



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
www.longniddrychurch.org.uk

Issue 72

Sunday 1st August 2021

Today's readings

Psalm 139:13-18 ("The Inescapable God")

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you. Amen. (NRSV)

Matthew 19:13-15 ("Jesus Blesses Little Children")

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' And he laid his hands on them and went on his way. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *O Lord, our Lord, throughout the earth how glorious is your name* (CH:5)
- 2 *Summer suns are glowing over land and sea* (CH:225)
- 3 *The King of Love my Shepherd is* (CH462)
- 4 *How sweet the name of Jesus sounds* (CH461)
- 5 *God is working his purpose out* (CH:235)

In the Name of the Father and of

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

A well made chair. A gleaming top-of-the-range car. An intricately embroidered tablecloth. A heart-touching painting. These and other works of human skill and craftsmanship attract our deep appreciation and admiration. But none of them can compare with the wonderful works of God. You don't need to go to a gallery or showroom to find an example of his skill. Just look at the miracle that is a new born baby.

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:13-14)

How amazing it is that someone can take a rolled up ball of yarn and from a single strand they can knit or crochet a fine gossamer shawl or baby blanket. Then look what God did! He gathered together atoms ... molecules ... strands of DNA ,and knitted them together to make a tiny babe. And he made us not simply as biological machines with different working parts. He made us who we are. Each individual, our soul and spirit, our emotional and mental makeup, our innermost being. And who did he choose to be his partner in the work of creation? Our mothers! How wise was God that he entrusted pregnancy and birth to women!

What knowledge God holds. He knows the deepest secrets of how our bodies were formed and how they continue to work. God knew each one before he or she was born. He knew the moment he or she was conceived and he is present at every stage of development from that moment on. Have you ever thought what a miracle it is for a child to be born with ten tiny fingers and ten tiny toes, with eyes to see and a mouth to let it cry out to tell its mother of its needs? A precious helpless babe. God figured all this out.

What a mystery it is to consider how a human can be formed, secretly growing in the womb. When a baby is born, it has already developed into a living soul. God alone understands the forming of a body so wonderous, and the care necessary to bring it to birth.

From the very beginning, God takes care of us and will do all of our days. We rejoice that nothing is beyond his knowledge or power. We are his children and each one of us is engraved in his heart. What an incredible thing is the gift of a child – and often petrified parents are entrusted to care for a growing and developing human being all through its physical, spiritual and emotional development.

We can understand why parents took their children to Jesus. The tender love he had for the little ones must have been remarkable, especially at that time. The place of children in first century Jewish society was humble indeed: they had no rights so could not dominate anyone, which is why Jesus says the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them rather than to the powerful who are free to dominate others. He would bless them, pray for them, place his hands on them.

We too must cherish the children in our midst. They are so special in so many ways, teaching us so much, as we do our best to teach them. Let us thank God for the children, they are truly a blessing to be nurtured, valued and brought on in a loving environment.

When I was a child, children were “seen and not heard.” I vividly remember being tucked up in bed long before sleep had filled my eyes, my mother eager to see me settled long before guests arrived for supper. Grown-up time not a family get together. Thankfully times have changed, definitely for the better.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

These past fourteen months have altered our attitudes and disrupted our usual routines. The pandemic has pulled us up short, making us re-evaluate what is important in life. As a nation, our eyes have been opened to the important role children play in our lives. We may have completely underestimated their true value and how much they mean, not just to their families but society as a whole.

Lockdown robbed our streets of busy, chattering schoolchildren, left playgrounds eerily silent. Parks and football pitches – forlorn, abandoned – paused, waiting to embrace the energetic youngsters back to enliven them once more. How must children have felt when home-schooling became the norm? Wonderful to have some special time with mum and dad? Or sad at missing time with their friends in a familiar classroom? A strange time for babies too, with mummy, daddy and perhaps a sibling their only social interaction.

Thankfully all political parties were focused on making the needs of children a main priority. It was imperative that the young people should return to school as soon as it was safe to do so. How teachers must have longed to engage in face-to-face learning, the children's welfare and education paramount in their minds. For younger wee ones, toddlers, maybe even kids who regard going to granny's house as still being "OK", missing being spoiled and indulged must have been hard. A favourite game in my house is depositing kiss prints and hand "art" on my glass banisters as my wee ones make their way upstairs to create wonderful, childlike chaos! Never again will I complain while on my knees trying to obliterate their trademarks. I must confess that these prints have remained in situ throughout lockdown, a reminder that one day, all will be well.

All children will have experienced one lockdown birthday, some even two, with no extended family to sing that time-worn song, or to hip hooray as candles are blown out. Bedtime stories from a babysitting grandparent have sadly become a thing of the past as mummy and daddy had nowhere to go! And, bizarrely, *not* kissing and hugging has been an act of love. Children have missed out on so much, making us ask what impact this has made on their young lives?

For years, a room in our church, set away from the main body, housed a library of books and a copious amount of toys. Plenty to entertain the little ones during and after the service. What was wrong with that? We hadn't got it right! The children were distanced from the congregation. We couldn't see or hear them. We were shutting them out, and as a result, everyone – young and old alike – was missing out. Just before lockdown we changed that. A child-sized table and chairs plus a storage unit, were introduced to an area just off the sanctuary, called "the gathering space". We knew the children liked drawing and reading so we equipped the shelves and drawers. The wee ones were delighted with their special place. Two weeks later ... lockdown. How sad!

The furniture is still there, ready and waiting to welcome the children back. And so are we! We want them to know how much we value and appreciate them. To see their smiling faces, to hear their lovely stories, to witness their wonder at the world around them. Let us embrace them because the church is all the more vibrant from their presence.

Children are a gift, an amazing blessing from God.

Let us pray:

Loving Father, wrap our children in your care, fill their lives with fun and joy, and whisper your love in their hearts. Amen.

Praying for others

A prayer from our Worship Team, adapted from the writings of David Adam.

Lord God, giver of all good gifts,
we thank you for all the love you have given to us.

Guide all who influence the well-being of the earth.
We pray for all who work to preserve the beauty and glory of
our wonderful planet created by you.

We pray for people who live in areas of the world defaced or destroyed;
we remember people who live in wretched places with very poor homes and
many who have no homes, even in our own land.

Father, the protector of all,
we pray for any deprived of work, of home, of well-being;
we remember all those whose land has been ravaged by war,
all places that have been pillaged through greed.

We pray for people in Africa whose harvests are failing from drought.

We pray for our own lands and our own people,
our own community and church, our own families, and friends.

We pray especially for any who have no one who cares for them, especially children.

Lord our God, you are our hope and our strength. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers the Church of Scotland's priorities:

In this, my last, look at the reports of the General Assembly I want to highlight a key aspect of the Faith Nurture Forum report. Successive General Assemblies have affirmed the work of Priority Areas and restated the Church of Scotland's commitment to being with its poorest communities across the nation and resourcing this missional work. The 2021 General Assembly affirmed this commitment of the Church.

During the pandemic the FNF has supported congregations in Priority Areas in several ways. They have held listening events, to ensure the Church hears and understands the key issues facing our poorest communities. Out of this came a drive to "reset the debt" which I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. The Forum spent much of 2020 supporting congregations with their transition to online worship. Challenge Poverty Week also shifted to have a particular focus on the impact of the pandemic on Priority Areas. The Forum continued to develop their programme of support, shifting as much as possible to online provision.

"Chance to Thrive" has been the Forum's partnership project between Priority Areas and the General Trustees. The project has worked directly with 14 congregations to help them to identify what "thriving" would look like in their local context, then consider how their church buildings might be made fit for purpose, resourced for worship and mission. The project is also working on how to roll out the lessons learned to the wider Church.

And finally, the Forum revised the list of Priority Areas in light of revised government information on deprivation. Congregations in these areas received extra weighting when the ministry numbers for the new Presbytery Plans were derived.

It's good to see the Church putting its money where its mouth is.