



# Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 78

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## Today's reading

### Philippians 2: 1–11 (“Imitating Christ’s Humility”)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

1 *Jesus calls us here* (CH510)

2 *One more step* (CH530)

3 *Angel voices ever singing* (CH498)

4 *The earth belongs to God alone* (CH18)

5 *Sing to the Lord* (CH184)

# In the Name of the Father and of

**W**hat a rich and varied biblical text we are thinking about today. For many people, these words of the apostle Paul sum up what Jesus is all about: this is the Christ who came down from heaven to be clothed in our human frame, our mortal form; this is the One who taught the way of peace only to suffer and die on a Roman cross, losing his life so that all the world might come to know the extent of God's grace.

If you take a look at this reading printed on a page (whether in a Bible or, for convenience, simply on page 1 of *The Sunday Focus* for today) you will notice something quite strange: the first section of our reading looks quite different from the second. Having started out as prose, it suddenly, unexpectedly, takes on the very distinct look of poetry. In fact, New Testament scholars tell us that Paul is effectively breaking into song, as he quotes from a first century hymn about the nature of Christ.

And if during this sermon you find yourself absent-mindedly humming a familiar tune, it would be no big surprise, as Paul's so-called "Christ Hymn" inspired the Victorian writer Caroline Noel to pen these words:

*At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him King of glory now;  
'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.*

But it's not just the "poetic" part of our reading that is worth looking at. Study also the top section which speaks of: encouragement in Christ; sharing in the Spirit; having the same love; being in full accord. The whole text is upbeat and positive for the reader, then or now.

Paul calls his readers to have "the same mind" as Jesus, as they look beyond themselves to recognise the needs and interests of others. What Paul is concerned with here is humility: the humility of Christ being seen in Christ's followers: a humility that demonstrates the true nature of Christian faith. If we can nurture our minds to be like the mind of Christ, then our thinking will be Christlike and, by extension, our actions – our lives – will more clearly resemble the life of Jesus. In short, we will live according to the faith we profess.

The way of Christ serves as our ever-present inspiration but it is also a challenge. Every time we see the story of Jesus showing us how he gave and gave and gave, it points out our own choices for easy living – those cherished comforts, those misplaced assumptions over what it means to be successful, those urges to go our own way, rather than Christ's way.

Christ's way calls us out of that mindset towards a new mindset: the mind[set] of Christ himself. Similarly, Christ's way calls the Church out of its own corporate mindset which so often looks at the joys of a rosy past and the need for a successful future. But is faith really about success? Or is it about determined service of God and conscientious love of neighbour in situations that can be demanding. True faith, as Paul knows, is actually about imitating Christ's humility in a world whose values are very different from God's values. While the world shouts about wealth and power and glory, Christ whispers *humility*.

Another great hymn: "Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation", sums up our plight really well: *Lust of possession causes desolations; meekness is honoured nowhere on the earth.*

# the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

The notion of “possessions” may be worth mulling over, especially during this season of autumn when our thoughts naturally turn to harvest and to questions of stewardship. Human society, of course, is geared up less to the notion of “stewardship” and more to the notion of “ownership” through which I know what is “mine”. The two-year-old refuses to share what they see as “my” toy (a doll, a car, whatever); the teenager, “my” football; the adult, “my” bank balance. Because of this rock solid doctrine of ownership, other people are duty bound to keep their hands off what is “mine” – and this attitude is backed up to the hilt by the force of law. But is it that simple?

The American pastor Matt Laney tells a story of taking his young son to a burger joint to buy him some chips (though he called them fries). As the boy munched away happily, Matt innocently reached over for a fry. “Dad!” came the kneejerk response. “Those are mine!”

Stung by this rebuke, the father alerted the son to a number of factors which might be worth reflecting upon in any discussion of fry ownership: the provision of the car and of the fuel; the ordering of food; the forking out of hard-earned cash at the counter. “At that point,” says Matt, “he begrudgingly handed over a few measly little fries he didn’t want anyway.”

Whose fries were these? The son’s? Or the father’s? And was the boy’s giving really *any* kind of giving at all? A neat little tale of pride and possession there. It serves, perhaps, to challenge our world’s rather closed approach to ownership.

What is expected of us as Christ followers? It has to be more than the ill-considered handing over of unvalued leftovers, as we pick out the unwanted chips and pass them grudgingly to Dad. We need to focus instead on a new attitude towards generosity. Matt Laney tells us that faithful stewardship is, “about giving to the church and other places we care about, first, and structuring the rest of life around that.” Helpfully and humbly, he then goes on to say: “I’m still working on that.”

He’s not alone there. We all need to be “still working” on the *right* kind of giving to God. To return to those hymn lyrics, perhaps our “lust of possession” needs to be matched – and more than matched – by a meekness, a humility, as we come to appreciate in wonder and in awe the One, “whose we are and whom we serve” (Acts 27:23).

Generosity is more than simply an attitude of mind. It locates its meaning and it pins down its purpose in action that flows from gratitude. If we truly appreciate sharing in God’s eternal Love, does it not follow that our response should be one of profoundly deep gratitude, and one of a mind open to our own planned and considered giving as a key part of a lived-out faith?

To be truly humble, before God, calls for nothing less than a life-changing realisation, as we grasp our place in a universe too vast to be reckoned with. As tiny creatures of little or no ultimate significance, still we find ourselves enveloped by God’s amazing grace. And so, in a strangely unpresbyterian action, we too might join with Paul in bending the knee and confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord: Lord of life; Lord of the Church; Lord of all that we are and – yes! – Lord of all those possessions we have so foolishly been calling “our own”.

Amen.

# Praying for others

Loving God,  
We ask for your help for those  
who are still coping with the effects of flooding,  
forest fires and other drastic effects of climate change.

As they rebuild their lives,  
may the support they desperately need be provided.

Closer to home, we pray that the recent  
British Government plans to fund social care and the NHS  
will actually improve outcomes for millions of people:  
those who have had important operations or treatment postponed  
and those who worry about how to fund care for loved ones  
who they have struggled to look after in their own homes.  
May a long-awaited boost in support for social care bring respite  
to all those unpaid carers who have been faithful for so long.

May those in desperate need in countries across the globe,  
where news reporters are no longer highlighting their plight,  
be remembered by you and supported by kind-hearted people  
who offer care where it is most needed.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## And finally . . .

*Abigail Morrison considers seeing things from a different perspective:*

As I write (or, rather, type) I am in Derbyshire celebrating my sister's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I am sitting at the kitchen table of the, very lovely, rented house looking over the village church to the other side of the local dale.

Derbyshire really is exceptionally lovely. Though it is called the Peak District it doesn't quite have peaks as we Scots know them. It's more of a high plateau carved through with fairly narrow, deep dales. Driving round here involves a lot of twists and turns. But the countryside is gorgeous. I love Scotland and think it is one of the most beautiful places on earth. But it has to be admitted parts of England give Scotland a run for its money. They are beautiful in a different way.

One of the gifts my sister was lucky enough to receive was an inflatable kayak for two. Kayaking has become very popular recently. Her present put me in mind of the many paddle boarders you now see along Longniddry Bents. I don't recall seeing them at all in the past.

I have never paddle boarded or kayaked myself though it looks fun. It occurs to me that the view you would get as you paddled leisurely along would be very different from the one you usually get from the land. You would look back at the shore from the sea rather than the usual view of the sea and Fife. You would be looking back at your land-lubber self.

What would we see from that perspective? Would we like what we see? Would we see a different kind of beauty than the vision from the shore? I rather suspect it might make you feel differently about the place and, maybe, yourself.