months ago. More tunnel needs to be travelled through. But there is light at the end – with the vaccines we are making progress faster than the virus.

I hope it won't be too long before we have trapped Covid-19 in a metaphorical milk bottle and contained it, just like Feathers McGraw, allowing us to return to something much more like life pre-March 2020. In the meantime, search out a Wallace and Gromit film to watch – it's guaranteed to cheer you up.