

# THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

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Online at [www.longniddrychurch.org.uk](http://www.longniddrychurch.org.uk)

## Today's Bible readings

*Psalm 118:19-25 ("A Song of Victory")*

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

*John 15:1-8 ("Jesus the True Vine")*

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

*Sing for God's glory (CH:172)*

*Jesus' hands were kind hands (CH351)*

*I waited for the Lord my God (CH:30)*

*We have a gospel to proclaim (CH:363)*

This Sunday poses a very stressful problem for ministers and priests all over the Commonwealth. There is a quite annoying and pretty much unavoidable difficulty here, which we all need to bear in mind. To illustrate what I'm getting at, listen to these three quite different broadcasting scenarios:

**Scenario 1:** "Blue skies above them, the sun beating down upon the exquisite State Coach, Their Majesties offer their smiles and their waves to unnumbered well-wishers as together the teeshirt-clad crowds cheer for all they are worth."

**Scenario 2:** "With typical British irony, the unlikely May snowflakes descend upon the State Coach. If we look closely, Their Majesties can clearly be seen shivering in the sub-zero temperatures as they overtake a penguin on The Mall."

**Scenario 3:** "We apologise to viewers for this break in our outside broadcast from London. Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible."

The problem, of course, is that the words which this congregation is hearing in church right now on Sunday the 7th and which devotees of *The Sunday Focus* are reading at a time of their own choosing were, in fact, being written away back on the morning of Tuesday the 2nd. As I had no crystal ball on my desk I didn't know how Coronation Saturday was going to work out, making me feel a bit like Ian Hislop and Paul Merton who for decades have recorded Friday's *Have I Got News For You* on the Thursday evening.

The fact is that in every aspect of life it is impossible to know what is going to happen until it has happened. That's one of the deep predicaments of human living: no matter how much we plan ... or calculate ... or hope ... or trust ... *now* is the only time we have. What's past is gone, and what is yet to come lies far beyond us, no matter how near it might appear. You might be a king in one of His Majesty's palaces, you might be a prisoner in one of His Majesty's prisons - whoever you are you can never know what lies around the corner (not, at least, until the future finally becomes the present, with all the many surprises which that can involve).

How, then, are we to find any security in our lives? In what ways can we take on the challenges of time in safety and confidence? As people of faith we can learn much on this from the gospel of John, a big part of whose task it is to point readers in the direction of the Jesus who says - and firmly in the present tense - "I am":

- I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35);
- I am the Light of the World (John 8:12);
- I am the Door (John 10:9);
- I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14);
- I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25);
- I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6); and as in today's reading
- I am the Vine (John 15:1,5)

In each of these short little statements, Jesus is making a very "present" claim about just who he is and what he is about. More than this, however, he is encouraging his listeners to think for themselves about what their own lives will be like when lived within the love and care of the Son of God:

- Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty;
- Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life;

- Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture;
- The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... I know my own and my own know me;
- Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die;
- No one comes to the Father except through me;  
and, as we see in today's reading:
- Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.

There is a "what" to all this, and there is also a "why". First then, the "what" ...

What is it that John is doing by offering these sayings of Jesus, spread out across a full 10 chapters of his book? He is taking very familiar images and attaching to each one some spiritual, symbolic value. Everyone knows that Jesus is neither bread nor light nor door. Still, these simple "I am" sayings help believers understand different divine traits as we see them displayed in Jesus. Through him we are filled. Through him we find illumination. Through him we come into salvation. (And so on.)

So that is the "what" of these sayings. Now let's move on to the far more important question: "Why?" Why does John interlace these wee word pictures through his gospel? Simply because such basic images are in everyone's mind from childhood upwards, speaking to us powerfully. We hear Jesus saying "door" and we visualise a door. He uses the word, "vine" and we are transported to a beautiful garden. And so his words connect not in an abstract sense but on the level of everyday life. This applied in first century Palestine and applies still in 21st century East Lothian.

Most (though not all) of the "I am" sayings of Jesus operate in this way. As the New Testament scholar, Marcus Borg, so beautifully puts it: "They flow out of the depths of human experience and longing", pointing us to the Jesus who takes on blindness in all its many forms; the Jesus who looks at hunger and conquers it in a shared meal; the Jesus who is both the route towards new life and also its entry point; and the Jesus who overcomes death and close confinement in the tombs which so often are graves of our own making.

On this Coronation weekend we cannot know what lies in store for our new Head of State. Whether you paint yourself in the brightness of red, white and blue, or else find yourself drawn to more dull republican tones, I hope that we would all wish King Charles well so that he can excel at the job he has been so well aware of since his early childhood. Like his mother before him he is a person who combines Christian faith with openness to other religious and spiritual traditions. So may he place his trust in the teachings of Christ and in the presence of God infused into every aspect of his life. Then he, like each one of us, need not fear the future, whatever it may hold.

Let's end with a beautiful little poetic reflection on the "I am" sayings of Jesus. It is penned by a Jesuit writer, Donal Neary, entitled simply, "We belong with God".

*I am the river, you are the water,  
I am the mountain, you are the soil,  
I am the love, you are the touch,  
I am the mother, you are the child.  
I am the fragrance, you are the rose;  
we belong with him, and in him. Amen.*

## Praying for others

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.  
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.*

God who is the rule of our lives,  
at this time of new beginnings, we pray for our King.  
May your blessing be upon him in his duties  
throughout our land and abroad.  
Grant to him, we pray, the gift of wise leadership and  
opportunities to influence the protection of our planet.

Give him clarity of vision and the strength  
to be self-giving and faithful.

May he rule with courage and faith.

Everlasting God,  
before you the generations rise and pass away and  
all is seen and nothing is lost.

In the days of this new reign, may your grace be felt once more and  
your praise be sung anew.

May your people return and share your love with joy and hope.

Hear these our prayers  
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Weekly Updates ...

**Coronation Praise Night:** The second "Sing at 6.30" service of the 2023 summer season will take place in Gladsmuir Church tonight (Sunday) at 6.30pm, when we will be celebrating in word and music the Kingship of God with accompaniment from Gladsmuir's two church organs and the Longniddry Church band. An informal choir will be meeting at 5.30pm to run through the six hymns. All are welcome, whether at 5.30 or 6.30pm. Retiring offering for Christian Aid Scotland.

**New Age Kurling:** Every Tuesday afternoon at 2pm in Room 2. This is for anyone who might like to exercise their mind and body while making new friends. All ages and levels of physical ability most welcome.

**Wednesday Club:** Wednesdays in Room 3, Longniddry Church Halls, from 2.30-4pm. Come along and enjoy fun activities, entertainment, chat, tea/coffee. (Contact Janet 07766574123)

**Sporting Memories Group:** Every Thursday in the halls 10.30am - 12pm. Come along, listen and share sporting memories with other older sports fans.

**The Guild:** The next event is on 17th May and is a trip to the Longniddry Inn for a meal together. More details from Mary Barron.