



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 60

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Today's reading

Matthew 5: 1-12 ("The Beatitudes")

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *O worship the King all glorious above* (CH:127)
- 2 *Blest be the everlasting God* (CH:424)
- 3 *Our Lord Christ is risen! The tempter is foiled* (CH:421)
- 4 *The Saviour died, but rose again* (CH:425)
- 5 *Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim* (CH:130)

In the Name of the Father and of

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Christian Aid, and tomorrow sees the start of Christian Aid week. Founded by British and Irish churches to help refugees left homeless after the Second World War, Christian Aid is now one of the world's most influential charitable agencies, being involved in many of the key movements of the past 75 years.

From raising funds for humanitarian aid through to challenging the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, Christian Aid has provided a voice for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. As an ecumenical organisation, Christian Aid stands for people of all faiths and none, working for dignity, equality and justice for all.

The focus this year for Christian Aid is climate change, and in particular the effects of extreme weather conditions on the very people least able to cope. No one in the UK can surely have escaped the growing awareness of the impact of climate change, and the urgent need to take action. There is certainly no shortage of material from diverse and respected sources. But why should Christian Aid, and we as individual Christians, be interested in climate change?

In an article by author and theologian, Ruth Valerio, she says the answer is simple: it's an issue of justice. At the heart of Jesus' teaching, and therefore central to the Christian faith, is justice. The human race is now well aware of the interconnectivity of all living and natural things. We understand how the breakdown of one aspect of the natural world affects another – and the evidence points to such breakdowns being human-created problems. For example, excessive burning of fossil fuels to sustain a modern way of living so many of us enjoy is now creating a crisis for those living in societies without the wealth and infrastructure to adapt. And what is happening in faraway countries will eventually impact our own lands. In the UK we can already see evidence of climate change. The increasing frequency of flooding is just one example, and whilst this creates heartache for those affected, to date we have had the mechanisms to cope and recover.

For those living in countries such as Kenya, where the climate has always been challenging, the effect is more profound. Here, people are caught in a cycle of climate chaos. Many older Kenyans have gone from a time when the climate was predictable to a climate where periods of severe drought are now followed by disastrous flooding. For those who are already vulnerable, the unpredictability of the climate is creating a real problem now. Not some vague future threat but a real problem **today**. This exacerbates the inequality and injustice that existed even before the effects of climate change became real.

As you would expect, the Bible provides clear direction on what is meant by justice. To be made in the image of God surely speaks of equality amongst all people. Looking after our neighbours does not refer to just those who live in the same community but to our neighbours in other countries who may not have the gifts and blessings that we enjoy. If we are made in the image of God, surely, we are also made to look after God's creation?

We also cannot escape the fact that we as individuals, communities and countries are interlinked in a way that is only now being fully understood. The pandemic of the last fourteen months or so has, if nothing else, shone a light on this. Not only did that interconnectivity lead to such rapid transmission of the virus from one country to another, but it highlighted the inequality in health care systems and the ability of individual countries to react. Witness the reaction of the developed countries with the vast sums of money and time invested in finding a vaccine. Would our enthusiasm have been so great had the virus been contained within the borders of a country 4,000 to 5,000 miles away?

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Today, we are reminded of Jesus' preaching and in particular the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes contained within Matthew's Gospel remind us of God's blessing on the poor, the mourning, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, peacemakers and the persecuted. If the Beatitudes don't speak to us about justice, **what** do they speak of? If they don't speak of the plight of the marginalised, **who** do they speak of? Perhaps they also speak of our lifestyles and the awareness of our impact on others?

In years gone by, Christian Aid would raise funds to help those most in need. We could donate and feel we had done our bit. But money, whilst vitally important, often treats symptoms rather than causes. As Christians we have to ask whether the lifestyles we enjoy are creating injustice elsewhere. We need to ask ourselves the question, "What can I do?" This is a challenging question because the moment we reflect on our individual significance on a global scale we realise our relative insignificance.

Climate change is such an enormous issue, plagued by misinformation and misunderstanding. It can lead us to giving up before we've even started. As individuals we cannot reverse climate change on our own. But a few small steps start us on our journey. Turning down our thermostats just one degree, making one less car journey a week, following the 3R's principle of reduce, reuse, recycle: these are all small steps that individually may seem trivial but collectively can have an impact. The power to make such changes is entirely within our hands. Make no mistake: it's by no means enough, but what it certainly is is a start – a start which can lead us out to new, more ambitious personal targets and firm commitments. By simply being open to embarking upon the journey of personal change, God can lead our feet along roads which, as yet, we cannot even see with our own eyes.

Looking at the bigger picture, there is hope. Tackling climate change is without doubt now on the political agenda of most large and developed countries. Big business is waking up to the fact that acting in a responsible manner towards our climate not only makes sense but is good business. Public awareness is increasing and the demand for change growing. Coverage of climate change is now mainstream news. Just look at how a teenager from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, has captured the attention of the world's media and, perhaps crucially, the world's youth.

Closer to home, the Church of Scotland voted at last year's General Assembly to develop a strategy for the entire organisation to transition both locally and nationally to net zero carbon emissions by 2030. To be successful will require strong, dedicated and truthful leadership. Climate change is not something that can be massaged away with a few warm words and a bit of spin. It will take courage and determination.

Later this year, the spotlight will be on Scotland as Glasgow hosts the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). Christian Aid will be lobbying on behalf of those who cannot campaign for themselves. Above all, we must again reflect on how we care for God's creation and the impact of the choices we make on our global neighbours. In doing so we will increase our awareness of the impact of climate change on populations both far away and closer to home.

But there is a population that will be much greater affected: the young of today and as yet the unborn. Can we look into the eyes of a young child or imagine the unborn baby, and say to them, "it's not our problem"? In Paul's letter to the Galatians he says, 'you reap whatever you sow'. If he was writing today, perhaps he would warn, 'others reap whatever you have sown'. This Christian Aid week, we pray that we sow the right seeds in tackling this greatest of injustices in the world of today ... and tomorrow. Amen.

Praying for others

God of abundant life,
we see your goodness all around us and we thank you for every part of it;
from the plants and animals which play their part in complex ecosystems,
to the dry deserts and stormy seas which test the limits of life.

We pray that in this time of climate crisis and ecological emergency,
you may help us to rediscover your love of creation and to reflect that in our own lives.

God who speaks through unexpected people,
we thank you for contemporary prophets who are challenging us to act on climate change;
we pray for indigenous people and their invaluable knowledge
of the land and sea where they live;
for scientists dedicating their careers to warning us about changes to the planet,
and for young people looking towards their futures.

We pray for the coming of a better world with justice, kindness and humility at its heart.

We ask that you guide us to be co-creators of this new world.
Give us confidence to follow the prophetic voices to stand against
injustice to people and to planet, so that together,
in your strength, we stop this climate crisis.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers Longniddry village Christian Aid week campaign:

Christian Aid week runs from Monday 10th May to Sunday 16th May this year. Usually, a team of willing volunteers would call at every house in the village, deliver an envelope for folk to place their donations in and then go back and collect the filled envelopes. This year will be a bit different. Our wonderful volunteers will deliver a leaflet telling everyone about the campaign and how to donate online.

In 2021 we are focusing on those most affected by climate change. Florence, a woman from Kenya, is one such person. As we all do, Florence and her family rely on water to survive – but unlike here in Scotland, climate change has made her water supply erratic and unreliable. Too little and her crops wither; too much and her crops drown. Until recently Florence had to walk for six hours to get water for cooking and washing. It was too far for her to collect water for her land as well.

With the help of Christian Aid and its partners, the building of a simple earth dam has changed her life and the lives of her family. Florence can now grow a wider range of crops – she even keeps bees – and she can sell her surplus crops and her honey at the local market.

The Christian Aid appeal this year asks folk in the village if we can help people like Florence. Over the years, the people of Longniddry have been hugely generous in their support of the world's poorest. Whilst we cannot deliver and collect our envelopes in person we can still support the work of Christian Aid by visiting the Christian Aid team's JustGiving page at www.justgiving.com/fundraising/longniddry-churchcaw.