



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
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Issue 50

Sunday 28th February 2021

Today's reading

Psalm 73:1–20 (“Pleas for relief from oppressors”)

Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.

For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.

They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people.

Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.

They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.

They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth.

Therefore the people turn and praise them, and find no fault in them.

And they say, ‘How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?’

Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning.

If I had said, ‘I will talk on in this way’, I would have been untrue to the circle of your children.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.

Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *Come children, join and sing* (CH185)
- 2 *Who put the colours in the rainbow* (CH143)
- 3 *Christ is the world's true light* (CH456)
- 4 *All my hope on God is founded* (CH192(i))
- 5 *At the name of Jesus* (CH:458)

In the Name of the Father and of

Our congregations have long enjoyed Fair Trade Fortnight, with its many opportunities to explore fair trade breakfasts, and fair trade games, fair trade films and fair trade tastings. Now, with Fair Trade Fortnight under way, it is right that we should pause to reflect on these words directed to us by the Fair Trade Foundation:

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us more than ever how interconnected we are globally. This interconnection is at the very heart of the Fairtrade message and is where your role begins. You are part of the Fairtrade movement and you have the power to drive long-term change, not only with your shopping choices but with your support in spreading the message. We just have to do this a little differently in 2021!

This year Fairtrade Fortnight is highlighting the growing challenges which climate change is – right now – bringing to farmers and farm workers in countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Honduras. It is a terrible tragedy that people such as these people have done the least to contribute to climate change in our world, yet they are the very ones who are disproportionately affected by it.

People are seeing their livelihoods diminishing before their very eyes, and in life-threatening ways. There are droughts and crop disease, floods and heatwaves, rising sea levels and bushfires. So many different changes are taking place, yet scientists tell us that they are all linked by one common factor: increased levels of carbon in our atmosphere – carbon which has very largely been put there by us and our flagrant overuse of fossil fuels.

When we stop to consider the good people and the bad people in world history, I would like to suggest that each one of us naturally wants to side with the good, not the bad. Most of us would see ourselves as living quiet lives in which we really want to do the right thing. We don't like countries that invade other countries. We are repulsed by the idea of torture, or of exploitation, or of terrorism, or of abuse in any of its forms. We like the idea of human rights, of a living wage for all and of a progressive taxation system that allows us to have roads, street lights, emergency services, hospitals, schools for all.

All of that is good. But as a rich country, we have money, and we have all sorts of things that people in poorer countries simply do not. As a general rule, we drive cars, we turn on our central heating, we eat meat, we fly off to overseas holidays. We buy and we throw away (and we buy and we throw away) with little thought of the consequences of our actions.

What kind of a picture does that paint of us in all our comfort for those poor people currently struggling to survive, far less prosper? The words of the psalmist once again:

... they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.

They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people.

Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.

They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.

They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth.

Is that a picture of us? We, whose bodies are sound and sleek? We who are not plagued like other people. Is pride our necklace? Many would say it is, for we like ourselves the way we are, and we don't want to change the things we do. They bring us pleasure, and we've grown accustomed to our simple luxuries that cost us so little, even if they cost our neighbours the earth.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

The psalmist knows exactly what it is like to feel drawn into the banal net of oppression. The selfish ways of the arrogant are so tempting because they offer so very much. Walk the way of greed, he muses, and it begins to look like you can have it all, but remember that pride comes before a very big fall. Here's what he wrote at the start of Psalm 73:

*... as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped.*

*For I was envious of the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

It is said that if you are scared of falling, whether on ice or a wet surface, or wherever, what is really important is to have an awareness of how to catch hold of that which will stop you going down. Is there a rail nearby? The branch of a tree? A gatepost or a fence? At home, can you get into the way of placing your hand on a bannister?

Awareness. Alertness. Foresight. These are the things which will serve us at least as well as a good grip on the soles of our boots or our slippers. Opening our eyes and our ears and our minds to the reality of the world that we live in can stop us from falling. Yes, we can make ourselves ready to catch ourselves before it is too late, before we go down.

Do we want to fall in with the materialistic standards of this world? If we are presented with this question, our heads might well respond with the answer: "Of course not. We want this planet to be a wonderful, fruitful place for our neighbours as well as ourselves. We want this planet to go on having abundant harvests of good things for our children and grandchildren and future generations too."

That's what we say with our mouths. But what are we saying with our lifestyles, certainly as individuals, but also as nations? What are we saying with our lifestyles?

In Fairtrade Fortnight 2021, let us look at the balance we have in our lives, and let us scrutinize that balance, just in case it is nothing more than an imbalance disguised for our convenience and comfort.

A Malawian farmer is finding his tiny patch of land parched by the sun, rather than watered by seasonal rains that have missed their season. So what does that have to do with us?

A fisherman in Indonesia finds that the shoals which have long kept his family in work are no longer there. What is our part in their disappearance?

How do the communities of Malawi and Indonesia and countless other places all around the world see us: as people whose "eyes swell out with fatness", whose "hearts overflow with follies"? Or as people who are genuinely willing to play their part in working towards a fair and equitable solution to global warming?

What is it that you and I so urgently need? Certainly, we need Robert Burns's special gift from on high: "... to see ourselves as others see us!" Perhaps then we would come to our senses. Maybe we would indeed learn to catch ourselves before we go clattering down in a terrible fall.

In this time of climate crisis, our world needs to find a good and proper equilibrium – a true balance which will save the human race from mass destruction. And while we're at it, let's also find that personal balance which will save us from our own arrogance, setting us up to live simpler, better, community-minded lives. Amen.

Praying for others

Dear Lord,

We pray that we might better understand how our choices
in our daily lives lead to climate change.

We ask that you remind us of the impact that has
on so many of the world's poorest people.

Grant us the strength to forego things we enjoy but
we know can contribute to global warming.

Help remind us of the devastation it causes to so many of our fellow sojourners
on this fragile planet.

We pray for Fairtrade producers as they grow their crops and craft their goods.
Bless them in their work.

We pray for those who transport Fairtrade goods to market.
Grant that they, too, may be fairly treated.

We pray for those who import and retail Fairtrade goods
and for all of us who shop where they are for sale.

Grant us a stronger commitment to a fairer world for all.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers mountaineering – up the stairs!:

On Ash Wednesday (a week-and-a-half ago) Robin started what he is calling “manse mountaineering”. Every morning before breakfast he walks up and down a total of more than 400 stairs in the manse.

With the two flights of 13 stairs covering a height of 2.6 metres, his plan by Easter Day is to have covered a height equivalent to Ben Nevis, Snowdon and Scafell Pike all combined. That's a total of 3,408 metres (or 11,181 feet in old money). Whew!

Why is Robin doing this? Well, it's to raise funds for our Lent Appeal to buy Chromebooks for Preston Lodge High School pupils. He hopes to raise enough funds to buy three Chromebooks for the school.

In the first five days of his manse mountaineering Robin managed to clear the height of the Eiffel Tower (322m or 1,056 feet). By the time you read this he hopes to have added to that the height of the Sydney Tower (305m) and he will aim to give the congregation weekly updates on his ever-increasing altitude Sunday by Sunday.

Family and friends have been sponsoring him, for which he is very grateful. If church members are doing our jars of grace or made a donation to the Chromebook Challenge in other ways, he *really* doesn't want you to worry about sponsoring his daily stair climb too. But if you are still looking for a way to give to our Lent Appeal, simply go to www.longniddrychurch.org.uk and you will find the JustGiving link there.

Thank you!