



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
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Issue 53

Sunday 21st March 2021

Today's reading

Psalm 31:1–10 (“Prayer and praise for deliverance”)

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord.
I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction;
you have taken heed of my adversities,
and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *Brother, sister, let me serve you* (CH:694)
- 2 *Who would true valour see* (CH:535)
- 3 *The earth belongs to God alone* (CH:18; tune: St Matthew)
- 4 *Take my life, Lord, let it be* (CH:502)
- 5 *Longing for light, we wait in darkness* (CH:543)

In the Name of the Father and of

One of the more humbling moments of my time in ministry came in 1999 while placed at St Cuthbert's Church (far down the slope of Princes Street Gardens in the centre of Edinburgh). I had signed up for the Bethany Christian Trust's night shelter and, not unsurprisingly, I found myself very busy.

As anyone who has done the Bethany night shelter knows well, there is never a dull moment, with all hands on deck all of the time, whether in minibus driving, food preparation, the serving of meals or general tidying up. But one of the most important parts of Bethany's outreach comes in the form of personal interaction. People who come to use the night shelter all through the cold months of winter are often keen to chat. And if a volunteer manages to get into serious conversation there can indeed be humbling moments.

So there I was in St Cuthbert's chatting with a middle-aged man. He was bright, articulate and very soft-spoken. More than 20 years on, I don't recall much of our conversation, but this much I do remember. Speaking about the provision of rented accommodation in Edinburgh, he noted that the system wasn't working. Why? Because would-be residents were provided with keys to their flat, but with not much more than those keys. When they went inside the property they would find very, very little: bare floors, bare walls, and minimal furniture.

It might be called a house, but it could hardly be called a home.

After a few weeks, new tenants had often had enough. The keys were handed back and the formerly homeless people were homeless once more, never having truly built up any kind of home-life in a house that may have seemed more like a solitary confinement cell. And yet, all of this could easily be explained. While being stuck inside a very basic flat could prove to be a desolate existence, the alternative (being back out on the streets) might bring with it a real and vibrant experience of community: a true and meaningful sense of home which homeless people can find among their friends.

Isolation or homelessness: which of these would you opt for? That's tricky, as neither choice is particularly attractive.

For most people, for better or worse, a sense of "home" is gained not by bricks and mortar but by people. As a young child I simply could not imagine making my home with anyone other than my Mum, my Dad, my brother, my sister. I was blessed with a very stable and supportive family, and I just couldn't (or wouldn't!) see beyond those blessings. But as childhood gave way to teenage years and young adulthood, I gained a different view of the world, as though I had grown tall enough to see over the walls and hedges of our garden and was able to glimpse a world beyond. So, my idea of "home" matured and expanded.

How interesting it is that Jesus spent his ministry on the road. As we know, there is little detail about his early life. Born in Bethlehem, exiled to Egypt, raised in Nazareth, and a young pilgrim to Jerusalem, he had gone from place to place as a boy. But where did the adult Jesus make his home? It's hard to know for sure, though one clue is given to us in Mark chapter 2, where we read this:

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door ... [Emphasis added.]

Did this house perhaps belong to a disciple? (Who can say?) Alternatively, did Jesus have a place of his own to call home? Maybe. Maybe not.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

What is clear, however, is that in order to have the flexibility to engage with his ministry of teaching and healing and challenging others, Jesus simply had to set aside any notion of a place that would be a home in the conventional sense of the term. His role was not to have some nine-to-five existence in which he could head back for a quick 40 winks in a quiet moment. Jesus, I feel sure, had to give up the comforts of a physical home if he was to travel far and wide over maybe as much as three years.

So might Jesus have been termed a homeless person by today's standards? I reckon that seems quite likely, though looked at in another light I think we can conclude that he found his real home via other means. Consider these Old Testament words from Psalm 31:

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; ...

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

Here, the psalmist is turning to God for so many of the things which a physical home might provide: identity; belonging; refuge; safety; refreshment; acceptance; understanding; true love – all to be found in the God to whom he prays. In this God (Maker of heaven and earth) the writer finds confidence and assurance. Yet don't you think that it must take deep commitment and trust for anyone to see God as their *home*? It must take spiritual strength to set aside the familiar comforts (the sofa, the telly, the fridge and the microwave; the bookshelves; the photograph albums; the hot bath; the cosy bed) *to make your home in God*.

What we see in the words of the psalmist we also find in the example of Jesus. Not only did he give up conventional living to go on the road with his Good News, he also had times when he had to seek refuge from the dangers, the mortal peril, the stresses which assailed him. Wilderness moments, mountaintop experiences, strolls by the shore and quiet places of prayer: all these helped Jesus to find his true centre, as he “came home” to God.

Where are we in this? We might maintain that we are secure in our lives. But do we trust with even a little bit of the trust that we see exhibited in Jesus? Or are we craving still some place of acceptance and security in our lives? It might just be that we, like the writer of Psalm 31, can find in God our refuge, our strength, and our home.

Earlier this week I was searching for a quotation from some wise writer which would demonstrate better than I ever could just what it means to “come home” to God. I looked on the internet and I flicked through my books until I chanced upon some words from the 20th century preacher and author, Leslie Weatherhead, whose writings had a big impact on me as a teenager. In a very brief paragraph, Weatherhead manages to say so very much:

“... let us, fifty times a day if need be, set before us a picture of the real God, utterly loving, whatever we have done, infinitely strong, resourceful and purposeful, finding this way for us when that way was closed for whatever reason, who will not allow us to be lost and defeated if we trust him, and who is generous beyond all thoughts of generosity. Let us commit ourselves to him every morning, for the real God is to be trusted, and whatever happens to us—called, as it may be by others, failure, catastrophe or defeat—we shall know that eternal love still bears us on its bosom and that we shall find our way home without regret.”

Trust in God and find your way home.

Amen.

Praying for others

God of our eternal keeping,

We pray today for the family and friends of Sarah Everard
and all women and girls around the world
who have been the victims of gender-based violence and abuse.

We pray for a change in the attitude of many men and some women,
who judge the victims of violence rather than supporting them.

We pray for those who raise their voices against this situation,
for those who are seeking changes in the justice system
so that it supports better those women
who are victims of the violent behaviour of men.

May their voices not be silenced or side-lined; may the right to protest be protected.

We pray for a transformation in the violent way many men act
towards and think about women.

May relations between men and women
be increasingly marked by mutual respect,
gentleness and true equality.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers worshipping in our church buildings again:

Tuesday just past gave us some more hopeful news on the slow progression out of lockdown. It was confirmed that our church buildings can re-open for worship from 26th March. We still need to: wear masks, sit two metres apart, sanitise our hands, not linger to chat outside the building, book to attend a Sunday service. We still can't sing. So, not like the old days but the same as when we opened in autumn.

From Tuesday 30th March we expect to re-open Longniddry Church each Tuesday from 2–3pm for an hour of quiet prayer and contemplation. If you would like some time sitting quietly in the church, then please do come along – no pre-booking required.

We are exploring how to open the church for Sunday services too. We plan to continue providing services by Zoom and YouTube as not everyone will want to return to the buildings yet. In any event, we can only seat about 35 people in Longniddry with a two-metre social distance, so the whole congregation can't attend a service in the church. We are exploring live-streaming services in the future, but in the meantime we plan to hold our usual Zoom service at 9.45am on both Palm Sunday (28th March) and Easter Sunday (4th April). There will be a Zoom Communion service at 6.30pm on Easter Sunday too. But we will also have “in-building” morning services at 11am in Longniddry on Palm Sunday, and at 11am on Easter Sunday in Gladsmuir.

You will need to book to attend these services. Booking will be open from 4pm to 6pm on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the week running up to the Sunday. Call 07443 858983 to book Gladsmuir and 07718 612546 to book Longniddry. Welcome back!