

**LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
SCO20871 and SCO10035**

Call to worship

Generous God,
We come to you knowing that we need your grace again,
Your generosity again,
Your love again.
We come to you, just as we are, knowing that we are accepted.

Amen

Hymn: O God, our help in ages past

1 Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

2 Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

3 Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

4 A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone;

short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
will bear us all away;
we fade and vanish, as a dream
dies at the op'ning day.

6 Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come:
Be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

Isaac Watts, William Croft.
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Opening Prayers

Gracious God, we come to worship as people seeking to know you more, seeking to take our next step in following Jesus Christ. Come amongst us, as we worship.

We pause, for a moment, to give you thanks for all the blessings and gifts we have received from you – in the quiet, we are grateful.

[Hold a moment of quiet]

Gracious God, we have come to worship, knowing we don't always get things right, knowing we have failed your hopes for our lives, knowing we have hurt others, and knowing we have missed opportunities to spread your love.

We pause, for moment, to say sorry, and to acknowledge where we have gone wrong.

[Hold a moment of quiet]

Gracious God, in the stillness, we know ourselves to be forgiven and accepted by you. No matter where we have fallen short, you love us all the same.

We pause, for a moment, to offer you the rest of this our time of worship. Remove our guilt, our burdens, our weariness, our negativity, and move through us to bring hope, grace, possibility and love.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

We will now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Philippians 1:21-30

²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I

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know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Matthew 20:1-16 The Labourers in the Vineyard

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Reflections on the readings:

What are you being called into next?

What does your walk of Christian discipleship look like so far? I wonder how might you describe your journey?

Have things on your journey always gone smoothly? Have they always gone the way you might expect or the way that you want? Or have things been rather more up and down?

I'm sure you'll agree, life can often be like a roller coaster. We never quite know what is coming next .

Our gospel reading today certainly leaves some people with a story to tell...you can almost hear the conversation in the pub, down at the shops or over the garden fence: 'you won't believe what happened to me at work today!'

The injustice of it is all too apparent to those who have been working all day for the same pay as those who have worked but a few hours. I'm sure it would be for us if we found ourselves in their shoes. In our world today there is much important work being done on to ensure 'equal pay for equal work', ensuring that women – and other disenfranchised or overlooked groups of people – are not receiving less money for doing the same work. There is a lot that could be debate in this story of Jesus and we might well find ourselves coming down on the side of those labourers who seem to have come off badly, but much of that does not seem to be Jesus' point in telling the story.

Rather, he tells this story to get to the heart of what all good story-tellers do – to help us change the way we see the world, to challenge the prejudices and biases that we carry around. This is a story about a radical new system of finance, which is not about 'earning' our place in society, but rather understanding that God's grace is at work in all of our life stories. This story is a warning to all of us who feel quite happy with the lot we've been given in life, perhaps we even feel we 'got a good deal'. This story of Jesus is saying 'Watch out'. He's warning us – another world is possible, where grace abounds.

In this new world Jesus is pointing at there is no more meritocracy, being rewarded because of what you've done, But rather a world in which there is only love, and generosity.

When we hear this story are we envious, because the master is generous?

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Or can we be generous, like the Master?

Do we tell our stories through the lens of grace, or – when we reflect on our lives to this point – do we prefer to think that we earned our place at this table, that we worked hard for this house, that we are somehow ‘owed’ something?

How do you tell your story?

Paul offers us a powerful example of how we might do it: ‘For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain’.

That oft-quoted, oft-misused little sentence is – for me – a great invitation into rethinking our lives. An invitation to let go of the narrative the world is selling us: ‘me, me, me, more, more, more...etc.’ and embrace a Christ-centric narrative, a story where I see God at work in my life, and make space for God to work through my life in order to touch others.

Then, when we embrace that as a way of life (and it takes work), then we begin to see that our lives are not about ourselves. I am not here for me. I am here for you, for you all, for us.

Me becomes we.

I becomes us.

Selfish becomes community.

Ambition and envy become love.

Greed becomes generosity.

It won’t always be easy, and the challenges of living our lives as if they are not our own is counter to so much of the way the world asks us to think. Spend a bit of time this week thinking how your story might become more in line with Jesus’s invitation to be more connected, more neighbourly, more loving and more generous?

May each of your stories be rich with the grace of God, and may you come to see that grace at work in your life, Amen.

Prayers of intercession

For our intercessions, we will hold three short periods of quiet, in which each of us is invited to bring our own prayers to God.

Firstly, we pray for those close to home, calling to mind the name or the face of somebody in our own family, amongst our church congregation or a close friend. In the quiet, we hold them and their situation up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know our hearts and our hurts. We commit them to you now, and invite you to come close to those we have prayed for, bringing them your healing, your comfort, your hope.

Secondly, we pray for situations further afield – taking a moment to pray for something we have heard in the news that troubles us, or for someone we have never met but whose story has affected us. In the quiet, we hold these people and situations up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know the pains of your world. It can feel like a dark world when we switch on the news, or read our newspapers. In the darkness, bring your light. In the conflict, bring your peace. In the brokenness, bring your healing.

Finally, we spend a moment praying for the church: perhaps this church congregation, the wider Christian church, or all people of faith. In the quiet, we pray for all who are gathering in worship today.

[Silence]

Living God, help us – your people – to be your hands and feet in the world. May we find ways to be an answer to prayer, to bring transformation in our own lives, communities and our world.

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We pray these, and all our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn: In Christ alone my hope is found

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Keith Getty, Stuart Townend
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Blessing

We close with a prayer which I invite you to make your own.

I want to live in a world more like your kingdom,
And less like the kingdom of greed I find myself in.
No longer the kingdom of comfort,
But forever, the Kingdom of heaven.

Be at work in me, Lord God, by your Spirit, Amen