

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

Call to worship

The living God waits here for us today. He waits for the encounter. Whether it's through words written on paper, through video conferencing or on Facebook or Youtube God waits to meet with us today. Whether it's in small group conversation or simply in our own deep personal thinking God is here with us today.

So come with to worship filled with expectancy, ready to be prompted to learn, to care, to serve, ready for an encounter with the living God who is waiting to meet you. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus calls us here to meet him

Jesus calls us here to meet him
as through word and song and prayer
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other:
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

Graham Maule, John L. Bell
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Opening Prayers

Lord of all things we come to worship you knowing that you are here with us. Even though we are physically separated we are spiritually united because you O God are not bound by space or time. Wherever and however your people gather you are here with us.

We come recognising that you know each one of us, not only by name but indeed everything about us. You know our joys and our sorrows, our doubts and our fears, our hopes and prayers. We rejoice that you love us and care for us even when we let you down. We give you thanks that we can come to you as we are. We come now aware of our failures, our mistakes and even our deliberate wrong doing and we come to say sorry and ask for your forgiveness. We are so thankful for your promise to forgive all those who recognise their sins and repent. So we come asking that you will wipe away all our sins that we might be worthy to meet you face to face

We come noticing all you have given to humanity – the wonderful world in which we live, the diversity of its peoples, the vast knowledge and skills that you give to the people you have created in your image. Above all we come now aware of your all-encompassing love and we give you thanks.

We pray that we might live as thankful people this day and every day, appreciating that all we have comes from you. Amen.

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Matthew 18:15–20 - Reproving Another Who Sins

¹⁵ "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it

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will be done for you by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Romans 13:8-14 - Love for One Another

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; ¹³ let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Reflection

The passages of scripture we've just heard have probably got some of the most famous and well known phrases of faith within them. “Again truly I tell you, if two or three of you agree about anything you ask it will be done for you by my father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” and “Love your neighbour as yourself” (that means Love and value others the same way as you love and value yourself)

The fact that we know these phrases and feel we understand them offers great comfort to us and although we recognise them as challenging we have them as quotes on the tip of our tongues and we use them regularly especially as we come together to pray. But as I was preparing and reflecting this week I asked myself did I really know what they were about and in particular what God might be saying to us right now. As I thought about these familiar phrases I found myself thinking that they are not quite as simple as they seem especially when read in context as we have done today. They come with all sorts of associated questions. What about if I'm praying on my own does God hear me then? What if I'm not living the way God wants? What about the fact that elsewhere in the gospels God calls us to offer forgiveness rather than pick fault (you remember specks in our others eyes but planks in our own etc) What if two or three people agree on one thing and two or three others agree on something else – how does God choose? What about the fact that God made me to be a complicated human being and I'm bound to fall into some of these habits- God says he loves me anyway? I could go on I guess so I think we'd best pause and wonder.....

During this pandemic we have heard the phrase “unprecedented” so many times. In fact it's become in some ways a bit of a joke statement. The disruption, the scale, the spread, the nature of the novel corona virus, the impact of the disruption - all unprecedented and yet we probably know that the same can be said of the plague, the so called “Spanish flu” of 1918. Maybe not so unprecedented.

What is certain though is it is uncomfortable. The impact on who we are as people and in particular on who we are as people of God has been truly disrupted. The way we live our lives has changed. The way we go about our daily business while we're living with this virus. Even the way we worship together. I'm sure many of the changes that we've become used to, we don't like very much but perhaps there are others that we are getting used to and perhaps even enjoying. I'm certainly most encouraged that we are able to meet and worship together like this and that we can meet with brothers and sisters far and near. We probably wouldn't be doing this were it not for the pandemic.

So imagine then living when Jesus was around. Living when the early church was forming and growing and ask yourself if that was a place and time of disruption. Imagine how the God we know and love was shaking up the world by sending his Son to model a new way of living. Jesus is

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suggesting that God is willing to listen directly to his people when they gather together and speak to God. Jesus is saying that the way his people live had to change and it was no longer all about self but was more about our fellow human beings. Jesus was saying that people had to change entirely how they lived, putting aside all sense of getting just what they want. Jesus is saying that God wants his people to seek out reconciliation and work hard at it, to strive love others, even those that you disagree with and struggle to love. Jesus is telling us that God wants his people to find ways of moving forward together and in love. I'm guessing that the people who encountered Jesus and the early disciples felt and saw only disruption. It was certainly all very, very different from the old ways of worship in the temple. But God's disruption as shown by Jesus, if accepted, means a better and preferred way of living in the future.

If for a moment we think about the ways God works and look back at some of the familiar Old Testament scriptures we will see that God often uses the unusual and the different, you might even say the disruptive.

- the birth of a great nation through an elderly barren couple.
- the work of a small child to defeat the most giant of enemies.
- the words of a prophet advocating peace and ploughshares not war and weapons.

And then we come to the New Testament.

- The challenging words of an itinerant preacher full of humility as a mark of greatness.
- The spirit-filled exuberance of sharing the good news to anyone who was around in the street as opposed to the ritual of prayer and fasting that was commonplace.

What else can you think of in scripture that shows how God regularly disrupts the status quo. That's your homework for this week!

But this God who disrupts our comfortable little bubbles is the God we adore. He's faithful, He's unchangeable but He's not static or bland. This God is always seeking to love us and to encourage us to do the same for others. This God whose love knows neither measure or end and will do anything to make it known. Even if it means some disruption and showing us something fresh.

Now don't mishear me. I'm not saying God sent this virus to teach us something or to test us. No. I am saying though that we can see God clearly in the midst of great disruption if we look - and we must look and notice right now what God is saying about the way we live as individuals, as community and as church. What must we shake up to live like God requires rather than the way we'd like to? How do we need to change and morph ourselves into the people we are called to be?

Listen to the urgency of the letter writer again

Love and value others the same way as you value yourself.....

To live like this is all the more urgent for time is running out and you know it is a strategic hour for human history. It is time for us to wake up..... Instead fully immerse yourselves into the Lord Jesus, the anointed one, and don't waste even a moment's thought on your former identity to waken your selfish desires.

This is a truly challenging call to action. To live up to the disruption of God's love for all. To put what God prefers for us first. To live as community in a way that is a disruption to society. Advocating love and forgiveness, care and concern, not selfishness and personal gain. To once and for all cloth ourselves in the radiance of light offered by knowing Christ. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Loving and everlasting God we bring to you our concerns for others

We bring before you the complexity of our world at this time. The horrors of conflict and war. The political landscape and all its arguments. The poverty and famine that affects people all over the world. The changing environment that is causing many challenges. The impact of living with a devastating virus.

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Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring before you our local community and those known to us who are struggling with life. Particularly we think of those affected by loss of income & independence and all of the upheaval in their lives.

We think of those who are ill or grieving and in the silence we name them before you.

Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring before you ourselves. All we are facing. All we are rejoicing in. All that we are wondering about. All that we are worrying about. All that we are considering.

Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring all these things to you in the name of Christ who gave so much that we might know you better. Amen.

Hymn: This this is the God we adore

1 This this is the God we adore!
Our faithful, unchangeable friend:
whose love is as great as his power
and neither knows measure nor end.

Christopher Priest, Joseph Hart
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2 For Christ is the first and the last;
whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
we'll praise him for all that is past
and trust him for all that's to come.

Blessing

Whether you be one, two, three or more go, knowing that God hears you and loves you. That God delights in your love for one another. That God requires of you this - to Love and value others whoever and wherever they are;

Go ready to be a beacon of God's love in the world. Amen.