

**Prelude** Sheep may safely graze J.S. Bach

**Words of welcome**

Welcome to the worship service for Kingussie church linked with Laggan and Newtonmore on this last Sunday of April. Again we are worshipping apart, but we know that the love of God holds us together, together with each other and with all who are part of God's family. Our opening Psalm reflects this as it reminds us that we are God's people and God's flock. We sing or listen to

**Hymn** All people that on earth do dwell

**Prayer and Lord's prayer**

Lord God, with all your people on earth we bring you our worship and our praises. We praise you with joy and yes, with mirth because your very being, your self is so wonderful, that the more we think on you, the more there is to wonder at and to be glad about.

We praise you because you invite us to enter into your glorious presence and to know ourselves as your people, those you care for as a shepherd does the sheep. We praise you because you are good and because what you speak and promise is faithful and true always. And so we can depend on your grace and goodness to be with us and sustain us every day and in every situation. You have helped and guided us in the past and so you will be with us in the present and guide us into the future. Keep us standing firm in our faith and in our love of you and forgive us when we do not think or act as children of a loving heavenly Father should.

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

Our Father, who are in heaven,

Hallowed by 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 for ever. Amen.

**Reading** Psalm 133

This Sunday is marks the first anniversary of the linkage of Kingussie with Laggan and Newtonmore church. We had big plans for today. There was going to be a joint service for everyone, to be held in St. Bride's church, in Newtonmore. And we were going to have the Kingussie choir augmented by some Laggan and Newtonmore voices. And there would have been a soup and pudding lunch afterwards, followed by Messy Church in the afternoon. It would have been busy, but it would have been wonderful. And now, of course we can't do any of it.

We can't do any of that plan, but we can still mark our anniversary. And it is still wonderful. "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" exclaims the Psalmist. He then goes on to make an analogy that doesn't work in our culture, where we don't tend to show our joy by pouring oil on beards, and another analogy which is less relevant in a culture which does not depend on dew for our water supply. But after that he picks up his thought and goes on, "For there the Lord has ordained his blessing, life forevermore." How very good and pleasant it is when God's children live in unity, for there God give his blessing of life.

The year of this linkage has been a whirlwind for me, as I have been trying to learn to minister to a new congregation and community without dropping the old one. It has been a

year of pulpit supply and preaching rotas, and of reminding myself and all of us where the minister is going to be on any given Sunday. It has been a year where the worship teams in both churches have stepped up and taken on more responsibility. And it has been done with such lack of grumbling, with such goodwill and good humour. Kindred, God's children, living together in unity. God's children experiencing the blessing of God in the fibre of their lives.

Of course the year has brought challenges to all of us – logistics to work out, new things to try, and it has ended with this greatest challenge of locked churches and dispersed congregations. But that is life. That is life even within God's blessing. We never know what is coming next. But if we live in unity with each other then we can seek God's blessing in whatever comes our way, even in the unknown future.

In these days when we are given daily rates of death, we are reminded again, if we needed the reminder, and some of us maybe did, that life is itself a wonderful gift. When we hear of these deaths, mostly of people unknown to us, we can and should be sad for them and pray for them and their families, but we should also learn to appreciate again the fact that we are alive and have the gift of God's life flowing through us. We are united in Christ, in our faith, in our worship; we are united in seeking to serve our communities in his name. And where there is such unity we also know the blessing of God in our life – individually but also together. So it is right that we mark this anniversary – not in the way we thought we would, but by taking a moment to be glad of God's blessing and of God's life in and with us.

Let us pray

Lord God, we pause for a moment before you to thank you for and to pray for our brothers and sisters of Kingussie and Laggan and Newtonmore churches. We ask that while we are apart we would not forget our unity or faith and purpose and calling, and that day by day you would help us to be together in our service of you. We ask it for Jesus' sake, Amen.

**Hymn** Jesus put this song into our hearts

Our second Bible reading picks up in the middle of the last time we meet Jesus in the pages of John's gospel. Indeed the twenty-first chapter of the gospel reads a little as a P.S added as an afterthought. John has a very good ending to his work at the end of chapter 20 where he says "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." What a great ending! And then we get chapter 21. In this chapter we see six of the eleven disciples leave Jerusalem and return to Galilee, where Peter takes them out fishing, returning to his old occupation. When things are upside down and uncertain it is tempting to want to go back to the past. And, just as in a previous fishing trip, they fish all night but catch nothing – maybe there was too much noise with 6 of them in the boat, which would usually have been crewed by two only. Anyway, just after daybreak they see a figure on the shore who asks them if they have caught anything, and when they say no, tells them to let the nets down on the right hand side of the boat – starboard in nautical terms – and they could catch some. So they do and they do.

Peter realises that it is Jesus and leaps into the water to get to him, while the rest struggle to bring in the net full of fish. And Jesus gives them breakfast. And it is from there that we pick up the story.

Reading John 21:15-25

Jesus takes Peter aside for a private chat. This is not the first time Peter has met with Jesus since the resurrection, but it is the first time that we have a private conversation between them recorded. And Jesus asks Peter to feed his sheep and tend his lambs. He asks Peter if he loves him.

I am sure you have heard before how these three questions of Jesus, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?... Do you love me?... Do you love me?” were Peter’s opportunity to unsay the three times he had denied knowing Jesus just a few short weeks before, when Jesus had been arrested. And I am sure that Peter was both glad of the opportunity to wipe that slate clean, and sad – John tells us he felt hurt – that Jesus felt that he had to ask and ask again. Having a conversation with Jesus is a privilege we might all covet, but when we do, when we come to God honestly in prayer, for instance, there is nothing that can be hidden and we might not always like what we see of ourselves in the words and silences.

Peter was allowed to put the past behind him by being reminded of who he is now. He is not a fisherman anymore. (“Do you love me more than these?” than these income-generating, purpose-to-life-giving fish?) In the confusion of the resurrection, in the absence of his normality, the normality of discipleship as he had come to know it travelling around with Jesus, Peter had returned to a normality from his past. He couldn’t re-create the life of the disciple, but he could go back to the life of the fisherman. Though he didn’t catch anything!

You can see the warning and the encouragement for us as a church. We have gone into the linkage, and we were working hard on taking it forward in the way that we had worked out, when this happened. We were put into lockdown. We can no longer meet physically together; we cannot really plan for the future because we don’t know what the future world might be like: how it may be different from the past. But the commission given to us is the same as it always was – to go forward. Peter was to leave his fishing. We are not to look back to seek to reinstate what has passed away, but to look forward and see what it means in the present confusion and in whatever the future looks like to “feed my sheep.” The church was not called into existence to give comfort to its members, but to bring comfort and hope and sustenance to the world. The sheep we are to feed – all of us, not just the minister – are the people whom we live amongst, some of whom are currently very worried about their future security. They are the neighbours whom we speak to – at suitable distance – over the garden fence. They are the people we encounter – but not too closely – at the Co-op. They are the dog-walkers we wave to as we take our exercise. Jesus’ sheep, his lambs, those he wants us to take care of.

There have been ways that the church has sought to carry out this commission in the past, the far past, and the near past. But we are not to look back but look forward. The church is a body, an institution, if you like, which should *not* always look the same from one generation to the next. The same principles of loving and serving God should undergird us, the same truths and scripture should guide us. But if the church today looked the same as it did in the first century (it doesn’t) it would be a failure of our calling. And if the church today were to look the same as it did even fifty years ago, it would be a failure of our calling.

Today we remember that we are called to work and worship together, as a linkage, to carry out Christ’s commission to us, which is to go to others in his name and with his love. In a time of crisis, we pray that day to day God will give us the wisdom to work out how we may best do that, so that his kingdom and reign may come and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Hymn** Lord, you have come to the seashore

One of the things we have not been doing, and indeed, cannot do, with audio church is to take up an offering, giving of our income in love to God and for God's work in the world. If you usually give by cash, including giving in the envelope scheme, you might want to think about giving your offering by standing order, and if you think this is something you might do, you will find the standing order form on the church's website. However we give, and when we give, it is in thanksgiving to God who gives us everything.

And now let us bring God our prayers for others.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we bring to you our prayers for ourselves and for others as we bow before you. We acknowledge to you how difficult we find it to look forward in faith as you ask us to, and how easy it is to look backwards with nostalgia. And so, on this day when we remember and give thanks for the linkage of our churches, we pray that you would help us to live by the faith we profess. Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for the "sheep" you have called us to tend, the "lambs" of your flock among whom we live. We pray for those who are worried about the future, we pray for those who are being driven distracted by the present, praying especially for parents of young children. We pray for those who find the restrictions of life depressive and for those who cannot look forward because they can find nothing for which to hope. Be close to your children, whom you love, and while we cannot be close physically, help us to find ways to give support and attention in other ways. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for your church here in our parishes, around Scotland and over the world. We pray for your faithful people as they seek to live in ways that will help others, by isolating and by reaching out with help. We pray for the many, many who will be worshipping today as we are, by staying at home and listening in. And we ask that in these days your church will find again who we are and what we are for. We remember especially the church in Libis and Kostelec in the Czech Republic, the twinned congregation of Laggan and Newtonmore, asking for your presence with Mirek and all our friends. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our nation, for those who advise the government and for those who must take decisions. We pray for wisdom that we may do what is best to control the spread and effect of the coronavirus. We pray for those who are ill and for those who care for them, and we ask that your special care might surround those who are the most vulnerable to the effects of this illness – or the effects of our controlling strategies. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Hear our prayers for each other, as in a moment of silence we pause to pray for those within our congregations who are most on our minds.....

And hear our prayers for ourselves and our families, whether they are all together or scattered far and wide.....

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer, for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

**Hymn** Look forward in faith, all time is in God's hands

**Benediction**

Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and forever, Amen.  
And may the blessing of God's presence be with us all. Amen.

**Postlude** All in an April's evening.