

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

Call to worship

Gracious God, we are your people, seeking to know you more.

Gracious God, come amongst us, by your Spirit, that we might be transformed by our encounter with you today.

Gracious God, make yourself known to us this morning, may each one gathered here today be conscious of your presence now and may that presence remain with us after our time of worship that we might know you with us in every place and every moment. Amen.

In **Matt 24 : 35** we read “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” and then in **2 Corinthians 12 : 9** we read “My grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in weakness” Both these scriptures are picked up in the song we will hear now by two of our modern hymn writers Stuart Townend and Keith Getty.

Hymn:From the breaking of the dawn

From the breaking of the dawn
to the setting of the sun
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power strong to save
that will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
and on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
that in freedom I might live,
so I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
you remember sins no more;
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,
love that casts out every fear
as I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word

Keith Getty, Stuart Townend © 2005 Thankyou Music (Admin.
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Prayers

As followers of Jesus way we come to this time of worship. However we gather, be it in our homes, be it online, be it by ourselves or with others, we call upon Jesus to meet with us.

We will sing our praises, we will open our hearts and minds to the spirit of God, we will listen for God's still small voice to speak to us.

Today we offer our thanks for all that God has made and shared with us. Today we rejoice in the knowledge that the God of all creation knows us, cares for us and forgives us.

So in a moment of silence we say sorry. We call to mind all the times when we have been less than we could or should have been, when we have failed to live as Christ would have us live. We are sorry if our thoughts, words or actions have brought pain to others and we acknowledge that anything that hurts others also hurts you Lord. We are sorry and ask for your forgiveness.

[Pause]

It is through God's grace that we are loved.

It is through God's grace alone that we are forgiven.

Through God's grace we have been called to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Today we seek your strength that we might be able to do this and in so doing be your witnesses in our the world today.Amen

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Romans 12:9-21 - Marks of the True Christian

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28 - Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Reflection

In our reading from the book of Matthew, chapter 16, we come across that phrase of Jesus that tells anyone who wants to be his disciple that they must, "take up their cross and follow me". It's quite easy to just read that phrase but in reality it's pretty tricky. It's hard to know exactly what it means. The truth is, it can mean lots of different things. If we imagine the Easter story, we can find some obvious connections. Some of our Gospel accounts say that, before Jesus was crucified, he was forced to carry his cross a long way to the hill. Now, we've all seen pictures drawn to represent the crucifixion. They all show that the cross was bigger than Jesus himself. Imagine having to carry something so big and heavy. If any of you have seen the Passion play at Oberammergau you will appreciate just what this would have involved. The cross was huge. Jesus was already weak and in pain from the horrible things the soldiers had done to him, and then he had to carry that heavy cross a long way. It sounds so, so hard, doesn't it? So, when Jesus says we must take up our cross and follow him, even if we don't physically carry a wooden cross surely what he is saying to us is that if we too should expect it sometimes it will be tough.

I don't believe Jesus is saying that every step of being a disciple will be hard and painful - there will certainly be moments of great joy and celebration, but he is saying that there will be times when it won't be easy. There will be challenges. There will be things we are called to do that may be heavy on our hearts or minds.

Like I said, this phrase can mean different things, and we can look at it from different angles, perhaps depending on where in the year this reading falls, or what's going on in the world at the time we read it, and which other readings this passage is paired up with.

The reading paired up with it this week is from Romans chapter 12. When I read this earlier in the week my first thought took me back to last Sunday when we were talking about rules. Although most rules have very sound purposes, often to keep people safe, there are times when rules are made for greedy, selfish reasons and we as Christians need to challenge these and not automatically accept them especially when they go against the ground rules of God set out in scripture. Here in Romans

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12 we don't have rules exactly but rather a long list of instructions that we should strive to follow as Christians. Knowing that the 'message' to take up my cross and follow Jesus is paired with these instructions in Romans, I believe that the words from Romans are possibly telling us some of the ways in which we can do this. Parts of this section from Romans say:

- V 9: Your love must be real. Hate what is evil. Hold on to what is good.
- V 14: Wish good for those who do bad things to you. Wish them well and do not curse them.
- V17-18: If someone does wrong to you, do not pay them back by doing wrong to them. Try to do what everyone thinks is right. Do your best to live in peace with everyone.
- V20-21 But you should do this: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if your enemy is thirsty, give him a drink. Do not let evil defeat you. Defeat evil by doing good.

Now those words aren't telling us do physically hard or painful things but some of those things certainly sounds really hard, don't they? Wish good on those who do bad things to you. Don't pay people back with something harsh if they have wronged you. Maybe, for lots of us, enemy is a pretty strong word. However, we've all come across people we find it really hard to like. People who have hurt us, perhaps, or hurt someone we love. People who make decisions that lead to others being treated unfairly. People who make careless choices and don't say sorry. People who make us feel small, stupid or unimportant. This passage from Romans tells us we should love them. Not just put up with them, or tolerate them, or simply ignore them and pretend they are not there- but love them. That's not an easy thing to do. So, what does it mean? What does it mean to love those who hurt us? I don't think Jesus wants us to love them necessarily in the same way that we love our families and best friends. It's not like that. We don't have to make them our best friends, or completely let them off the hook for the things they've done. What I believe we're called to do, is to remember the people who hurt us are only human, just like us. Instead of hurting them back, we should deal fairly with the bad things they do. I'm sure Jesus wouldn't want us to let them get away with the hurtful things they do, but sometimes he wants us to be prepared to offer them forgiveness, another chance, an opportunity to make a fresh start in a relationship or friendship.

But maybe for you carrying your cross is something completely different. It might be learning to accept a deteriorating health condition, or facing up to an addiction, sacrificing something that you hold dearly for the sake of others.

In a moment of quiet ask God to show you any cross that he is asking you to carry, seek his strength to be able to do this, to be able to put aside fears or concerns you might have and to clear all those doubts that are preventing you from picking up that cross and moving forward.

We pray Holy spirit, for strength, for clarity and for guidance.
In Jesus name we commit our lives to follow in your way.
Holy Spirit work in us and through us we pray. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we come to you as the one who created the laws and offered grace in abundance.

Lord, we pray for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world, We lift them to you as they seek to follow the commandments of your gospel and great commission, May they be strengthened and emboldened for the mission you have called them to, Cleanse and mould your church into the likeness of Christ.

Bring peace and safety to our world, in particular to the places of the world where laws have been leveraged for revenge and gain.

Open paths of reconciliation and heal the brokenness,
Repair the war torn cities and countries and make a way for those who have been displaced to find a place to call home again.

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We pray for the 65 million plus refugees around the world who are on their journey.
Lord, whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own; look with
mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger,
Bless those who work to bring them relief.

Lord, bring healing and reconciliation to marriages and peace to those who have
experienced broken relationships.
Lord, repair trust and build bridges of communication so love may flow.

Lord, teach us to love our neighbour,
In a moment of silence, we think of those who we would consider a neighbour and
place them into your hands

Lord, teach us to be quick to forgive and acknowledge our own mistakes.
Above all else, inspire us to live in the likeness of your Son Jesus Christ.
In your mercy, hear our prayer,
Amen.

Hymn: May the mind of Christ my Saviour

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self abasing –
this is victory.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart, from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus,
as I onward go.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May his beauty rest upon me
as I seek the lost to win;
and may I forget the challenge,
seeing him alone.

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Blessing

Go from this place inspired, Go from this place renewed,
Go from this place with the Spirit of God alongside, within and all around you,
Go from this place, a child of the Living God. Amen.