

Prelude: Adagio for organ by Anton Bruckner, played by Alan Buchan on the Laggan organ.

Words of welcome:

Since the dawn of creation people have taken time out once a week to worship God. Whether we can gather in person or meet virtually, we are never alone, for we are part of the worshipping community that spans all time and extends across the world. So together let us worship God using the words of Psalm 95

Hymn: Come let us praise the Lord (60)

Prayer:

Lord God you are the rock of our salvation. You are unmoveable, unchangeable and on you we can build our lives in security. In you we find our rest and our home, and although the world around us is in turmoil, in you we know our peace. Lord God of all, we worship and praise your name.

We come before you as your people, called, amazingly, by your name. We come knowing that we depend on you for everything, our lives, our world, and our acceptance in Jesus into your family. So we come with hearts full of gratitude, with wonder, with joy.

Keep us secure on the rock of your steadfast love. Hold us in your hands and keep us from straying from your presence.

And hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 1:27-2:3

This morning we read the end of the first account of creation, found in the book of Genesis. We read of how God made people in his image, how he made provision for our food, and how he gave us charge over the rest of his creation. And then we read about how God rested. When I learned this story as a child, somehow I was given the impression – probably inadvertently – that God was worn out by all he had done and needed the seventh day to recover. But now when I read the Bible, and when I think of all that we know about God, who is infinite in power as well as love, I read that verse a little differently. God spent six days – or aeons – or epochs or whatever – making the world in infinite love and creativity, and then he sat down, as it were, to enjoy it. God took the seventh day, literally or metaphorically, to simply enjoy what he had made. There it was, with all the millions of living things interacting and mutually reacting and working together and simply making life and beauty and it was as it should be. And God saw what he had made and it was good, so he took time to enjoy it.

Later in the Old Testament story the idea of the Sabbath of rest gets hedged around with all kinds of rules, but the origin of the idea came from this lovely picture of God simply delighting to take time to enjoy what he had made. Creation is his gift to himself first of all, and then his gift to us. And we should take the time to enjoy what we have received.

Hymn: All things Bright and Beautiful

Reading: Mark 2:23-3:6

For a long time after the Reformation, Scotland, very like Judea in Jesus' day, was a land of strict Sabbatarian observance – at least legally and outwardly. Sunday was known as “the Sabbath” and was a day when there was much that you did not do. Shops and places of amusement were closed, and church was expected to be the order of the day: not only the morning service but the children's service in the afternoon and then the evening service as well. Ideally it would be a day for rest and to worship God. In practice for many it was rather a dull, gloomy kind of day. If you think of the film “Chariots of Fire” there is a scene where Eric Liddell and his family are coming out of church and find two boys kicking a football. Eric stops them with the words “Sunday is no day for football” – though of course he offers to have a kick about with them the next day.

Many of you will remember the discussion and debate when it was proposed to allow shops to open on Sunday. In some parts, especially the Western Isles, these conversations are still ongoing. And my own parents made a rule that we might not play with our friends on Sunday – it was for church and family. We didn't mind much, because they made that fun, but our friends thought us a bit odd.

All these customs sprang up for excellent reasons, and the intention behind them all was to help people to have a day of rest and worship. But I wonder if to a lot of them Jesus would say, “The sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath.”

Jesus makes his point about the sabbath in a typical way. He goes into the synagogue, where good Jews would be, and he deliberately heals a man in front of them all. He could have sought the man out quietly afterwards, but as ever his healings were not only to bring relief but to teach. Instead of talking about what was forbidden and permitted on this one day of the week, Jesus wanted to talk about doing good or evil. And then the question becomes a nonsense, because of course there is never a good day to do evil! No wonder there was no answer given. So Jesus did good. He healed the man. And this is the first time that we hear that he angered those who were used to setting the rules and enforcing them so much that they began to talk of getting rid of him.

The Sabbath, in Jesus' view, was God's gift to his people: a day of rest, a time of relaxation, of restoration. It was not to be hedged around with prohibitions but was to be a day when you could say “I choose not to do – whatever – so that I can rest and worship.” Or indeed “I choose to do – whatever – so that I can rest and worship.”

During this pandemic, when the church buildings have been and in our case continue to be closed on Sunday mornings, thoughts of what Sunday is for may have occurred to more than just me. For many of us church on Sunday morning has been a pattern for most of our lives. Some churches have chosen to try to keep this pattern in lockdown, with services on Zoom, which you have to log into at the same time each week. And that is a good platform for those who can and those who were already able to come to worship at such a time. But what of the increasing number who are not free on a Sunday morning, whose time off is during the week, not at weekends? One of the good effects of this pandemic has been that by putting our audio service on the websites for a whole week, we are giving more people a chance to use it to help them worship God, which they might not have had before when you had to gather in a certain time and place.

I know that many of you join in with this service on a Sunday, but of course you don't have to – and you don't have to do it at the same time as you would usually be together in church. I know of some who listen in while still in bed in the morning, and others who leave it for later in the day, or even later in the week. And I think that is all right. We live in the present, and we follow Jesus who leads us forward and not back, and our present is not a place where society orders itself to make a space for rest and worship on a Sunday. We may think that is a pity, but nevertheless that is where we are. I should add it is where the first

church was too. The early Christians chose to worship, not on the Sabbath, which is Saturday, but on Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Their world was not oriented around that being a day off, a day of rest in either the Jewish or the Roman jurisdiction. So they had to carve time out of a life that was not designed to help them find the time for worship.

Just as then, so nowadays people get their time off work, but for many jobs that cannot be on Sunday: not in retail or hospitality or leisure services. In this present in which we live: the present of the 21st century, and the pinpoint present of today, a day lived in the time of pandemic, God still gives us the gift of sabbath rest, the gift of delight in what God has done, but we have to be sure to reach out and take it, to make for ourselves a day of rest and worship when we do not pursue the same pattern of passing our time as we do on other days.

'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' In fact, it was the best of questions when it comes to how we make a sabbath with God. Do we spend our time of sabbath doing good, saving life – even our own inner life – or doing harm? It is a yardstick to all our questions of what to do or not: will this activity be life-affirming for myself or someone else, or will it not? All of us need a day for delight in God and rest and worship. All of us need a day that is different. As we choose how to make it, remember that God delighted in the life he had created and had given us, and let us find ways to delight in that gift of life and the creator who gives it to us: life for now and life for always.

Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the street (360)

Before we come to prayer, I am asked by the Presbytery of Abernethy, of which we are a part to say that there will be an on-line meeting of the presbytery on October 6th at 7 p.m. to which an invitation is extended to all. The reason you might want to log into this meeting is that at it the members of presbytery will be discussing a proposed amendment to the presbytery plan which would allow us to seek two full time people to work at helping the churches develop new expressions of worship, to reach people who find the traditional model of church difficult. If you would like to log in to the meeting, please let me know and I can get the details to you.

Prayer:

Lord God you give us so many good gifts: indeed, all your gifts to us are good. Among the gifts you give us is the gift of sabbath rest, to restore us, to bring liveliness to our days, to heal our souls and bodies and lift us up into your loving presence. Thank you for your gift, and may we never take it for granted or decide not to receive what you so wisely want to give us.

Lord God you give us so many good gifts. We thank you for the gift of our church and our surrounding community. We thank you for the brothers and sisters in Christ whom we know living near us, whom we see in the course of our daily lives, whose presence reminds us that we are not alone as disciples of you, but that we are called to follow you together. And we thank you for the communities in which you have placed us, places where people care for each other and generally try to be good neighbours.

Lord God you give us so many gifts. You give us a world of people who are all different and you give us the desire to see life work out well for all. We pray for those who lead in our nation, asking that you will give them the wisdom they need to look ahead and make wise

decisions. We pray that the desire that everyone should live well and in peace would never leave their minds.

Lord you give us so many gifts. You give us people skilled in looking into how your world works and who are always finding new wonders. We pray today for those who are looking into the Coved 19 virus, for a vaccine and for a cure, asking that you grant them insight and success, and praying that they would not succumb to any pressure to work faster than is safe.

Lord, you give us so many gifts and we thank you most of all for the gift of yourself in Jesus. Help us to follow him as true disciples today and tomorrow and always. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymn: Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet (169)

Benediction:

Day by day, claiming the joy of Sabbath rest in God,
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you now and always. Amen.

Postlude: "Grand Coeur" by Theodore Salomé, played by John Crombie on the Kingussie organ