

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

Sunday 31st January

Well this Sunday brings us to the end of January. Do you, like me, feel as if this month has flown by? Isn't it strange that there are occasions when time drags on so slowly when we just wish the time for some particular event would arrive. The expression 'watching paint dry' comes to mind. Then there are those other occasions when time just flies by and we can't imagine how it has passed so quickly. It's perhaps no wonder that we can't understand God's time. God the one who has always been, who is today and who always will be.

Today we come in the present to meet with our God who is Eternal.

Call to worship

Lord God, the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, you have called us here by your Holy Spirit. We are called here to listen, to pray, to join in fellowship and to sing of your glory. Today, in the present, we come with open hearts and minds. In the here and now may we still our thoughts. Today may your Spirit interrupt us with love and blessings. Amen

Hymn : My Jesus My Saviour

My Jesus, My Saviour
Lord there is no one like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of Your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King!
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of your name!
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand

Nothing compares to the promise I have in
You

Repeat verse

My Jesus, my Saviour
Lord, there is none like You
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Pricilla J Owens ©The United Reformed Church
CCLI Song #2631455 CCLI Licence 632441

Opening Prayers

God of power and might, you sent prophets to your people, calling us back to your covenant, and teaching us your ways.
In the fullness of time, you sent us your Son Jesus, teaching with such authority, that our eyes were opened to see your ways anew.
Open our hearts and minds, that we may understand and proclaim your teachings for all to hear.
Holy God, we confess that we are an arrogant people – so full of “knowledge” that we hardly have any room for love.
We confess that we too often judge when we really need to listen.
We confess that we push people away when we you call us to welcome them into our communities.
We confess that we think only about protecting ourselves when we are challenged to risk everything for others.
Lord, forgive us for being more concerned with “being right” than we are with “showing love”.
Forgive us for demanding uniformity when you call us to celebrate diversity.

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

Guide us, Great God, to live according to your unconditional love.
Teach us to see one another as sisters and brothers, that we may learn to live as one family. So as one family we now join together as we say the family prayer taught to us by Jesus himself.

The Lord's Prayer

Deuteronomy 18 : 15 – 20

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death."

Mark 1 : 21 – 28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Reflections on the readings

Once again this week as I was looking at the lectionary passages set for this Sunday I sensed that they were once again drawing my attention to the voice of God and how he has continued to speak to his people throughout the generations.

In the OT passage from Deuteronomy we heard these words. 'If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die' (Deuteronomy 18.16). At the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy we have Moses reminding the Israelites of God's words spoken to them at Horeb. God's words had been direct and unmediated, no doubt truly awesome. But now things appear to be changing. It appears that this unmediated word of God is just too much and the people know they can't bear it any more. The time is coming for God to speak to his people in different ways, through prophets rather than directly.

If we go back to the beginning we have the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve walking side by side with God and talking to him in the cool of the evening. But one of the results of the Fall is the loss of this intimacy between God and his creation. People are no longer capable of being in the unveiled presence of God. From now on, they need to hear God's Word mediated through other agencies, (prophets, angels) rather than direct from the mouth of God.

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

God doesn't appear to be disappointed at this request on the part of his people. On the contrary, he acknowledges its justice. They are quite right to think that the presence of God could be fatal to our faulty senses, rather like a powerful electric current passing through a wrongly wired plug. So God makes alternative provision for his people. But why is this necessary? Well it would be equally fatal for them to attempt to live their lives without hearing God's Word at all. God promises to raise up prophets for them, people who will be capable of receiving God's words and transmitting them faithfully.

But the people have to understand clearly that this is no soft option. They cannot use this as an excuse not to listen out for God and his word.. They cannot say, 'We are not capable of being in God's presence and hearing his words directly, so we'll just have to get on with our lives as if he didn't exist.' On the contrary – they have asked for prophets, and they must take their prophets with the utmost seriousness. The whole people must take seriously their responsibility to weigh the words of prophecy and discern where God is genuinely speaking and where he is not. The failure to listen on the part of the people, or the misuse of the Word of God on the part of the prophet, will have equally serious consequences.

But of course the history of God's people, from that day to this, is full of instances of failures to listen to and abuses of God's authority. The art of discerning whether or not the word is from God is one that has to be practised with great patience. The problem is that (most of us at least) are not a patient people. So by the time the Word (with a capital W) of God comes in person, the person of Jesus, there is almost no tradition by which to measure him or listen to him. John's Gospel spells that out for us in its first chapter in verse 11. 'He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him'. The people simply did not recognise the Word of God.

Mark makes the same point with understated irony.as we heard read earlier. Here in chapter 1 of his gospel we hear that it is only the mad man, the one filled by the evil spirit who recognizes Jesus for who he is. It is as though this man's illness has actually scraped away layers of blindness and insensitivity so that he is aware, as no one else is, of God's presence in the person of Jesus. Like the Israelites on Mount Horeb, this man is terrified by God's presence. When Jesus heals him, there is a bitter irony as we realise that the man is being restored to the normality of the human community around him. and, at the same time, losing his ability to discern the fearful presence of God. The ability to recognise the word of God and sense the presence of God has become so rare. Lack of recognition is what is 'natural' or 'normal' to us now, not the ability to see and hear God.

During these months of pandemic how often have we heard people talking about when things get back to normal. Are we perhaps asking ourselves 'What is normal?' Well my prayer for us all as God's people in this day in which we live is that our normal might be a yearning to hear and to recognise the word of God as he speaks to us today.

Prayers of intercession

God, who spoke to us through the ancient prophets, teach us to recognize the prophets of our own time.

Some of them have loud voices and say things that upset and disturb us.

Some of them may not appear to have anything to say that concerns you, or your world.

Some of them may seem too worldly-wise to have anything spiritual to offer us.

Some have a history of faults and failings.

Some come from a background that appears to be unacceptable to society.

Some seem to be arrogant, or too holy for this world.

Some appear to be so humble that they are ignored.

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

Where are your prophets for our time?

How can we discern who is speaking a word from you?

How can we work out which of them is simply following a personal agenda?

Wise and loving God, teach us to listen with discernment, to reflect what we hear back into what we already know of your nature and challenge, and to be constantly aware that your message to us may come from the most unexpected sources.

Help us to listen with open minds, but with thoughts that are guided by you.

Hymn: Lord you sometimes speak in wonders

1 Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders
unmistakable and clear;
mighty signs to prove your presence,
overcoming doubt and fear

2 Lord, you sometimes speak in
whispers,
still and small and scarcely heard;
only those who want to listen
catch the all-important word.

3 Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,
through our loud and noisy day:
we can know and trust you better
when we quietly wait and pray.

4 Lord, you love to speak in Scripture:
words that summon from the page,
shown and taught us by your Spirit
with fresh light for every age.

5 Lord, you always speak in Jesus,
always new yet still the same;
teach us now more of our Saviour;
make our lives display his Name.

Christopher Idle
© Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd
CCLA Song # 2421471 CCLI Licence 632441

Blessing

May we go with the courage of Christ in our hearts.

May we go with the fierce energy of the Spirit in our bodies.

May we go with the God of love streaming through us and out into the world.

Go in peace, and serve the Lord.

Amen