



# Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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## Today's readings

### Psalm 1 ("The Two Ways")

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the  
righteous;  
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.  
Amen. (NRSV)

### Ephesians 3:14-21 ("Prayer for the Readers")

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and  
on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that  
you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ  
may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray  
that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and  
length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so  
that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more  
than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all  
generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

- 1 *All creatures of our God and King* (CH:147)
- 2 *Amazing grace!* (CH:555)
- 3 *For the beauty of the earth* (CH:181)
- 4 *Just as I am* (CH:553)
- 5 *Son of God, eternal Saviour* (CH:468)

# In the Name of the Father and of

In September 1946, exactly 75 years ago this very week, Bill Monroe and his band went into a recording studio in Chicago to lay down some tracks for future release. Prior to that session Monroe had recorded a great many songs with a great many musicians, but on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1946 something truly historic would happen.

With the postwar arrival of a teenage banjo player named Earl Scruggs, a totally new sound suddenly became possible for Monroe's band, creating an entirely new genre of music. It didn't develop. It didn't evolve. And nobody pushed at any boundaries. On one specific date, Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1946, a recording of "bluegrass music" *emerged* out of the familiar-sounding old time country tunes of the past, *born* into a vibrant American folk scene that had never heard anything like it before. The next stop, within one short decade, would be rock and roll. (*Please note: this account has been grossly simplified due to lack of space. It's a fascinating story worth telling some other time!*)

In recent generations, the Church of Scotland has been all about developing and evolving, as Christians pushed at boundaries which far too often proved to be boundaries so great and so high and so heavy, that no end of pushing was ever going to shift them. And so the boundaries have doggedly remained in place, as the old denomination pushed and pushed and pushed some more, getting more and more tired and more and more dispirited.

I strongly believe that for our church the days of pushing are over. If the pushing was going to work, it would have worked by now. We have tried our hardest to turn ourselves into the Church of the future. Perhaps now the time has come for us to realise that this Church of "ours" is not ours at all. It is God's Church, so we need to place our trust in God, seeking the will of God, and going where God leads us, as we invite and allow God to bring the Church – *God's Church* – to the point of fresh emergence. Make no mistake: an emergence, a fresh start, is one very powerful way in which things can and do change. As Christians, we of all people should understand that. After all, God didn't change the course of history with a briefing paper. He changed the course of human history with a baby.

Things "emerge" in different ways, but I think we can agree that when they do there is often an element of surprise at work. And such an emergence can be as vital as it is unexpected. Indeed, it may be that in 2021, something new is emerging already.

For Bill Monroe, the emergence of bluegrass music came about because a boy with a banjo brought a totally new style of playing to his band. Without that single innovation happening at that point in American history, the chemistry of the moment would have been missed entirely. In consequence, the long flowing stream of folk music, pop music – all kinds of music – would have been diverted down a different channel altogether. And that would have been very sad, not least for Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs.

75 years ago in September 1946, something else was happening on this side of the Atlantic. The Church of Scotland was beginning to grow once more after the shock and horror of war against the obscenity of fascism. 75 years ago our denomination was altogether confident, as its members and their children were once again able to flock into church together. New hope was emerging from the ashes, and something else was emerging too (something we have referred to already this morning): an enormous arrival of babies. This, of course, became known as "the baby boom", and how lovely it was.

And yet ... that baby boom (in which I played a very late part) may in an odd sense have been the seed of the old Church's downfall. Decade by decade, complacency set in as we lost our "missional zeal". In turn, church, for many people, became fixed and stable when it should have been a movement of passion and energy. Little wonder that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not seen as relevant, if those who were its bearers were hardly bearing it at all.

# the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Too many congregations placed too much faith in maintaining the old ways of the past: old ways in which churches took delight in their many members' biological ability to produce large Sunday schools, big enough – as we know only too well – to fill three buses for the annual picnic.

Some congregations (though by no means all) liked the ease with which church life could be maintained so very simply, with creches and Sunday schools leading on to the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade and the dull-as-ditchwater Bible classes that no teenager in their right mind would ever ... *ever* ... choose to attend.

And then youth fellowships offered a breeding ground for what, rather delicately, became known as “boy-girl relationships” which in a few short years would see engagement parties, wedding receptions, new households taking shape. And so, through the 1960s and into the 1970s, this whole process would wheel round to babies once more.

Meanwhile, young and enthusiastic adults declared their faith in Jesus Christ, entered the pews as members of his Church and over time were elected as active, dedicated office bearers, with some becoming ministers.

And I can tell you this much: from the year 1964 to the year 2004, that is virtually word for word my personal Church of Scotland story. And it may well be similar to yours too.

With a gloriously efficient, biologically driven model such as this, what we might call “missional impetus” was always likely to be quietly quelled. Churches were buzzing after all, with happy congregational treasurers counting their pounds, shillings and pence. There would be exciting new buildings, bright new stained glass windows, expensive new church organs for members to enjoy. Some congregations (though by no means all) kept their human resources and their financial resources largely for themselves, without even trying to discover exciting ways of sharing and living and *being* the Good News of Jesus Christ out in their own parishes and communities – communities of ordinary people doing the best they could who, as it turned out, increasingly failed to see the point of what was going on behind those big blue doors where “the good people” sat to pray on a Sunday morning.

The writer to the Ephesians penned these inspiring words to a church that was active in a time of social turmoil:

*I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*

That church in Ephesus knew all sorts of challenges, whether local or national. Yet here they are being told that God could strengthen them in the heart of their troubles through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through the Christians of the city. Strikingly, the writer notes that his prayer is for them to be “rooted and grounded in love” – God's immense love which reaches out to bring hope to those who so badly need it day by day, whether inside the church or far beyond its membership..

In our day, it is as simple as this: we must open ourselves to God, and to the mission of God, as we look in faith and in hope towards some as yet unknown re-alignment of the Church's way of working and, indeed, its very way of being. It is time for us to be serious about our discipleship and our place in the *mission Dei* – God's own mission – as we walk the Way of Christ, embracing what it truly means to be part of an awe-inspiring Commonwealth for all the world: the Kingdom of God.

Keep watching. Keep praying. Keep waiting expectantly for something new ... to emerge. Amen.

# Praying for others

God of compassion,  
as summer turns into autumn,  
as the days get shorter and the nights get cooler,  
we pray for all the homeless people who don't have the security  
of a warm place to stay each night.

Comfort them in spirit and bless those who work  
to provide them with shelter, food and friendship.

We pray for refugees – those who have fled Afghanistan and  
those who continue to try to come to Europe  
from many other countries.

We thank you for the open hearts of many caring people.

We ask that our government would be more humane  
towards those in real trouble.

We pray that desperate people will find new hope and  
that lives torn apart by war and strife would be restored.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who fled persecution at his birth and,  
in the end, triumphed over death.

Amen.

## And finally . . .

*Abigail Morrison considers travelling versus arriving:*

I have been doing a lot of driving recently. A couple of weeks ago I drove down to Derbyshire and then last week I made one of my regular drives through to Glasgow. You are probably familiar with the concept that one should enjoy the journey at least as much as the end destination. My driving got me thinking about this.

The drive to Glasgow is, for me, a regular trip. The drive along the M8 is not the most exciting in the world. To be honest, it's really dull. You don't get to see much of the countryside and what you do see looks pretty forlorn. But the drive to Matlock in Derbyshire is wonderful. First you pass through the hills around Moffat and then the edge of the Lake District. And before I knew it my satnav had taken me off the M6 for a beautiful drive down through the north of England and the Peak District. We travelled along quiet roads, across high plateaus and down into delightful vales, passing through beautiful old villages of lovely stone houses. It made the journey a pleasure rather than a chore and it became part of the holiday.

I sometimes fear I'm not so good at viewing life in the same way. I can be too focused on what I need to get done (where I need to get to) that I don't stop to enjoy the moment, to savour what I'm doing or to notice incidental pleasure around me. I've learned to make my driving trips a pleasure in themselves (well, with exception of the M8 to Glasgow!).

I now need to extend that lesson more widely in life. Maybe I'm not alone in this?