

THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

Issue 180

27th August 2023

Online at www.longniddrychurch.org.uk

Today's Bible reading

Psalm 85 ("Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favour")

Lord, you were favourable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.
You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation towards us.

Will you be angry with us for ever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in
our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each
other.

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down
from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

O for a thousand tongues to sing (CH:352)

Make me a channel of your peace (CH:528)

The King of Love my Shepherd is (CH:462)

Your hand, O God, has guided (CH:511)

The Bible reveals a deep and detailed concern for God's Creation. Throughout these holy writings, our Scriptures paint a vivid picture of a universe and a planet Earth in which the majesty of God is depicted, with awe-inspiring visions laid out for all to see. Again and again we find "the mystery of all that is" wrapped up in nothing less than the love of God.

As the psalmist writes:

*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.*

*Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm. [Psalm 33:6-9]*

Now, in this troubled 21st century, our good planet Earth has much to contend with, yet it remains for us a place of fierce glory and calm magnificence, with oceans that thunder in our ears; sunsets which are capable of bringing a tear to the eye in their unrivalled beauty. And all the while the Bible sends our thoughts in one singular direction:

*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. [Psalm 24:1-2]*

Thinking of our own situation in this wonderful world, to leave the hubbub of everyday life - taking time to explore and to value the natural world around us - is one of the most rewarding things we can do in life, as we allow ourselves to draw close to God whether in a garden or on a hillside, whether in a park or by a beach.

As many of you know, Ailsa and I had the great privilege of retreating for a whole month to the lovely Isle of Arran ... to a little cottage ... without a doorbell ... without a phone ... without broadband ... without reliable mobile coverage. My purpose in this was two-fold: firstly for a fortnight of study leave; and secondly for a good, old-fashioned holiday by mountain and sea. Locked away, I was able to lose myself for 14 days in a writing project. Soon, the ideas which I was seeking started flowing like coolest waters from the blue pool of beauteous Glen Rosa. The stories I was writing formed before my eyes like the broad and glorious vista which spans Turnberry, the Firth, Ailsa Craig, Ireland and Kintyre. The school assemblies I was hoping to create came together like billowing clouds of majesty rolling in from the Firth of Clyde. (Or something like that, at least - I will leave you to imagine.)

And by getting away from it all, we drew near to God in nature: what a joy.

While we were away, we had a fair old mix of weather conditions, as is so often the way on that green and pleasant (and midgy) isle. There was a lot of cloud and a fair bit of rain, along with short but welcome spells of sunshine and general brightness. But throughout that entire period, never once did we see our thermometer rise above 19 degrees Celsius. In short, we had it cool ... very, very nicely cool.

Meanwhile, across that entire month I found myself more than a little drawn in by the BBC, running its sad, grim headlines which told a tragically different story: "**Portugal:** Wildfires amid third heatwave of the year" ... "**Greece:** 1,200 children evacuated from summer camp" ... "**Algeria:** Locals return to burnt homes" ...

“India: Row over claims of heatwave deaths” ... **“South Korea:** Thousands at Scout camp move into hotels” ... **“USA:** Thirty-six dead as Hawaii wildfires burn” ... Thirty-six dead, and (as it turned out) so, so many more.

Far across the northern hemisphere the deadly catalogue of what we must truly call “global heating” stacks up year by year across God’s good Earth. Taking a broad view of what is happening to our planet - our home! - that which comes to us as news will be coming as no surprise to the people of our most climate-challenged countries: places like Zambia; places like Mexico; places like the Philippines, all of which have seen climate change bringing such destruction to water supplies, and crops, and general living. They know what we do not, because they feel the heat.

We do not feel the heat, blessed as we are to live in more temperate regions like Scotland. It seems so very natural to keep going with our old lifestyles as we always have done: our gas central heating and our airline flights, our cars and our electronic gadgetry (all of which I personally use and benefit from - maybe you do too).

In all of this, what does the Bible say? In today’s reading the Psalmist speaks about good things for both our planet and our humanity. The writer looks ahead to a time of abundance and peace in which human beings rejoice at goodness all around:

*Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.
The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.*

The psalmist knew nothing of gas hobs and built-in ovens; he was unaware of the internal combustion engine and of the oil-burning cruise liner. His was a world of low population and low human demand so profoundly unlike our world of today. While his paradise on earth may have been a secluded valley in the Middle East, our paradise is - is it not??? - the joy of East Lothian, of Scotland, of the UK, of northern Europe. Cool and comfortable places - yet our comfort comes at what global cost?

When we look beyond our shores we see those injustices which have always been so much a part of human life now being displayed in new ways, with millions of people fleeing poverty and persecution as they journey north into Europe. When we look to the hottest lands these days, we find the makings of geopolitical turmoil over simple things like water supplies, enough for only some. When we consider the crises facing our Earth today, can we not see that the psalmist is right in calling upon God to “restore us” again. Indeed, may we be restored to our right minds.

To finish, a poem by Janet Morley, entitled, “Sinking wells”:

*Come to the waters,
all you who are thirsty:
children who need water
free from diseases,
women who need respite
from labour and searching,
plants that need moisture
rooted near the bedrock,
find here a living spring.
O God, may we thirst
for your waters of justice,
and learn to deny no one
the water of life.*

Amen.

Praying for others

Lord God,
you have created the universe by your eternal Word,
and have blessed humankind in making us stewards of the earth.

We pray for your world, that we may share and conserve its resources,
and live in reverence for the creation and in harmony with one another.

We pray for those affected by the wildfires throughout the world, from Maui,
to Spain, Portugal, Greece and many other places including Canada and the USA.
Have mercy on them and support them in this time of great trouble and distress.

Thank you for the work of all those who are helping in these terrible situations:

the firefighters, the aid workers, the medical staff and
all who are working to care for those affected.

Keep them safe and give them strength.

We pray for those whose health is threatened by the smoke and ash:
ease their suffering and protect them from permanent damage.

In Christ you call us to a new way of life, loving our neighbours before ourselves.

Help us to treat with care and respect the world as it is,
as we live in hope and anticipation of the world as it will be

when your Kingdom comes and your will is done.

Thank you for those, living and departed,
who have shown a true respect for your Creation.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

"Sing @ 6.30": Gladsmuir Parish Church's final evening service of the summer season will take place on Sunday 10th September at 6.30pm. Our special guest will be the Rev Bill Wishart who will be bringing us both his preaching and his musical skills. This act of worship will be an evening of old-time gospel music led by our very own string band, "The Coal Road Ramblers", plus lots of fine organ music. Admission free, with a retiring offering to benefit Christian Aid.

New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. 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 from 2.30-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along and enjoy a variety of activities, entertainment, chat and tea/coffee. (Contact Janet 07766574123)

Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from 10.30am – 12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along, listen and share sporting memories with other older sports fans.