

# THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches  
Issue 279 27th July 2025

## Today's Bible readings

*Luke 10: 1-12*

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town

AMEN. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

*Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah (CH167)*

*Lord For the Years (CH159)*

*Tell Out My Soul (CH286)*

**R**eading Clifford Longley's Thought for the Day struck a chord with me. Two things hit home – the image from the Matthew Arnold poem of faith as a receding tide and Longley's last comment – God hasn't gone away – he just isn't where we thought he was.

I didn't know Arnold's poem though Longley's Thought implies it is well known south of the border. I won't read the whole poem, just the third of its four verses:

"The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Arnold and Longley's words struck me because, as some of you may know, I convene our Presbytery's Planning Committee. This involves me visiting many churches often to discuss something they don't like and didn't ask for – an adjustment or the closure of a much-loved building. What has struck me in some – but by no means all – of these visits is some small, usually elderly, congregations clinging on by their fingertips. And that clinging on often looks like spending all their limited resources and energies on maintaining their building and their one service of worship each week – sometimes less than once a week. They can only talk about how welcoming they are and how they would love to have more people join them on a Sunday morning but folk just don't seem to want to. They are hanging on for dear life, exhausted, dispirited, holding on as the tide of faith sweeps past them and away down the shore.

But that thought process – here we are, we'd love to see you, just come on Sunday morning – and its sister - the church is dying because we aren't getting more folk in the pews on a Sunday – is common even in larger, thriving churches.

Arnold's poem reminds me of King Canute, only in reverse. You know Canute, the Danish King on England's shores commanding the incoming tide to stop coming in. In fairness to Canute, he did this to show his people he wasn't all powerful. But Arnold's poem sounds like how we in the established churches can be. Instead of commanding an incoming tide to stop at our feet, we call an outgoing one to come back in. Here we are, tide! Away back here half a mile up the beach! Come back, come back! We're here! We'd love to see you!

I think this comes back to Longley's last point – God hasn't gone away – he just isn't where we think he is. And to stretch the tide metaphor almost to breaking point, if the sea of faith is still there – that well of spirituality that Longley talks of – but has just moved to a different place then surely the answer is not to stand crying at the tide but to move to where it is?

Of course, that begs the question - where is God? And how do we find him? Perhaps I really mean where does God want us to be? And how do we find that place? God is always with us but that doesn't mean he wants us to stay put – literally or figuratively.

If there is indeed a deep, untapped well of spirituality in people (and I believe there is) then how do we reach them and help them explore it, in a Christian context of course?

Our bible reading today gives us some helpful clues. It is one of at least two that record Jesus sending his disciples out into the world to preach His Good News and to relieve suffering. Jesus himself travelled widely so he could meet as many people of faith and spirituality as possible and tell them about His Way and change their lives for ever. So, going somewhere else, somewhere new seems to be important. For us that doesn't necessarily mean literally leaving Longniddry (though when I think of Blindwells, it may in some way) but it probably does mean forming relationships with new people in new ways and not always in this building. Of course, we already do lots of that but maybe there are other things, other ways?

The other key thing is Jesus didn't work alone. He had at least 12 key people around him. And the bible story today tells us of at least seventy-two more he sent out. And they went out in pairs. They were to work together, supporting each other, encouraging each other but working out in the world in a new way and a new place.

When I look round this morning I can see at least fifty heads. That means 50 brains, 50 different experiences of faith, 50 different ways of looking at the world, 50 different sets of God-given gifts. What if we focused those minds and experiences of faith on how to reach that untapped well of spirituality out there? Out there in our neighbours, families, friends? What if we chatted with our friends of faith about some ideas as to how this might be done and then shared those ideas? What if we thought and prayed about the gifts that God has given us and listened for His guidance on new ways we might deploy them?

I think if the church did more of that we would find that we are guided to somewhere new, that we would be led to the edge of the tide, where we can paddle and swim in the sea of spirituality and unshaped faith, and share our experience of God and His Son and how that faith transforms lives and the world.

Amen.

## Praying for others

Loving God, we lift to you those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit and those facing all kinds of trials due to ill health, conflict, poverty or injustice. Please comfort those who are in despair and help others to be moved with compassion to share your love.

Please protect those who are vulnerable to illness around the world, especially children and babies living in poverty and where medical assistance is difficult to access. We pray especially for the people of Gaza, that their urgent need for life-saving aid would be met.

Lord, we pray for all who are affected by natural disasters and issues of climate change. Please provide the practical aid people need in times of emergency.

Father God, we bring before you all those who have had to flee their homes due to persecution and conflict. May they find loving communities where they can settle well and find healing from trauma.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

## Weekly Updates ...

**Postcard challenge:** Members of our churches are being invited to send in postcards and/or digital photographs showing where they have been in the balmy, sunny days of summer. This year's theme is "Reflections". Watch out for the right pictures and send them on to Derek Easton at 74 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry EH32 0TA or derekeaston@btinternet.com .

**Christian Aid:** The Christian Aid team are sorry to announce that the **bluegrass concert on Tuesday, 12th August at 7.30pm in the church, has been cancelled** - the band are unable to make it. But the concert on Saturday, 23rd August at 7.30pm with the acclaimed classical guitarist, Ben Kearsley is still going ahead. Tickets are priced at £10 for adults and £5 for Under 18s, including interval refreshments. Tickets can be bought from any member of the Christian Aid team: Peter Helmn, Abigail Morrison, Ann Lewis, Andrew Dickenson, Blythe Peart, Sheena Munro and Robin Cuthbertson.