



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Today's reading

Revelation 14:6–13 (“The Messages of the Three Angels”)

Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’

Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’

Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, ‘Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name.’

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.’ Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *Rejoice! The Lord is King* (CH:449)
- 2 *This is the day* (CH:194)
- 3 *I bind unto myself today* (CH:639 i and ii)
- 4 *God of freedom, God of justice* (CH:263)
- 5 *Forth in the peace of Christ we go* (CH:646)

In the Name of the Father and of

The Swiss Reformer, John Calvin, made his mark on Church history in many and varied ways. One of these was as the author of commentaries on every single book of the New Testament. Except one. Why might it have been that Calvin never finished his great project, stopping short of a commentary on the book of Revelation? Some say that because his life drew to a close at the age of 55, death beat him to the finishing line. Others maintain that Calvin himself just didn't understand what Revelation was about, so decided to leave what might have been said ... totally unsaid.

In fairness, if I had plans to write commentaries, I would probably put off the final book of the Bible for as long as I could. It's possible to speculate about the overall sweep of St John's mammoth visionary tome, but to get into the nitty gritty of what it's all about would be far beyond the bounds of both my belief and my patience. Just look at today's reading and all its apocalyptic detail. There's talk of judgment, and that's a perfectly fair scriptural topic, of course. Then there is that reference to "the beast and its image" and to marks on foreheads or on hands. As for drinking "the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger," I simply wouldn't know where to start.

Biblical scholars may bring their wisdom. Conspiracy theorists may throw in their mad ramblings. As for me, what could I do but trust in the remarkable grace of God and hope that all will be made clear in the constantly unfolding fulness of time. I don't think I could – or would want to – do more.

So – you may well be asking – why has the minister chosen to preach on a biblical text which he feels he cannot preach on? You are, of course, entitled to an answer. The reason that Revelation chapter 14 is appropriate to this service is that it has an utterly beautiful couple of verses which tie in so well with this stage in the church year when we reflect upon both souls now departed and saints who live the life of God. Let us consider verses 12 and 13 once more:

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.'

When biblical writers mention saints, they are not meaning people on a list of those who have been canonised: St Paul, St Anne, St John, St Mary. When the Bible uses that term, "saint", it means those people who have come to faith in Christ. This becomes clear when we read biblical passages like the one we find at the very start of the letter to the Ephesians: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,*

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Emphasis added.]

Clearly, those saints in Ephesus were not necessarily mythical figures, but everyday, hard-working Christian believers who were seeking to be led by God's Holy Spirit as they lived out together their faith in the Risen Lord. To be a saint, then, is to be human, not superhuman. Maybe you know a saint. Or, perhaps I will rephrase that, just to make it a bit easier to take in. Maybe you know or have known in your life ... a saintly person whose living faith shines or shone in their words and their actions.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Saints, in my experience, seem to be those who have lived lives of service to both God and the church – people whose faith is tangible. Like stained-glass-window-saints in so many church buildings, they have, “the light flooding through them”.

One person who had tremendous light in her life and who might well be seen as a modern-day saint is a Roman Catholic woman named Dorothy Day. Little known in this country, she was born in New York at the end of the 19th century. The young Dorothy struggled with what it truly meant to be a saint. Listen to these words which sum up her dilemma:

“Whatever I had read as a child about the saints had thrilled me. I could see the nobility of giving one’s life for the sick, the maimed, the leper. But there was another question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?”

Dorothy Day was someone who would always strive to see wrongs righted, not merely tolerated. She didn’t simply want people to be kind to those who were less fortunate than themselves. She wanted to frame a society in which all could have enough, in which each one could reach their full potential. She started out working as a radical journalist but then in 1933 her life would take a major turn as she co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement which aimed at helping people unite their spiritual growth with their passion for justice.

There would be the creation of “hospitality houses” in the city, and training farms where people could learn about the land. And the Movement also took seriously the need for people to have their say and to listen to others. Although there was no monastery, Dorothy Day created what might be called a new monasticism which combined spiritual reflection with committed action designed to create, “a new society within the shell of the old”.

In setting up the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day could have chosen to have focused her attention on action with the long term goal of getting lots and lots of things done as soon as possible. But rather she stressed the need for followers of Christ to have an intentional awareness of the long journey of faith that they were on. It was important to worship God, to have a discipline of thankfulness, to pause in life to pray for the needs of others, to repent from the heart for the human sinfulness which stops us being all we could, and should, be. For her, the journey of life became something of exquisite value. When undertaken with Christ as your travelling companion, this journey would be far more than a way of arriving at a destination. She would often quote from a saying by St Catherine of Siena: ‘All the Way to heaven is Heaven, because He said I am the Way.’

“What we do,” Dorothy Day once said, “is very little. But it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest. What we do is so little that we may seem to be constantly failing. But so did he fail. He met with apparent failure on the Cross. But unless the seeds fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest.”

What does it mean to be a saint? Is it to do good things all of the time, selflessly putting others first? I really don’t think so. Perhaps it is concerned with changing the world from its old ways of tired conformity to something revolutionary. Again, I have my doubts.

Surely to be a saint is to set out each day upon the Way of Christ, opening ourselves fully to the Spirit of God who directs our steps as we seek to position our own purpose within the purpose of God. By doing this, rather amazingly, our mission comes to match up with the very mission of God, as more than a few saints have found for themselves. Amen.

Praying for others

God of all Creation,

With the nations of the world gathered together
at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow,
we turn to you in prayer for our planet and its people.

For those troubled people of the world's poorest nations,
feeling the very personal impact of global heating
upon their communities, their families and their own lives,
bring hope, we pray, coupled with justice.

For leaders of industry, leaders of commerce, leaders of nations
and all who stand in positions of power,
knowing that our future depends so greatly upon their commitment to change,
bring wisdom, we pray, coupled with determination.

For us who do not even feel our own quiet complacency
compounding all the suffering and misery which, even now, is piling up
for the most uncertain of futures all across our planet,
bring challenge, we pray, coupled with true resolve to repent and to restore.

Hear this world's anguished cries,
and guide our lives in your true way of peace for all the Earth.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Sheila Jamieson considers the gift of reading for our families:

“Reading is the gateway for children that makes all learning possible.” Barack Obama states just how important reading is. We know that many children in the UK do not have a book of their own and Home-Start East Lothian would like to provide each child in every family they support with a book.

As Home-Start cannot hold a Family Party again this year, door-step deliveries of Christmas parcels and gifts are planned during December and the books will be included with these. The generosity of Gladsmuir and Longniddry folk have made this possible in the past and once again it will be greatly appreciated if you were able to supply a new, brightly-coloured, unwrapped story-book suitable for a child under 5. It should not be a Christmas book so that it can be enjoyed throughout the year.

If you live in Longniddry, you can place your book in a box in the church on a Tuesday or at a Sunday Service, or deliver it to me at 40 Glassel Park Road, EH32 0NY. Gladsmuir residents can take their book to Gladsmuir Church when there is a Sunday Service. If it is more convenient to order a book online, you could have it delivered directly to me at the above address, or if you are unable to purchase a book a monetary contribution could be given and Home-Start staff would buy a book on your behalf. Cheques should be made payable to 'Home-Start East Lothian'. All contributions should be made by Sunday 28th November. If you have any questions or would like more information please contact me on 07927400437 or 01875 852068.