

THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

Issue 306

1st February 2026

Online at www.longniddrychurch.org.uk

Today's Bible reading

Acts 10:9-16 ("Peter's Vision")

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while it was being prepared he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

Let us with a gladsome mind (CH93)

This is the day (CH194)

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you (CH191)

Courage brother! do not stumble (CH513)

What must Simon Peter have thought? There he was, a Jewish Christian who had been raised to obey the laws of the Hebrew Bible, being given radical news of big, big change. Peter, as I noted just there, was a Christian, though, as we must not allow ourselves to forget, Peter was also a Jew. (And that is the starting place for the cultural dilemma which our Bible reading addresses.)

We are told in Acts chapter 10 that one day Peter was feeling peckish, and going by the words of the passage, it would seem that he had placed his order and now was waiting for his food to be brought to him. But before it had time to arrive Peter fell asleep, and in that moment he became the recipient of a heavenly vision:

... heaven opened [with] something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

What emerged from within that trance was a curious dialogue in which Peter was told he could eat whatever he wanted, free from all the religious dietary restrictions of the past - restrictions which had been handed down from generation to generation, and which had marked out a big part of Jewish devotion and lifestyle. At first, Peter would have none of it:

By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.

But eventually Peter got the message in all its liberating dimensions:

What God has made clean, you must not call profane.

From that day on, the Christian faith broke with the dietary rules of Judaism, and to this day the Church recognises freedom of choice when it comes to the food which believers decide to grow and buy and cook and eat. As a result, the two faiths found themselves more distinctive, one from the other. Christianity, which had once been a tolerated sect of Judaism, would split away becoming one of the great world religions in its own right and on its own terms.

Food is good. Food is vital. Food is not, says the Church, a particular signal of our faith, sent intentionally to mark us out as different. Food restrictions, then, are just not meant to be part of our traditions and our living.

And so we move on, from one far distant century to another. The year is 1522 and the reason for stopping off at this particular point in ecclesiastical history is so that we can examine something that has been named "The Affair of the Sausages". In the Zurich parish of Grossmünster we meet a man named Huldrych Zwingli who three years earlier had become a priest in the late mediaeval Church, only to start preaching ideas on reforming the old ways of the past. He spoke about corruption; he put forward the idea of clerics being able to marry; and he took a dim view of graven images in places of worship. But ask any minister today what key issue of doctrine it was that Zwingli is most famous for today, and the minister is most likely to give you a one-word answer: "sausages".

In the season of Lent 1522, Zwingli found himself at the home of Christoph Froschauer, a printer in Zurich. Now printers were very powerful people, on account of the wonderful new technology which they controlled. More than this, a printer could be very, very rich - a bit like a software developer or a tech entrepreneur today. In short, Christoph had the wherewithal (and the guest list) to put on a very fine party indeed. The only problem, of course, was that Lent is never party season, so the church authorities would be less than pleased with socialising during the annual period of lenten temperance which severely restricted the consuming of meat products ... like sausages.

Christoph Froschauer's sausage supper went ahead with invitations flying out to his printing staff, plus dignitaries ... including priests. After the event, the scandalous news of the lenten sausages made it to the ears of the authorities, and the party's host was promptly arrested. And all this time, Huldrych Zwingli was pretty much in the clear because he had chosen not to partake. Nonetheless, he was very keen to support those who had, and so he preached a sermon entitled *Von Erkiesen und Freiheit der Speisen* ("Regarding the Choice and Freedom of Foods"). His argument was simple enough: "Christians are free to fast or not to fast because the Bible does not prohibit the eating of meat during Lent." [Emphasis added.]

Indeed, Lent itself was never mentioned in the Bible. Zwingli held that it was a matter for each believer to decide upon, not a matter of discipline across the Church as a whole. Over time, the Affair of the Sausages became a crucial part of Swiss history, also viewed as a crucial moment in the spread of the European Reformation, decades before John Knox raised his head above the parapets in Scotland.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find Peter's trance through which the obstinate saint is eventually brought round to the idea that different foods can be eaten, and eaten without restriction. Some 15 centuries after that we encounter Zwingli telling Christians that they might choose to fast as part of their faith, but that (lacking guidance from the pages of the Bible) believers should feel no requirement to do so. So what about our 21st century and our faith of today? Lent is just around the corner, with Ash Wednesday only two-and-a-half weeks away. So should each of us decide to give something up? Here's my own view: if you want to participate in Lent, then go for it; and if you don't, no worries. Many people, however, find it good to take a firm and resolute decision to cut out something indulgent which they really enjoy. This might be alcohol or chocolate, soap operas or cheap novels. And in that deprivation there should be a spiritual purpose, because Lent is the time of year when we are called to journey with Jesus to the Cross of Calvary.

One more glass of wine? maybe you'd love to, but you're focusing on the journey.

A second mini-Snickers from the tub of Celebrations? That would be nice, but you prefer to think about the struggle and sacrifice of Jesus, approaching Jerusalem.

In recent years there has emerged a different approach to the season of Lent: an approach geared away from giving up something, and geared towards taking up something. This idea poses a wholly different question to believers: what can you do positively to help others in the days before Easter?

Only this week the Rev Peter Wood, our Presbytery's Mission Officer, sent out a note to all Church of Scotland congregations in Lothian and the Borders, in which he posted this lenten challenge: "Join thousands this Lent for a 40-day generosity challenge – building habits, deepening faith and reflecting the heart of Jesus through everyday acts. Each day offers a simple invitation to give, bless, and grow in generosity – one act at a time."

Although I have found nothing about this on the Church of Scotland's website, I did discover it within the Church of England, which is promoting a mobile phone app called "40acts". Here's what it says: "With 40acts, this year we invite you to: give things away, give time, give encouragement, and discover the joy of walking in generosity. Doing 40acts this Lent is a way for all of us to start learning how to live generously. Together, we can practise a generous way of living that helps build love, hope and joy into the world."

Altogether, I like to think that both Peter and Zwingli might have approved. Amen.

Praying for others

God, who lives in mystery,
how many times have people looked for you and not found you?
How often do folk feel alone, sad that you keep your distance from them
or your face turned away from basic human need?

Yet, Lord, you have always been there, and you are there now
in the depths of despair, the yearning of humble hearts.

Help each one, we pray, to be open to your presence,
recognising you when you show yourself
in situations of everyday living.

Give to each one the confidence to believe that at turning points,
at beginnings and endings, you watch over us all, even if just out of sight.

You are God, and at no-one's beck and call.
May we all be mindful of this, rejoicing in your love and guidance.

Above all, keep us aware of one great truth:
that we do not need to find you, for you have found us.

Glory be to you, O God. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

Fancy a cuppa? A reminder that our next "Coffee Catch-up" for members of Gladsmuir and members of Longniddry will take place at Starbucks near the top of the Coal Road tomorrow (Friday 30th January) at 10am. All welcome!

Preston Lodge Concert: Please come along to Longniddry Church on Wednesday 4th February at 7pm both to enjoy a varied programme of music by singers and instrumentalists, and to show your support the performers as they prepare to meet their examiner in their Music practical exams next month. This will be a great evening of singing and playing from 15-18-year-old students of our local high school. Admission free. (And tell the neighbours!)

Community Art Group: With the arrival of the new year, our art group is meeting from 2-4pm on Thursday afternoons is taking as its theme for the new term, "Spring Comes to Longniddry". This will involve silk painting and iPad art. Come along to Longniddry Church's Room 2 and join the fun, which comes free of charge! More details from Ann Hyde or Robin Hill.

"Hamilton" Lent Bible Study: Longniddry Church will be running a Lent study course on Monday mornings, 10am until noon from 23rd February to 23rd March inclusive. The discussions will be based around the musical *Hamilton*, and specifically the songs from it. The book to accompany the course is *The Room Where It Happens* by Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin and can be downloaded to Kindle or a hard copy purchased. The venue will be decided once we know how many folk might come along, so if you are interested just have a chat with Abigail or Robin.