

**Orphir & Stenness Church: Communion Service 22.03.20; Lent 4A**  
*Not used because of Covid 19 situation. Edited for email distribution.*

**Welcome and Intimations**

Good morning. Welcome to our worship.  
 Wherever you have come from today,  
 whether you come here regularly, or occasionally,  
 and especially if you are here for the first time,  
 your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Today read about a blind man who regained his sight, and sighted people who were blind, and we celebrate Holy Communion.

As we begin our service, let us take a few moments to feel the worries and stress of the last week slip away, and open ourselves to the presence of God among us.

***Gathering prayer:***

Dear God, Saviour and Shepherd of Your people,  
 as we are gather to praise you, open our eyes to the traffic between heaven and earth,  
 and to the wonder of Your call to live in the light,  
 through Him who is the light of the world, even Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Call to Worship**

The Lord is our Shepherd; we shall not want.  
 He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters.  
 Come, let us worship the Lord, and let our souls be restored.

***Let us worship God:***

**Hymn 1: 200** Christ is made the sure foundation

**Scripture Sentence**

I was glad when they said to me,  
 'Let us go to the house of the Lord! (Ps 122)

**PRAYERS Let us pray:**

Gracious God,  
 from the everyday things of home and garden, work and money,  
 we come, young and old, to the mystery of bread and wine.  
 The table is set, and in its whiteness it extends to us all.

Eternal God, before we were born, you were alive.  
 Before time began, you were.  
 An infinity of ages and universes are in your keeping,  
 yet we believe that you are not infinitely remote from us,  
 that we are not indistinguishable grains of dust in your sight,  
 but real people whose names and lives you know and value,  
 acquainted with all our ways,  
 sharing in our loneliness and our misgivings,  
 in our happiness and our despair.  
 Yet we know that we have not grown  
 to our full stature or capacity:  
 we are dry bones that need flesh and sap and spirit.

We think of ourselves;  
 our successes, our failures, our needs, our importance.  
 We see ourselves as unique, and so excuse ourselves  
 for the same sins that so many have committed for the same reasons;  
 thinking we are special cases, deserving special consideration from you,  
 yet knowing that as men and women,  
 created by you for your service,  
 we have broken the promises we made  
 and fallen short of what we should have been.  
 We have compromised too much, and confessed too little.  
 Forgive us for all that we confess now.

*Pause*

By the power of your love, and of a shared redemption and a shared joy,  
 unite us in word and sacrament that our hearts may be warmed, and our life find its meaning.

In our worship, O God, help us to derive strength from you,  
 that we may be renewed and invigorated.  
 the more to share our faith and our hope and our with one another,  
 and to do more for other people than we do.

Help us, O God,  
 to live every day in the presence and the power of Jesus Christ our Lord  
 that his life may inform and direct our lives,  
 that his service may be the purpose and meaning of all our living.  
 The Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.  
 The Lord is in this place. In his name we pray. Amen.

## **5 SCRIPTURE LESSONS**

### **Ephesians 5:8-14** (New International Version, UK)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

### **John 9: 1-41**

#### *A Man Born Blind Receives Sight*

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3 Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' 10 But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' 12 They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

### *The Pharisees Investigate the Healing*

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' 16 Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' 25 He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' 26 They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' 28 Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' 30 The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' 34 They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

### *Spiritual Blindness*

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 36 He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' 38 He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. 39 Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' 41 Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

**Hymn 2: 14 (3) or 16 The Lord's my shepherd**

### **Message:**

Today's long and complicated chapter from John's gospel is a wonderful story, enough material for many sermons.

It shows us a blind man who could see, and sighted people who were blind. It shows us Goody-goodies so concerned with observance of their laws and regulations that they couldn't rejoice in the healing power of Christ.

It points to the eternal problem of human suffering.

*"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

Even today people believe that bad things happen to people because they deserved it. If people are in trouble, it is because of their wrong-doing – their sin.

We've all heard someone who is suffering illness or misfortune say, "What have I done to deserve this?" Maybe you've said it yourself. Maybe like me, when something bad happens, you find yourself saying, "That's because I did – or failed to do – such and such."

When HIV/AIDS made its appearance, there were people who said that it was a punishment for the "sin" of homosexuality. There are still people who say that, despite well-established evidence that homosexuality is a genetic trait and neither an illness nor a sin. There are those who say that the people who live in squalor and deprivation in the poorer areas of our cities have only themselves to blame: drunks and drug-users, layabouts, work-shy. And single mothers? They've only themselves to blame. Why should we pay taxes to support these people?

### ***Wait!***

Disasters and calamities are no respecters of persons. They happen to the good and bad, to rich and poor alike. The sun shines on the righteous, and on the unrighteous as well. The rain falls on all. Are the devastating floods that cause such destruction and misery and make so many people homeless in many parts of our country, and overseas, a punishment sent from God? Were these people really all bad? Really worse than anybody else? The fires in Australia: were all these people bad?

Think of someone you know personally who was cut down by cancer or a heart attack or a stroke. Was he/she really worse than anybody else?

NO! Jesus is forthright:

*This man's blindness has nothing to do with his sins, or his parent's sins."*

But notice: Jesus doesn't try to answer the problem of the suffering of the innocent. There was no easy answer in his day, and there is no easy answer for us either.

Generations of Christian thinkers have struggled with the Problem of Pain: why does a good and omnipotent God allow such appalling human suffering?

Why did God not intervene to prevent the murder of 6 million Jews? Or the genocide that still goes on in many places?

Why did God not prevent all these devastating disasters of recent times – fires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes - that brought horror to our TV screens and – such is human nature – fade quickly from our memory?

Why does God not stop the wars, the riots, the violence, the sex crimes, the abuse of children that seem to be forever in the news?

Legitimate, logical questions. I have no answer.

I have heard people – Christian people – even pastors – who, confronted by the tragedies of suffering and death, say, *"This is the will of God."*

In circumstances of wilful murder, or a tragic accident -or where a young person died much too soon, it seems to me almost blasphemous to say, *"This is the will of God."*

I will not allow myself to believe that it is the direct will of God that anyone should be killed by a drunk driver, or that a mother of a young family should be snatched away by aggressive cancer.

I don't believe that these things are all the will of God, all part of his mysterious purpose.

When these things happen, I believe that there is no one sorrier than God. Confronted by death of Lazarus, “Jesus wept.” And remember, Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”.

We don't know what God is. No one does. God mystery.

But we do see God revealed in many ways. He is revealed in Jesus. He is revealed in the way Jesus treated children, treated the poor; the marginalized; the excluded. God is revealed in the trust of a small child; in the selfless love of good Christian people.

St John tells us: ‘God is love’. Not a being who loves: God *is* Love: the very essence of transformative, mutual, self-giving love, the love that took Christ to the cross to show that there is nothing in all the world that can separate us from the love of God.

I do not believe in a God who actively and vindictively brings misfortune upon people, as a punishment, or for reasons known only to him, or that he has the power to help and yet stands aside and allows these things to happen.

I believe that God weeps.

I believe that God shares in our misfortunes, our suffering, our tragedy.

How can we rationalise all these things?

I don't know. There are no easy answers.

Theologians remind us that God created humanity with free will, and the freedom to make both good and bad choices.

In his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner tells us:

*“If we want to hurt someone, God will not intervene to keep us from doing it...[God] will not intervene to take away our freedom, including our freedom to hurt ourselves, and others around us.”*

I think we all know that that is true.

Kushner goes on:

*“I have to believe that God was with the victims [of the Holocaust]...*

*that the tears and prayers of the victims aroused God's compassion...*

*that the anguish I feel when I read of the sufferings of innocent people reflects God's anguish and God's compassion.*

*I would like to think that God is the source of my being able to feel sympathy and outrage, and that he and I are on the same side when we stand with the victim against those who would hurt them.”*

As Christians we would add that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God, in his love, his compassion, his suffering and death on the cross, God did indeed identify with suffering humanity.

We all know that – sometimes – or when we learn to recognise it - God does bring something good out of the bad. Study of natural disasters helps scientists learn how to make more effective defences. Study of cancer patients leads to more effective treatment. The Coronavirus pandemic will bring greater understanding of disease control, and maybe – help us all to have more concern for other people.

I do not believe that God wants people to suffer and die. That's not the God of Love that we see expressed in Jesus. But I do think God does want us to be his instruments in bringing help and healing and wholeness.

How do we do that?

We can stop being judgemental. If we blame the poor for their poverty; blame those who are ill for their own illnesses – the smokers, the obese, the alcoholics, the drug addicts - it means *we can ignore their problems* – so that *we don't actually have to do anything* – like giving more of our own wealth; or challenging Government policies.

We can stop being blind. We can learn to see the need around us. There are none so blind as those who cannot see. The man born blind told again and again *who* gave him back his sight, and how, but the Pharisees still kicked him out of the synagogue.

Do we really see the scandal of worldwide poverty and misery? People in so many countries for whom adequate food or wholesome water are unattainable luxuries. People suffering from diseases that can easily be treated or prevented. People in Syria, Yemen, and many other places where war, terrorism, oppression, persecution are everyday facts of life. Our Television screens are full of appeals for money and help - but do we really see?

In our own country – even here in Orkney – there are people struggling to make ends meet. The uptake from the food bank shows that. There are people in this country who have children with disabilities, struggling to get any help from Government agencies and sometimes even from the Health Service. There are older people, struggling with loneliness, depressed because they can no longer do the things they used to do – but reluctant to ask for help.

Do we do anything to help? Or do we leave it to others?  
*Or do we leave it to God, forgetting that God has no hands but our hands?*

At the beginning of our reading Jesus says: *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'*

The implication for us is clear. Now that we no longer have the physical presence of Jesus in the world, can we carry on where he left off?

Lent is a time when we consider how we stand before God, how God looks at us, and how we have 'walked in his way'.

Reflecting on the past few months of our lives, what stands out for us?  
Have we walked in his way?

Have we let - can we let - our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven? (Matthew 5:16)

These are questions to bear in mind as we come to the Lord's table.  
Amen. To God Alone be Glory.

**8 Offering Hymn: 667** Now, my tongue, the mystery telling (Tune Triumph 706)

### **Dedication of Offering**

#### ***Let us pray:***

Gracious and loving God, all things belong to you, and all that we have comes from you. If we have gifts to bring, it is of your free mercy. Accept these our offerings, and grant that they may be hallowed by your blessing, and used in your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Sharing the Peace:**

This is a house of God. A place of peace.  
A place where we befriend one another.]

*Before we come to the Lord's Table, let us greet one another as a sign of God's peace and of our shared fellowship*

**Invitation to Communion:**

If you know why you have come here today, or if you don't,  
come to the table anyway.

If you understand what this is all about, or if you struggle to understand faith,  
come to the table anyway.

If you are certain about God, or if you wonder more now than ever before,  
come to the table anyway.

If you seek forgiveness, or if you are not yet ready for that,  
come to the table anyway.

If you are sure of who you are, or if you are not,  
come to the table anyway.

If you know you are meant to be here, or if you hesitate,  
come to the table anyway.

This table is open to all, for it is the Lord's table.

You are all invited to be yourself, and know that it is Jesus himself who invites you.

*If for any reason you do not wish to receive the elements, we suggest that you simply pass the bread and the wine from your neighbour on the one side to your neighbour on the other, and remain united with us in prayer.*

**The Story of the Last Supper**

***To take us into communion, let us sing:***

**Hymn 668** According to thy gracious word

**The Grace:**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. *Amen.*

**11 Taking of the Bread and Wine**

As the Lord Jesus,  
the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,  
I take these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses  
to this holy use and mystery;  
and as he gave thanks and blessed, let us draw near to God  
and offer him our prayers and thanksgiving.

***NB Responses - Let us pray.***

**Prayer of Thanksgiving & Intercession and Lord's Prayer**

The Lord be with you.

***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts.

***We lift them to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

And now we give thanks that,  
Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience through suffering  
and is able to help those who are in the midst of their trial to overcome evil and grow in grace.

Therefore, with your people  
of all places and times,  
and with the whole company of heaven,

we proclaim your greatness  
and sing your praise in the angels' song:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes  
in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.***

We bless you for his holy birth, his perfect life on earth,  
for his suffering for us and his triumph over death;  
for his ascension to your right hand  
and his gift of the Holy Spirit;  
and for the promise of his coming again.

Remembering his work and passion,  
and pleading his eternal sacrifice,  
we follow his example and obey his command.  
who on the night of his arrest took bread,  
and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said:  
'This is my body, which is for you;  
do this in memory of me'.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said:  
'This cup is the new covenant  
sealed by my blood.  
Whenever you drink it,  
do this in memory of me'.

Send down your Holy Spirit to bless us  
and these your gifts of bread and wine,  
that the bread which we break may be for us the communion of the body of Christ,  
and the cup of blessing which we bless the communion of the blood of Christ;  
that we, receiving them, by faith may be made partakers  
of his body and blood,  
with all his benefits, to nourish us and help us grow in grace,  
to the glory of your most holy name.

And here we offer and present to you our very selves,  
to be a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for your acceptance;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Through him, with him, in him,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours,  
almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.***

Remember, O Lord,  
your holy Church throughout the world  
and reveal your glory among the nations.  
Save your people, and bless those who belong to you,  
shepherd them and carry them for ever.

Remember, O Lord,  
our families and friends, and surround them with your steadfast love.

Remember those who are sick,  
especially at this time all who are in any way  
touched by the Coronavirus pandemic:  
those who are ill, those worry about them, who care for them,  
or who work to bring this pandemic to an end.  
Be close to all who suffer pain,  
or loneliness, or grief,  
those who draw near to death,  
and those whom we name  
in our hearts before you . . .

### **Pause**

Comfort them with your presence,  
sustain them by your promises,  
grant them your peace.

And now, rejoicing in the communion of the saints,  
we remember with thanksgiving all your faithful servants  
and those dear to us who serve you in the glory of heaven.  
Keep us in unbroken fellowship with your whole Church in heaven and on earth,  
and bring us at the last to the joy of your eternal kingdom;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:  
*Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done in 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.*

### **Breaking of Bread**

According to the holy institution, example,  
and command of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and as a memorial of him,  
we do this:  
who, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread  
*(take bread)*,  
and when he had given thanks he broke it  
*(break bread)*,  
and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you;  
do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup  
*(raise the cup)*  
saying, 'This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood.  
Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.'

### **Communion**

Take, eat. This is the body of Christ  
which is broken for you.  
*Do this, remembering him.*

**The body of Christ, given for you.**

This cup is the new covenant  
sealed by Christ's blood  
which was shed that the sins of many  
might be forgiven.  
Drink from it, all of you. (P. 165:)

**The blood of Christ, shed for you.**

*When all have received, the vessels are returned to the Holy Table and covered.*

**The Peace**

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. *Amen.*

**Prayer after Communion**

***Let us pray.***

Let us pray:

Here we have tasted the things of this world.  
Here we have touched the things of the next.  
Here we have seen and heard of the great mystery of our salvation.  
Here we have eaten of one loaf,  
and drunk of one cup,  
in that communion becoming one with you,  
with our brothers and sisters near and far,  
and with that great cloud of witnesses which surrounds us.  
May this precious gift which we have received  
be shared with all whose lives we touch,  
that our love of you  
and your love in us  
may shine for the salvation of the world. *Amen.*  
All: *Amen*

**Hymn** The Spirit Lives to set us free (Walk in the light) [Songs of God's People 102 or Mission Praise 664]

**OR 674** Halleluya! We sing your praises

**Dismissal and Blessing**

The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus;  
and may the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and abide with you always. *Amen.* (BCO 3)

**Doxology:**(Hy. 786)

May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;  
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.