

**Prelude** *Chanson De Matin* by Edward Elgar

**Opening words**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning. As we begin our worship, together though apart, we remember God's presence with us now and through every part of every day, as we sing or listen to the song

**Hymn:** Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

**Prayer**

We ask you to be there, to be present, to be with us, at our waking and working, in our leisure and at the end of the day, Lord God, and as we pray we remember your promise to be with us even to the end of the world. So we can thank you for your presence, knowing that whether we are conscious of you or not, you are with us, waiting for us to turn to you, leading us and comforting us, helping us and saving us.

In difficult days, we need to know your presence. In difficult days we need to be assured of your love for us, and for those who are dear to us. In difficult days we realise afresh how you are our rock and our compass, our security and the one who leads us through the wilderness. And we thank you for your presence.

Forgive us when we doubt you, when in our confusion and pain we forget to turn to you. And hold us close to your side as we walk through these days.

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, the power and the glory for ever.

Amen.

**Reading:** Psalm 137:1-6

Over the past two weeks in the daily devotions which have been going on the Kingussie Church Facebook page and the Laggan and Newtonmore church website, we have been delving into the Psalms, the songs of God's people through the ages. We have been in the Psalms, because the Psalms understand about emotions and are not afraid to name and claim them. So far, we have reached Psalm 12, so there is a bit to go before we might get to the Psalm we have read today, Psalm 137. But this is the one that has been running in my head.

*By the waters of Babylon sat we down and wept.*

*When we remembered Zion, we sat down and wept.*

*On the willows there we hung up our lyres*

*From our captors there: sing us your songs.*

*We have no song.*

*How can I sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*

*If I forget you Jerusalem, may the life run out of my hand.*

It is a lament. It is a song of sorrow and longing and loss, and I hear it echoed in my own heart and behind the words of the people I talk to these days.

When we greet each other in the street or the Coop or over the garden fences, we say things like “It could be worse.” And “Imagine being shut in a tower block.” And “We’ve just got to make the best of it.” And we end our conversations with the new farewell “Keep well!” And behind the brave words and the determinedly cheerful faces, each of us is mourning. We have all lost something. I don’t mean in the death toll of the virus: though you may have done that as well, a friend or family member who lives outside this area. But even without that shattering loss, which is the loss we are in lockdown to seek to avoid, we have all had our losses. We mourn the loss of holidays, maybe, or appointments. We miss the simple pleasures of going out for a meal or a coffee. We miss having the freedom to go out whenever we want to and not having to question our motives: is this really necessary? We miss seeing our families, our children or grandchildren, our parents or grandparents. We miss gathering as a church, or in the golf club, or going to the shinty. We are in lockdown and that means that in some way we have lost our freedom. And so our hearts lament for what is gone.

And although we know it is not forever, we do not have the certainty of knowing how long it is for and how things will be when this ends, if it does. You cannot look forward when there is no certainty. And focussing on the present can be tiring, so we lament what we have lost, if only temporarily. We are in a foreign land where things are different. And how can I sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? And what do we do with the feelings of lamentation as they arise?

We do what the Psalmist says that the ancient Israelites did when they were carried into exile in Babylon: we sit with it. They sat by the river and hung up their lyres. They sat, therefore in silence, and they brought it to God. So we too need to sit with our losses and our underlying grief. Just as they acknowledged how they were feeling, so we should as well. Lamentation is a stage of grief and grief is a consequence of loss. Moreover the real feelings of grief and loss tend to come upon us, not immediately we experience the event that brings loss but four to six weeks afterwards: so about now in the lockdown. If you, behind your determination not to grumble and to look on the bright side, are aware of loss; or if you hear lamentation behind the determined cheerfulness of your family or your neighbours, then remember that lamentation is all right. Indeed it is Biblical. And lamentation should be brought to God.

All of our emotions can be brought to God, of course, and they should be. We didn’t read the end of the Psalm where lamentation boils over in violent anger against those who have brought the people of Israel to this pass and this place. We all have feelings – even Christians – and when we feel violent anger, just as much as when we feel tearing joy, then we should bring it to God in our prayers. It is better to explode in prayer to God than to anyone else, because God hears and understands.

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, you know what we lament. You know the little things, the places we cannot go, the pleasures we must deny ourselves, the people we may not be present with. And you know the big things, the deaths and suffering that we see happening around us in this land, the fear and worry about the future. We bring you these things and we bring you the way that we sometimes feel in this difficult time. We can seem to be living in limbo and that is not an easy place for us to be. But we know that you understand. Heal our griefs and hold our losses and our loves in your hands we pray, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

**Hymn** God is our refuge and our strength

**Reading:** Luke 19:41-48

Jesus knew what it was to lament. Here we see him lamenting over Jerusalem, weeping over the city which he knew quite well, mourning over the people who lived there. In his case his sorrow was over a loss that he could see approaching, but of which the people were oblivious.

He saw that Jerusalem was not going to recognise the things that make for peace – turning the other cheek, answering a sharp word with a quiet one, refusing to give in to feelings of wrath or to retaliate for hurts received. The people of Jerusalem had grievances, and they were building up to letting them boil over: they were spoiling for a fight. Ironically, this was one reason why it was decided that Jesus himself should be killed: lest he become a focus for these resentful people.

Jesus saw too that the people will not recognise, are not recognising the time that God has visited them. The tragedy is that the people around, who are hailing and cheering him, don't know who he is or whom they are hailing.

Today, when we lament for ourselves, we also lament for others, for the loss of lives in this land, for the families torn apart, for goodbyes that have to go unsaid; We lament for lives put on hold and for people who fear what their future may be when, if this is all over. And we lament for what the world does not know. The world does not know that this strange time is also a time when God is coming to us – as all times are.

Times of grief and loss are times when in our vulnerability we can be more open to God coming to us: more perceptive to see his hand in our lives and in the world. And so when we sit by the waters and hang up our lyres on the willows, metaphorically speaking; when we acknowledge the numbness or pain in our hearts, the fear for the future that we experience, the sadness over what we have lost; and when we bring all that to God, we can and should also bring to God prayers for others who also lament.

As a Christian community, one of the Church's main callings is the call to prayer. We are given the great gift and privilege of being able to come into the very presence of God and make our requests and needs known to him. We are able to come before God as we are, with our hurt or pain or anger or loss and tell God about it. And we are also given the responsibility of coming to God on behalf of others.

So pray for yourself in your loss and longing.

And pray for your family...and your neighbours...and your friends.

Pray for those who you see in the News: politicians or agitators or those who struggle to work hard for others, or those who grieve. Bring their responsibility or sadness or worry or struggle to God. This is something you can do to help, and it is something we are all called to do. You don't need fancy words. You don't need to be in a church building – fortunately. But you can in honesty bring to God how you are feeling and pray too for others who feel much the same way.

Like the people of Israel, in many ways we are just now a church in exile: people who are living in a strange land. We do still have a song to sing, and a faith to proclaim. But we also have a loss to mourn and learning and adapting to do: and it is only by living through these days consciously in God's presence, that we will be able to do this and in the end to do it well.

Jesus went from his lamentation straight into the temple and got rid of lots of extraneous customs and habits that had accumulated there. Maybe we too, in our time of loss, can allow him to show us what in our lives and in our faith are the most important things. One of them will undoubtedly be faithful, honest prayer.

**Hymn** Blessed be God blessed be God forever

**Prayer**

Blessed be you, Lord God, blessed for ever. We praise and thank you that however we feel and whatever we go through you do not change but are unfailing in your steadfast love and faithfulness to your people. And so whether we come to you in joy or in sorrow, you are ready to hear us. Blessed be your name.

We pray today for all who in their hearts lament loss. We pray for those who are bereaved of family or friends; we pray for all who have lost any sense of a future; we pray for those who find that their interest in daily life has waned; we pray for those who feel lonely; we pray for all who experience loss, knowing that when we bring our emptiness to you, you can fill us with your love. Blessed be your name.

We pray today for those who are ill and approach death: those with the coronavirus and those who suffer from other diseases or simply who have grown old and tired with living. May your hand be on each to heal, where healing is your will and to ease the passage into your presence when that time has come. Deal gently and tenderly with the sick, in your faithful love. Blessed be your name.

We pray with thanksgiving for the people in our community who show love and concern for neighbours, by helping with the tasks of life or by restraining themselves and keeping at home when staying home is getting old. We thank you for those in our community who expose themselves to the risk of illness by continuing to do their work, in shops or by delivering post or goods to our doors, by working in the health service or by collecting our rubbish. Bless them in their caring. Blessed be your name.

And we pray for your church here and around the world as we seek to comfort the bereaved and calm the fearful, while pondering the unknown future. Take us by the hand and show us how we can best serve you and show your steadfast love to others. Blessed be your name, the name in which we pray, the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Hymn:** In heavenly love abiding

**Benediction**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

**Postlude:** By the Waters of Babylon by J.S.Bach