



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 51

Sunday 7th March 2021

Today's reading

Today's service is conducted by our worship team; the preacher is Andrew Dickenson.

Psalm 112 ("Blessings of the righteous")

Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.
Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.
Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures for ever.
They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.
It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.
For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered for ever.
They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.
Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures for ever;
their horn is exalted in honour.
The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *All people that on earth do dwell* (CH:63)
- 2 *O Jesus, I have promised* (CH:644)
- 3 *O for a thousand tongues to sing* (CH:352)
- 4 *Shine, Jesus, shine!* (CH:448)
- 5 *Love divine* (CH:519)

In the Name of the Father and of

It is often hard to find any passage of the Bible on which all commentators agree, but one thing is clear: everyone agrees that Psalms 111 and 112 go together like peas in a pod. Psalm 112, describes people who live close to God with an open heart – open to God and to others. Psalm 111 describes God himself – his character, his goodness, his faithfulness. But here is the thing and the challenge for all of us. The two psalms are so similar in content that we cannot miss the conclusion that, in some basic way, those who are trying to follow God – that’s us – are expected to become like God.

Let me show you what I mean by looking at a few parallels between the two psalms. Verse 3 of Psalm 111 says of God: “his righteousness endures forever”; Psalm 112, verse 3, says of God’s people: “their righteousness endures forever”. Exactly the same words used about God and his followers! Again, Psalm 111, verse 5, says God: “provides food for those who fear him”; Psalm 112, verse 5, says: “it is well with those who deal generously and lend”. So God is a provider, but his followers are also generous in providing for others. Again, Psalm 111 says that God’s “precepts are trustworthy, they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness”. And Psalm 112, says: “their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid”. There is a parallel between the reliability of God and the dependability of his people. Verse 9 in each psalm points again to generosity – “he sent redemption to his people” and “they have distributed freely, they have given to the poor”.

We immediately see the problem: on the one hand, there is an expectation that we should reflect the goodness and love of God in our lives, while on the other, there is our frequent and repeated failure to do so – the plain fact that we fall short, day by day. How do we resolve the tension between these two facts? Two considerations help right at the outset. One is that, while the Bible continually presents us with high moral standards to reach for, there is utter realism throughout that we are weak and prone to failure – just look at some of those many famous figures in the Bible who were capable of great faith, heroism or self-sacrifice on the one hand and terrible behaviour on the other.

Only Jesus bucks this trend. The rest of us have to live with the fact that we are potentially very good, but often very bad! The other consideration at this stage is God’s grace: our lives as Christians are built on the solid foundation of God’s acceptance of us as we are, with all our faults. Through the dying and undying love of Jesus we are forgiven, reconciled and brought close to God. Nothing and no-one can tear that away from us.

Phew! So we can relax, accept ourselves, relish the unconditional love of God and go on our way without another thought? Not quite. That is “cheap grace” and the great German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who coined the phrase “cheap grace” described it in these direct words: “*Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*”

Bonhoeffer, in his day, saw many Christians who accepted mentally that the gospel offered them full and free salvation, but did not seemingly allow that to affect their daily living overmuch. His classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship* aimed to show the inescapable practical implications of following Jesus.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

How do we escape the pitfall of “cheap grace”? Well, Psalm 112 can help. The key verses are at the beginning: “... happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments”, and then, later on, “... their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD. Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid”. When we remember that “fearing the Lord” is not about being frightened but refers to awe and wonder, we realise we must take time to remind ourselves regularly what God is like and what he has done, to remember that he is in charge of our seemingly chaotic world. Then our hearts will be warmed by counting on his love for us and all people, his acceptance of us in spite of the things we so often do – or fail to do. This should spur us on, knowing that we are secure, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. And this leads to action. Again, in the words of Bonhoeffer:

“Every moment and every situation challenges us to action and obedience. We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbour or not. We must get into action and obey – we must behave like a neighbour to him.”

And so, when we read in Psalm 112 about the actions that flow from the heart of those who know the love of God, they are very practical – giving, lending, remembering the poor. This is topical when you think about it. The pandemic has widened the gap between rich and poor and dire need is everywhere. Doing what we can, whether in helping out with the provision of Chromebooks or local foodbank supplies or looking further afield, there is plenty of scope for action. Some problems are so massive that only governments and large organisations can do what is needed, but sometimes it takes ordinary people (and the occasional celebrity), to stand up and campaign in order for governments to listen – witness the many U-turns the UK Government has to made in response to outraged people saying “You can and must do more!”, whether on free school meals, cladding replacement, etc.

Taken together, these verses remind us that our hearts and not just our heads are involved in following Jesus. It’s heart and head together. I am reminded of the phrase a preacher used in a sermon I heard back in my student days. He kept on referring to the “logic of grace”: the idea summed up in the words of Jesus, “freely you have received, freely give”. At the time, the linking of “logic” with “grace! seemed to jar. After all, logic is about rigorous thought, data and deduction, while grace seems to be about something quite different: the outpouring of the heart in love, an emotional response to the needs of others. However, it is in our culture, not in biblical thinking, that we drive a wedge between the heart and the mind. We have phrases that embed this dualism: for instance, when someone says, “Oh, I just went with my heart”, we tend to assume that thinking, reasoning, logic, just went out the window. But it does not need to be this way. The ancient wisdom of the Bible sees the mind and heart as much more unified and integrated than we normally do. If we take in with our minds *and* hearts what God has done for us, who he is to us, day by day, we will want to share that with others. As Jesus says in answer to the question, “What is the greatest commandment?”: *“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* You see, it’s the “logic of grace!” Amen.

Praying for others

Eternal God,
you call us to follow you.
In you we see the compassion and generosity of spirit
that we aspire to live by in our relationships with you and with one another.
You see our potential and you encourage us to be our best.
But you know our limits too.
You know that as humans we are not perfect.
By your Grace and in your love, we are accepted fully,
held in the palm of your hand just as we are.
Remind us of what it means to be disciples.
Stir in our hearts and in our minds a readiness
to share the love we receive from you.
We thank you, Lord, that when we inevitably falter,
you remain with us, our Guide and our Redeemer,
emboldening us to move forward,
sure in the knowledge and presence of your love.
In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers jars of goodness:

We are currently in the middle of our 2021 Lent appeal, gathering donations to buy Chromebooks for students at Preston Lodge High School. But I thought you might like to hear about donations to last year's Lent Jars of Grace appeal. Easter in 2020 fell not long after the first lockdown began so collecting our jars was not easy but over 2020 many found their way to Douglas Clarke. Don't worry if yours was not one of them and you still have a 2020 jar. Douglas will happily receive it when you feel it's safe to pass it on.

Last year we were gathering our funds for the Refugee Survival Trust (RST). By the end of the year £556.83 had been given to Douglas and he handed this over to RST at the beginning of 2021. It's a tremendous amount, especially during such a difficult time.

RST help people seeking safety in Scotland to find a route out of extreme poverty. They work "to prevent and alleviate destitution among refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland by providing practical support when it is most needed, building connections between people and using what we learn to campaign for change. Our vision is of a welcoming, inclusive, safe Scotland for refugees and asylum seekers, where all live free of destitution and have the means and opportunities to realise their full potential."

In response to our donation RST told us, "... we will utilise the funds to deliver our core work providing destitution grants and temporary accommodation for people who are destitute. We are also currently delivering our winter project, supermarket vouchers for clothes and essentials and mobile/data top ups. Thank you for supporting our work, please pass our thanks to everyone who donated."