

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

Call to Worship

Long ago a vineyard was planted. The ground was prepared, and all was made ready.
But the vines grew wild, the ground was unable to support the wild grapes.
What happened in that place of promise?
People forgot the One who planted the vineyard. They chose their own ways and failed.
Let us again turn to the Lord, who will again plant, prune, and cause us to grow in faithfulness.
Let us open our hearts to God, trusting in God's ways and God's word. **Amen.**

HYMN We are marching in the light of God

We are going to start worshipping God with a lively song that will not only get us singing but also our feet tapping. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SOWN0_0lrk

We are marching in the light of God,
We are marching in the light of God.
(Repeat)
We are marching, marching,
We are marching, marching,
We are marching in the light of God.
(Repeat)

We are moving in the power of God,
We are moving in the power of God,
(Repeat)
We are moving, moving,
We are moving, moving,
We are moving in the power of God.
(Repeat)

We are living in the love of God,
We are living in the love of God,
(Repeat)
We are living, living,
We are living, living,
We are living in the love of God,
(Repeat)

Anders Nyberg, Andrew Maries
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Music UK)
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Prayers

Most Gracious God we greet you once as we meet once again in our own sacred spaces.
We have come because we need to be reminded of your love and your expectations for our living.
We are like the vine you planted, watered and protected.
We know in our hearts that we need, want and desire your presence in our lives.
So we come in prayer and listen for your Word to speak to our hearts and reveal again your desires for us
Divine God, we try to grow happily, patiently, and faithfully in the soil you have prepared for us. You feed us, shelter us, and provide for our daily needs.
Yet, we often fail to offer you the fruit of our harvest.
We act as though we were abandoned children, trying to make it on our own.
We feel forsaken, attacked by wild boars, cut down by our enemies, and neglected in the wilderness of our lives.
Yet, through it all, you remain faithful.
Renew our lives once more, and we will call your name on high.
Be assured that God's love is sufficient.
In the warmth of the sun, the fertility of the soil, and the refreshment of life-giving water, we have been given all that we need. God hears our cries, and comes to save us.
Through Christ we may lay aside our sins; through Christ, we know we are safe.
In that assurance that we are held safely in the arms of Almighty God let us continue to worship, pray and praise. Amen

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Reading Isaiah 5 : 1 – 7 The Song of the Vineyard

5 I will sing for the one I love
a song about his vineyard:
My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside.
2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones
and planted it with the choicest vines.
He built a watchtower in it
and cut out a winepress as well.
Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,
but it yielded only bad fruit.
3 “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and
people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
4 What more could have been done for my
vineyard than I have done for it?
When I looked for good grapes,
why did it yield only bad?
5 Now I will tell you
what I am going to do to my vineyard:
I will take away its hedge,
and it will be destroyed;
I will break down its wall,
and it will be trampled.
6 I will make it a wasteland,
neither pruned nor cultivated,
and briars and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.”
7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty
is the nation of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are the vines he delighted in.
And he looked for justice, but saw
bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of
distress.

Reading : Matthew 21 : 33 - 46
The Parable of the Tenants

33 “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. **34** When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.
35 “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. **36** Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. **37** Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.
38 “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ **39** So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.
40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”
41 “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”
42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:
“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?
43 “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. **44** Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”
45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. **46** They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Meditation on this passage

I would like to consider this rather violent story for a few moments in three ways.
Gaze – use your imagination and imagine the picture I will present.
Consider – the nature of the characters in the story we’ve read
Contemplate – what is this story saying to use today

Gaze, not on this story we’ve just heard, but another scene of attack, that will take place a little later in Matthew’s Gospel, when the violence predicted here against the son and heir finally takes place. Gaze as the ‘tenants’ approach ‘Son’ in Gethsemane with swords and

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clubs, as if he's a rebel, to be arrested. Hear Jesus exclaim, not without irony, 'Am I leading a rebellion?' Now gaze at him bound by the temple guard, the ropes cutting deep into his wrists. Stare at his back, bloody and raw from the flogging. See him stripped of his clothes, humiliated in his nakedness. Look at the scratches and wounds. See his scalp where the crown of thorns was rammed on his head. Do not look away. Does he flinch when he's spat at and struck? One degradation follows another. All this before the actual murder – the death sentence – is carried out.

Consider the difference in meaning between the words 'rebellion' and 'revolution'. Rebellion means open resistance to an established authority that is more or less legitimate and more or less benign. And the rebels often appropriate for themselves not just the power but the privilege and lifestyle of those they have overthrown. But revolution means the overthrow of a social order in favour of a totally new system. It usually involves a fundamental break with the past and new order is founded on a different set of principles.

Examine this story from Matthew again and it is easy to work out the identity of the rebels. The tenants rebel against the owner and, it would appear, for no very good reason. There is no indication that the owner is repressive or tyrannical, just that he is expecting to collect his portion of the produce as rent, which is quite reasonable. Instead what we see is the rebels' greed that makes them want to grab the inheritance from the son. It is their wilfulness and refusal to honour the terms of their agreement with the owner, not any provocation by him, that causes the rebellion. The rebels – we ourselves – tear up their tenancy agreement and attempt to usurp the owner, and go it alone.

Now consider who is the revolutionary in this story. We don't find a Che Guevara type character in this plot. No, the overthrow of the social order is brought about by God, and the new system which is brought in, is brought in by God. God brings upheaval to our social norms and sometimes reverses our expectations. This isn't the only story that starts when those who might have expected due reward lose their chance by their own behaviour; and ends with the surprise of a new people being blessed by God's bounty.

Contemplate the rebelliousness of mankind; starting with Adam and Eve, the Old Testament is a catalogue of God's people's rejection of God's will. Contemplate for a moment the threat in v. 43– 'the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit'. That threat still stands today, if we rebel. That threat still stands today, if we fail to produce fruit.

Prayers

Almighty God, maker of all things, with joy we give thanks for all your goodness. We praise you for the love which has created and sustained us to this day, and for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ who brings us into a relationship with you and with all your people of faith. Help us to treasure all your gifts to us and help us to show our thankfulness by living our lives in your service.

We pray for your church throughout the world. Give it pastors and ministers filled with your spirit. Give them strength to serve your people teaching and guiding them from your word. Unite all your people so that we can work together to bear witness to you and your glory. Remove all those things that divide Christian brothers and sisters and instead unite us into one family, loving and caring for one another and for all those that you want us to serve. We pray that you would move our nation and all nations of the world toward the justice of your peace. Bless our nation, its national and local leaders as they seek to serve all people with integrity. Purge from us all hatred and prejudice, and build within us your love, that even in our dealings with the other nations of earth we may be servants of peace, truth and justice. We remember the troubled parts of our world today, now pushed from the news headlines because of the global pandemic, but we remember now the people of Syria, of Yemen and now of Azerbaijan and Armenia. We ask that leaders would come together

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around negotiating tables rather than resorting to acts of warfare that threaten the lives of innocent men, women and children.

We pray for our homes, bless them with the joy of your presence. Strengthen family relationships, may our homes be places where children grow in faith, learning of your love. We pray for those homes where there is bitterness and strife, bring healing to broken relationships. We pray for the many living alone, especially in these days more isolated than before. In these lonely places we pray that your presence may be known.

Let your grace be seen in seed-time and harvest, in labour and business, in leisure and rest, in arts and culture and in education. May all who do work find fulfilment in their vocations, and all who are in need of work find the relief of new endeavours.

Comfort those who are sorrowful and are in need, sickness or adversity. We remember especially today Leslie recovering from his recent operation. Have mercy on those for whom death draws near. Bring consolation to those who are mourning, and to all give your peace. These and all our prayers we bring to you in the name of Jesus our Christ. Amen.

HYMN: Be thou my vision https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg

1. Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart ;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art ;
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my Wisdom, be thou my true Word ;
I ever with thee, thou with me, Lord ;
thou my great Father : and I thy true son ;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3 Be thou my battle shield, my sword for the
fight ;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower ;
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my
power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
thou my inheritance, now and always ;
thou, and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.

5 High King of Heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's
sun !
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)
Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (*alt.*)
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Blessing

May the peace of God calm your fears through storms of night.

May the love of God warm your heart and bring you light.

May the word of God give you strength when the body's weak.

May the grace of God flow from you to the world you meet.

Go now with the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN