



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Today's reading

Psalm 24 ("Entrance into the Temple")

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *We have heard a joyful sound, 'Jesus saves'* (CH:249)
- 2 *As a fire is meant for burning* (CH:252)
- 3 *Praise, my soul, the King of heaven* (CH:160)
- 4 *The King of Love my Shepherd is* (CH:462)
- 5 *Moved by the Gospel, let us move* (CH:247)

In the Name of the Father and of

If you enjoy a bit of Bible trivia then this week you have come to the right place. Listen to this, and hopefully you will see what I mean as we explore together the vocabulary of biblical times and some strangely omitted words.

The author Dorothy L. Sayers is probably best remembered today as the creator of that posh detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. But in addition to her interest in whodunnits, Sayers was also someone who took an interest in theology. In her book, *The Mind of the Maker*, she explores the nature of God, making this fascinating observation:

... the rise to power of our words 'problem' and 'solution' as the dominating terms of public debate is an affair of the last two centuries, and especially of the nineteenth...like 'happiness,' our two terms 'problem' and 'solution' are not to be found in the Bible ...

Just imagine that: such familiar words as “happiness”, “problem” and “solution” never once made it into the pages of the King James Bible. It seems that people of thousands of years ago simply were not interested in any of these terms.

Another word which – remarkably – never quite made it into Scripture is “bridge”, though we can probably understand why it didn’t make it. In a dry, parched landscape, rivers that were shallow could be waded across while those that were deep might very well have been viewed as borders: forbidding boundaries between “our territory” and “their territory”. Why then would anyone ever need to build a bridge in the Ancient Near East?

Unlike that poor forgotten term, “bridge”, one word which most certainly appears in the Bible is “gate”. No fewer than 20 times do we find gates referred to from Genesis to Revelation, sometimes in their literal sense, and other times used metaphorically. Gates are really important things, not least because they can have two quite opposite purposes. A closed gate sends a signal to people who draw near: “You may have come along the road, but beyond this point it is road no longer. Think carefully, traveller: do you *really* want to open this gate, not knowing what you might find on the other side.

Then again, an open gate is a different kind of threshold. It says: “Welcome! Come on in.”

It's a common enough experience to stand on the threshold of, say, an exam hall or a dental surgery, even an exclusive shop or a club, and wonder whether or not you can bring yourself to push at the door, even just a tiny wee bit. What will you find on the other side: a welcome?; an understanding smile?; a place where you can be yourself? Or a building where you're almost meant to feel out of place as just another stranger whose presence may be tolerated, but isn't particularly valued.

Not without reason are so-called “gated communities” seen as a retrograde step in the world of the 21st century. (Similarly, those smart tower blocks with secure parking for “residents only” and video entry systems to keep the stranger out.) Such properties are marketed as an attractive place to live because if you choose to put down your roots there you will find yourself cocooned in a community for insiders as you – quite literally – *look down* on the outsider. And the thing is, such properties are popular. What does that say, I wonder?

Attitudes which promote social separation may well speak of the fear and suspicion that have grown up in British society. They certainly speak of individuals and families who find satisfaction in keeping the other out and at arms' reach. It's not good, and it's not civilised.

Why then are so many *churches* a type of gated community? Look around a range of churches and I reckon you will find that the clear majority are closed up for most of the time, with gates – which *could* be left open – latched firmly shut. I would contend that a building which presents itself as though it is a closed-in, closed-off clubhouse for “members only” cannot fail to give the general public a clear impression of being out of touch with the world. So ... what are we to be: closed off, or wide open? It's our choice.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Our reading today is Psalm 24 which may well have been sung by worshippers at festival time as the ark of the covenant was brought into the Temple. This special cabinet housing the tablets of the Ten Commandments was seen as nothing less than the manifestation of God's presence and power. So when the ark was brought in, it could have been no surprise that the faithful would sing their praise:

*Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.*

*Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.*

Old, old words, yet even today we see a reflection of this ancient tradition in our Communion service when we so often bring the bread and wine into church to the tones of "Ye gates, lift up your heads on high". Some people find this metrical psalm's stately sound rather dated and a little rustic, but I absolutely love to sing it with power and passion, accompanied by ringing alleluias and a big threefold Amen right at the end. For me it is a distinctive mark of the Church of Scotland and very much part of our on-going heritage.

We may not have any kind of understanding of the ark of the covenant in our Christian way of worshipping, but what we do have is a knowledge of God's presence with us in Communion. Because of this, I think that in celebrating the Sacrament we can take for ourselves some 21st century meaning from the notion of gates being opened and doors being thrown wide as God comes to us. But once again, there is a problem here, and it is that same old human problem which we have identified with the gated community.

We might sing of throwing the gates and the doors open for *God* to come in, but what about doing the same for our neighbours? The communities of Gladsmuir and Longniddry have for the best part of a century seen really big expansion in housing. It's happened before and now it's happening again on a massive scale. I live in a house that was built in the course of that century of expansion, and the chances are that you live in a "new-ish" house as well.

For me and for my family, we received a great welcome back in 2004 from the congregations and the wider community, making the process of settling in so incredibly easy for Ailsa and Katie and Michael, as well as for me. Think back to your own experience of arriving in Gladsmuir or in Longniddry, or of moving into a new home from an old one. Were there people there for you with a card or a cake or a bottle of wine? Were there invitations to call round for a coffee or a meal? Were there parties or play times that your kids were invited to, even though they didn't know a single soul, and no-one knew them?

These are the kind of memories we need to keep very firmly in our minds over the months and the years to come as new neighbours move into Gladsmuir and Longniddry. We all know that the make-up of our communities changed immensely over the 20th century. Now that same demography is changing once more with years and years of housebuilding to come, creating one massive and near-uninterrupted line of developments all the way from Longniddry, through Edinburgh and out to Queensferry. The time is fast approaching when we as Christians will need to grasp a fresh understanding of what invitation and welcome truly mean for our churches – *God's* churches, which are here not for us, but for all.

Thresholds in life are ambiguous places. We have a duty to remove the ambiguity, encouraging the friendliness of our invitation, the warmth of our welcome and a new approach within our community, transforming our stern gates into happy, open entrances.

Let us pray:

God of invitation, give us the mindset we need to regard our gates ... our doors ... ourselves, as instruments of welcome, not the paraphernalia of unwitting exclusion. Amen.

Praying for others

Loving God of all the earth,
we pray for all those in Haiti whose lives have been thrown into chaos
by the recent earthquake and the storm that followed it.

We pray for all who are grieving, for those who are injured and
for the ones who are able and willing to do what they can
to help others rebuild their lives.

May they not lose hope but know
you love and care for them in their troubles.

We pray for all those in Afghanistan
who have dreaded the return of Taliban rule.

For those who have fled the country
we ask that you would help them to find a place to settle.

To all those who remain and live in fear
of what the regime change will mean for them, give hope.

Please protect all women from oppression
who feel that their dreams of a life of freedom and opportunity
have been crushed.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers power:

Many of us in the village suffered a power cut a couple of weeks ago. We had no electricity for over an hour. It was much longer for some folk affected in Tranent, I believe. Fortunately it was during a summer day so no-one was plunged into darkness nor did we freeze.

The first thing that told me I had lost power was my washing machine going off. Then I heard a house alarm sounding somewhere nearby. I had a workman in for something. I offered him a cup of tea. Then I realised I couldn't use the kettle to make him one. I couldn't even use my gas hob to boil water because the ignition is electric and the hob won't produce gas if the ignition spark is out of action. In addition, I realised I didn't want to open the fridge to get any milk out as I didn't want to let warm air into the fridge because I had no idea how long the power would be off.

Then I thought I would use the computer to look up the internet to see if I could find out what was going on. Oh, but I couldn't use the computer because it needs power too! Nor could I use my landline phone. Fortunately, I was able to use my Smartphone. But if I'd forgotten to charge it that would have been useless too.

The incident reminded me how reliant we all are on our utilities, be they electricity, gas or water. And how reliable the supplies generally are – I can't remember the last power cut we had. And it reminded me that millions of people around the world don't have reliable – or indeed, any – utility supplies.

We are so very, very fortunate.