



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 73

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Today's readings

Hebrews 13:1-6 ("Service Well-Pleasing to God")

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence,

'The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?' Amen. (NRSV)

Luke 19:1-10 ("Jesus and Zacchaeus")

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.' Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *One more step along the world I go* (CH:530)
- 2 *This is a day of new beginnings* (CH:526; tune: Sunset 595)
- 3 *O God, thou art the Father* (CH:119)
- 4 *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty!* (CH:111)
- 5 *You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace* (CH:804)

In the Name of the Father and of

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

Our church is a very sociable one. We enjoy sharing cups of tea and coffee and the prerequisite Presbyterian biscuits after the Sunday morning service. However, our hospitality reaches way beyond that. Coffee mornings, Burns suppers, Christmas parties, concerts and more. You name it, we'll host it! For more years than I care to remember, I've been on the wrong end of the tea and coffee pots. I well recall, at an early age, being taught by a tea/coffee connoisseur, to swill boiling hot water around the offending articles for 10 minutes. A perfect cuppa guaranteed.

Nowadays, our happy band of caterers as we like to call ourselves, has been infiltrated by an interloper ... a stranger!

It all started like this. Not too many years ago, a probationer minister called Bill came to do his training with our minister. He brought with him his jovial character, his obvious preaching skills, his love of singing and the pièce de résistance, his prowess as a magician! In fact, he was (and remains) a member of the Magic Circle. So in demand were Bill's talents that it wasn't long before we were staging "music and magic shows" featuring Bill and his band. Of course we couldn't let those moments pass without putting on that "guid" Scots word, a "spread".

For years we had the tea making – if you'll pardon the pun – down to a T. The coffee, however, was a different matter. Sometimes we would put instant coffee into the pots, taking a guess at how much we needed, plus an extra one or two dollops "just in case". Other times a heaped teaspoonful went straight into the cups. It was a bit hit or miss! Sometimes strong as tar, sometimes weak as ditch water. People were too polite to complain.

Then one day something magical happened. There in the kitchen stood Bill grinning from ear to ear. Beside him, in majestic pose, stood a glinting, gleaming, two-foot-high coffee urn!

"Yer coffee's rubbish! This is what you need," he declared, waving a packet of ground coffee at the machine. Cold water goes in, with ground coffee placed in its tray. Press the button and off it goes hissing and spitting. Then, abracadabra, hot, frothy, golden liquid flows from its tap.

It keeps us on our toes though. If we don't look after it carefully, it stops working. A quick descale and a thorough clean and we're good to go again. It's been centre stage at many an event and has transformed our coffee making, it's "magical"! The team can't wait to fire up our trusty co-worker and welcome back friends old and new once again – hopefully sooner rather than later.

Jesus spent most of his time showing, receiving and teaching hospitality. He displayed friendship and grace, inclusivity and a welcome to everyone. Through ordinary things like food and drink, he showed us what really counts as a friendly, outward-looking body of believers.

A little later, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews got it right when they said we need to take this subject seriously.

After all, you never know who's coming round for a quick coffee.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

The Bible impresses on us that we must extend our love to those who are strangers, to visitors, outsiders, making them welcome. Hospitality in the ancient world often included putting a guest up overnight or longer. In Jewish culture this was considered an important pattern for virtuous people. Staying at an inn was both costly and dangerous since inns were known as hangouts for some dangerous types you would do well to steer clear of. So people tended to depend on the kindness of ordinary folk when they travelled or found themselves in need in a strange place.

To offer hospitality in a time when they were experiencing a period of persecution, the Hebrews could not know whether a guest would prove to be a spy or a fellow believer. Given the cultural backdrop, it isn't surprising that welcoming strangers was an important expression of Christian love, especially when it came to those travelling for the sake of ministry.

The writer to the Hebrews tells readers: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Angels, however, are not the motivation for hospitality. Put simply, you never know how far-reaching an act of kindness might be.

This is exactly what happened to Abraham and Sarah in a story from the book of Genesis. Abraham rushes out to greet his three guests, paying them homage, providing water to wash their feet, giving them a place to rest, feeding them with the best quality food and finally escorting them down the road as they leave. These were considered exemplary acts. Hospitality fosters good relationships and Abraham and Sarah's hospitality provides an insight into the way relationships and sharing a meal go hand in hand. These strangers reaped a deeper understanding of each other by eating and being together. This remains true today. When people eat or enjoy recreation or entertainment together, they often grow to understand and appreciate each other better.

During his ministry, Jesus and his disciples depended on the hospitality of others as they moved from town to town. Jesus shared many meals. It made no difference to him who he ate with, the poor and the needy, the tax collectors and lepers. His very being there was a sign of the hospitality he received and offered, the breadth of the fellowship he created.

In the feeding of the 5000 we see evidence of his care for the gathered crowds he had been preaching to. These ordinary people full of hope and hunger, his compassion for their needs was greater than his exhaustion. Taking two fish and five loaves, He gave thanks, raised them to heaven, blessed them and gave them to the disciples to hand out. Everyone ate and yet there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets.

We see the close connections between meals with the crowd and the Last Supper, the taking, blessing, breaking and giving. Jesus met people's needs with complete disregard for their status, labels and abilities. Today he calls us to feed people with that same openness and generous spirit. The motivation is the knowledge that wonderful results flow from heaven when we extend ourselves in hospitality. The promise is there of God's blessing and reward when we open our hearts and offer our tables.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, help us to be welcoming and inclusive to all who come to our door. Let us be your hospitality in the world. Amen.

Praying for others

A prayer from our Worship Team:

Lord, help us to heed your word, spoken so clearly by Paul.

Help us to see the angels in our midst.

They may come disguised as the angry, lashing out at us.

They may come disguised as the hurt, wounded and disfigured, whether in body or mind.

They may come disguised in hate, fear and distrust.

Help us your Church to see – and welcome – those angels none-the-less.

Lord, we remember those in prison.

May their punishment always be fair rather than vengeful.

We recall especially those imprisoned simply for their ideas and their politics.

We ask that they know that you stand by them in their time of need.

Lord, we ask you to support those for whom marriage is not honourable
because they are abused by their spouse.

Help the perpetrators of abuse step back from it.

And we ask for your support of the victims,
giving them the courage to leave the violence.

Lord, you told us you will never leave or desert us.

Let all your children know your steadfast love.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers freedom:

At the time of writing, tomorrow (9th August) is due to be what some are calling “freedom day”. We will move out of Level Zero – which was never “zero” anything but don’t get me started on that! – into a world much more like the one we knew prior to March 2020. But we are none of us the same after the last 16 months. Lifting most restrictions will mean joy and a prompt return to their old lives for some. But others will feel nervous.

I think both approaches are reasonable. We must learn to live in a world with Covid-19. It is never going away, and, like flu, we will unfortunately have to live with it claiming lives every year from now on. So, it is reasonable to be nervous about close contact with others and to be worried about catching the disease. It is reasonable to want to continue to wear masks and keep your distance and perhaps avoid much socialising or going to events with lots of people. We should be understanding and supportive of those who feel that way.

It is also reasonable to want to protect future generations from the appalling effects the lockdowns have had on young people’s education and job prospects. Many of them have sacrificed their futures to protect their older compatriots. It is reasonable to want to ensure that the significant adverse health effects of the restrictions are not extended. Mental health concerns, cancer survival rates, not to mention the ongoing poor health outcomes of poverty, may all worsen because of the pandemic. Many want to return to normal contact with others as a result. We should understand and be supportive of those who feel that way.

Tomorrow begins a new chapter. Let’s move forward – whether in trepidation or confidence – in hope.