



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 69

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Today's reading

Psalm 115 ("The Greatness of God")

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'

Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats.

Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.

O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel;
he will bless the house of Aaron;

he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great.

May the Lord give you increase, both you and your children.

May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence.

But we will bless the Lord from this time on and for evermore.

Praise the Lord! Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

1 *Christ is alive!* (CH416)

2 *The great love of God* (CH358)

3 *Take my life, Lord, let it be* (CH502)

4 *Father Eternal* (CH:261)

5 *Jesus loves me, this I know* (CH:564)

In the Name of the Father and of

Lay pastor Frances Cunningham offers this week's summer service address:

The writer of Psalm 115 understood that when God does wonderful things, the glory should be given to God and not to his people, even if in some way they had a hand in the work. The psalmist's message of confidence is strong here and can be summarised in three separate ideas:

Firstly, **the Lord is above idols** – he alone is God;

Secondly, **trust in the Lord** – he will help you;

And thirdly, **praise the Lord** – he is worthy.

Let's start by thinking about our God being above idols of clay and wood and metal. In this psalm the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is seen as having a heavenly home, invisible to human eyes, provoking the taunt of idol-worshippers: "Where is their God?"

But God does not have to prove himself every time someone doubts. In contrast to the people of Israel, the Gentiles worship idols of their own making, fashioned from minerals that originate in God's own earth. These idols are spiritually worthless. To worship one, even though it may have human characteristics, can bring no power at all. But the one, true, living God hears our prayers and answers when his people cry out. God alone sees into the hearts of his people and comes to them in times of need. When his people reach out, God opens his hands to provide in a way that not even the most precious idol of gold ever could.

These idols owe their form to human hands, not the hand of God – put simply, they're not real, unlike the invisible, ever-present God. That may seem strange, but recall that some of the most real things in life are simply not able to be seen with our eyes. Take love for example: it is probably the strongest force we know but we can't see it. Also, we can't see the wind, although we know it's there because it effects things we can see. That's like God: he exists and can be known by the effect his presence has upon our world, and upon us.

Let's move on to our second theme: trust. Our reading mentions the house of Aaron. These people were a priestly tribe and ministers of God's word. They of all people should have had the best understanding of who God is and what God means. "O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield." When we know God in our hearts and are safe in the knowledge that God is there for us, we find perfect peace. At times our faith may falter but that is when we can rise above our doubts, choosing to place our trust in God.

These blessings come from God who made the world and everything in it, for us, his children. And this brings us to the psalmist's third point, our calling to praise the Lord. The Bible tells us that everything that breathes should praise the Lord, but the dead can neither praise nor worship him, so we should do this with every fibre of our being as long as we live. "It is right and true for us to praise God."

We live in a mortal world of life and of death, in which people are born only to die in due course, often after well-appreciated lives of dedication and service. For those who follow, the remembering of such a life can be powerful indeed. Our country, as many others, has created memorials to those who have lived bravely in situations of conflict or of selflessness, often giving their lives that others might live. (And if we are in any doubt of this, just look at the mass of poppies which we see all over the country in the month of November.) Memorials which are built by human hand are not there to be worshipped in any way, but they should be respected as a vital reminder of what has gone before, recalling people whose contribution to this world should go neither unrecognized nor forgotten.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Memorials come in all shapes and sizes. Take for example, the Edwin Lutyens plinth of Portland stone surmounted by an empty casket symbolising the tomb of the dead: the Cenotaph on Whitehall. Designated the United Kingdom's national war memorial, the inscription reads, simply, "The Glorious Dead".

In contrast, we have the memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales: a fountain in Hyde Park, London. Built from the finest of materials, it features 545 pieces of Cornish granite, using the latest technology alongside traditional skills. The water flows from the highest point in two directions as it cascades, swirls and bubbles before meeting in a calm pool at the bottom. The memorial symbolises Diana's quality and openness.

Since 2006 in our village church, an area known as "the gathering space" has played host to a quite different type of memorial. It won't turn any heads. It's made of unremarkable, lightish brown wood, not highly polished, not very big, not particularly eye catching. It's rather plain – in fact it's quite inconspicuous. This Bible stand may be functional but it is nevertheless important as its flat, semi-upright top supports a very special book: the Bible. From March 2020, however, this little stand found a new role in life, supporting the Bible in full view of our Zoom camera in the manse spare bedroom. This means that every single Sunday for over a year it has been there in the background as a constant reminder of our closed church building. We all look forward to the day when it – and we! – can fully "come home". Until then, it has an important job to do in our internet acts of worship.

The definition of a book stand is "a cradle for an open book so that it may be read comfortably". What finer and more precious book could rest there? This stand was donated to the church in gratitude for the lives of Peter and Molly who devoted themselves to serving God and their church. Peter was a man of the soil and, together with his wife, worked the local market garden. He served his church from 1928, twenty one of these years as its first session clerk, until retiring in 1970. During the war years, the couple ensured that surplus produce from their fields and orchards found its way into the homes of their neighbours in the village. When prisoners of war from the camp at Gosford were put to work on the land, Peter and Molly treated them as friends and welcomed them to share their meals. There was always room at their table. During the '50s, the pupils from "the bad boys home" were sent to work for the couple and they quickly earned the boys' trust. Many a boy credited Peter and Molly for keeping them on the straight and narrow.

In their retirement, Molly took great pleasure from her involvement in the Guild and the Women's Rural Institute, while Peter tended his beloved, beautiful garden. The village had expanded and their warmth and hospitality were extended to their new neighbours, old and young alike. Their passing in 1981 and 1987 respectively, was deeply mourned by the whole village.

None of those who are commemorated asked for lasting memorials in their name. Indeed, the Cenotaph and the Diana memorial fountain were both installed after an outpouring of national sentiment. Similarly, the Bible stand is a fitting tribute from a family to a special couple who lived their lives by the words of Mark 12:31: "love your neighbour as yourself". My grandparents.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, you open the way to eternal life. Strengthen us so that we may give ourselves in love and service to one another and to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Praying for others

The Moderator has asked congregations to remember that 26 years ago this week, the systematic massacre of 8,372 men and boys took place at Srebrenica, in what was already a war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tragically, the international community failed to intervene.

O God of truth and justice,
we remember today the consequences of hatred
in lives brutally extinguished in hearts torn apart in memories scarred with pain.

As we remember and honour the victims of hatred,
lead us to sorrow over the sins of humanity.

Draw close, we pray, to mothers and sisters, wives and grandmothers
and all relatives and loved ones left behind, and heal the pain in their souls.

And teach us, O Lord, to learn how to live for a world
where differences are respected and valued,
and where fear and mistrust can never overwhelm us
nor vengeance be stirred in our hearts.

Give peace we pray, to the people of Srebrenica;
that their lives may be restored through your grace.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers the Faith Impact Forum's focus on justice:

Last week I looked at the Church of Scotland Faith Impact Forum's report to the General Assembly 2021 regarding migration. This week I am completing my review of their work.

One of the sections of their report was called "Speaking Truth to Power". Often religious bodies are told to keep out of politics. But politics is about life and so it is quite right that our Church should challenge our politicians where we think they have got it wrong, particularly with regards to caring for the most vulnerable. As part of that role the General Assembly "deplored the decision of the UK Government to cut overseas aid programmes and called on the UK Government and Parliament to continue to provide a minimum of 0.7% of Gross National Income as Overseas Development Assistance in line with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 and all main parties' 2019 manifesto commitments." Strong words from the Assembly.

The Forum is also promoting a campaign called "Reset the Debt", and urging congregations to support it. This campaign resulted from asking people struggling with poverty what their biggest challenges were. One of the clear results was the increased level of debt that had been incurred as a direct result of the pandemic or the associated restrictions. The Church of Scotland has a tradition and history of campaigning against unjust and injurious levels of debt. The General Assembly called on the UK Government to establish a Jubilee Fund to provide grants to pay off and cancel unavoidable debt accrued by households because of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions.

And finally, the Forum is promoting "Meet Your MSP" resources and encouraging congregations to approach their MSPs so we can establish and strengthen relations with our elected representatives.