

Order of Service – Web
Avoch linked with Fortrose-Rosemarkie
Teachings for Troubled Times
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

What is hidden will be revealed – trust in God and live in the light

Gathering

ALL: Praise the Lord!

Praise God from heaven,
praise him from the mountaintops,
praise him, all you his angels,
praise him, all you his warriors,

ALL: Praise the Lord!

Praise him when you're happy,
praise him through the dark times,
praise him when you're working,
praise him when at rest.

ALL: Praise the Lord!

Let all praise the name of God -
it's the only Name worth praising.
His glory is above all -
Hallelujah!

ALL: Praise the Lord!

Ps148 – responsive reading* (Sara Hargreaves)

1 – CH4 818 Praise ye the Lord (Old 124th) - v1 & v2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DdiC-TKgml> *(follow lyrics on screen)*

Prayers of Approach/ Confession/ Lord's Prayer

Prayer

Lord God we join with creation this morning as we give thanks to you in worship
From the heights above to the depths below the creation worships you
Lord God you are praised by young and old, men and women – by people from all walks of life
– from the leaders of nations to the poorest and most neglected and across the globe
You are worthy of our praise for your name is exalted - not just as the creator God
but on account of the salvation that you have offered to us in Christ Jesus.
Lord God we pray that we may draw close to you in our worship

CONFESSION (we take a moment for confession before God)

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own.

SILENCE (as we confess our sins)

Let us confess our sins in the stillness of this moment:

ABSOLUTION (as we receive pardon and renewal from God)

God be gracious to us - forgive us, bless us, and make your face shine upon us.

Lord God, in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord

Who taught us when we pray to say:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. AMEN

Word of God

Bible Reading 1 – Luke 12:1-3

2 - CH4 498 Angel Voices ever singing - v1, v2 & v4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVYIIQEB2yE> (follow lyrics on screen)

Sermon – pt1: *What is hidden will be revealed – trust in God and live in the light*

For this period after Christmas, we are going to look at the teaching of Jesus to his disciples and the crowds in Luke chapter 12. There are a range of themes dealing with the fact that we face and have to respond to the unexpected in life and we have to make choices about who we are and how we live in terms of character, allegiance to God and so on.

The Crowd and the disciples

¹ *Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: ...* The passage opens talking about Jesus beginning with teaching for his disciples implying an inner circle who were more receptive to nuance.

The yeast of the Pharisees

The previous section of Luke had looked at the way in which the religious group of the Pharisees in their quest of righteousness were at risk of worrying more about the outward appearances than the inner realities. Jesus says outright: *“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”* What underlies this section is the idea of our true character. What are we really like?

In a context where people made their own bread, the idea of yeast or leaven working through the dough and causing it to rise would have been very familiar. As Morris puts it:
“Leaven speaks of a penetration that is slow, insidious and constant. In this case the leaven is hypocrisy. The practice of saying one thing and doing another eats at the moral life like a canker.”

The point of this saying and warning is that eventually the mask will come off – situations will reveal our true identity. In part, it is connected to our identity in relation to Jesus – the Son of Man - as God’s chosen one. Not just the life of discipleship in its ethical and moral

dimensions – but do we identify with him? Is our allegiance with him? That is the force of the challenge that comes in v8 and v9 later.

Nothing hidden – Korean proverb

² *There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.* ³ *What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.*

There's a vivid Korean proverb that approximates to "walls have ears" that puts it a little more colourfully and closer to what Jesus is saying – "birds hear words spoken in the day-time and mice hear words spoken in the night." So you can feel the full Korean flavour – here it is in *hangeul* the language John Ross the missionary from the Tain area learned and translated the bible into - 낮 말은 새가 듣고 밤 말은 쥐가 듣는다 (see our recent Newsletter 6).

The Korean dynasty – the Choson dynasty - that lasted from the early Renaissance till around World War I (in our terms) was plagued by cliques and factions, conspiracies real and imagined – most children would have had this proverb drilled into them for the safety of their lives ...

Nothing hidden – then and now

The contrast between the inner room and the rooftops is also rather distinctive – but a reminder as we know only too well in our social media world – is that once a story breaks it can travel further and faster than we might expect. "*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*" Even beyond our modern culture of leaks these are sobering words.

The point underlying them is this- what we are, what we really are, is revealed by circumstances – we need to focus on the basics and not obsess with what is on the outside.

Our next hymn reflects this concern to march and to live in the light!

3 - CH4 516 We are marching in the light of God - v1 & v2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn16ABWn20c> (follow lyrics on screen)

Bible Reading 2 – Luke 12:4-9

Sermon – pt2: *What is hidden will be revealed – trust in God and live in the light*

In the first part of this sermon – Jesus has been talking about character and the life-choices that we make – that they are genuine and deep-rooted. Life is not a game – real issues are at stake. We know this in the pandemic but it is true more generally. Some of my extended family watch the Repair Shop on TV and at least two episodes recently have featured objects by whose who served in WWII or even WWI. These were times of great uncertainty; the Roman Empire was an equally uncertain place, perhaps even more so for many.

Jesus makes an unexpected comment about the uncertainties of life.

⁴ *"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.*

So – that’s the Emperor sorted and the Governor ... Jesus continues in an unexpected direction. ⁵ *But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*

His reference is to God and his point is that human beings only have a capacity to touch our physical selves they cannot deal with who we are at a deeper level – but God can.

“The important thing, therefore, is to consider the welfare of your soul rather than of your body. Be prepared not for the judgment of any earthly tribunal but for the judgment of ... Almighty God. Let it be your preoccupation to be, through and through, the kind of person of whom he will approve when that day comes.” Michael Wilcox

As we noted earlier, this passage is building to a climax that has to do with our orientation towards God (or away from God) when it is challenged in the public arena. Jesus’ point here is to say that we are not to be fearful about persecution of human beings around us we need to be mindful and wary of what God thinks about who we are and what we are. Lest we think the balance goes too far, in one direction, Jesus now speaks of God’s knowledge of us and his concern for us.

The sparrow

⁶ *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.*

⁷ *Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.* Sparrows appear at various places in the bible – including famously Psalm 84 in the house of God.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?” The word for sparrow is the diminutive of sparrow – probably used here in the sense of small birds sold for food. (For those who are RSPB members or sympathizers, the commentator Howard Marshall from the Univ. of Aberdeen who was exceptionally knowledgeable about the gospels says that, in fact, sparrows weren’t eaten – the reference will be more general to small birds! I’ve also tactfully avoided pictures of bird markets for that subset on Zoom ...)

However, clearly some small birds were sold for food and went for “pennies” in the market. Matthew says that they were “two a penny.” So, presumably Luke’s account is:

either

A) an early marketing ploy – “‘five for four’ sparrows today, Ma’am, two pence a bundle – and cheap at ‘alf the price!’”

or

B) a result of two similar, but very slightly different, oral traditions ...

God’s knowledge of the sparrow is true and real but more than that the very hairs of our head numbered. God know us and that should give us confidence indeed.

As Marshall summarises: “God knows even the smallest detail about the disciples and is concerned for them: if the hairs of their heads are numbered, they have no need to be afraid of men, and they can be sure that they matter more to God than sparrows.

Do we acknowledge the Son of Man - or not?

God knows us – but do we know God? Do we acknowledge our allegiance to God and our debt to God in everyday life?

The final verses that we're looking at today bring this matter to a head. To draw on the language that we used earlier - the judgment of God is more important than the judgment of any earthly tribunals.

⁸ *"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.*

⁹ *But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.*

The words of Jesus suggest that the verdict aligns with how we treat Jesus (the son of Man) when we are living. [The use of son of Man here may reflect Luke and Matthew's desire to point to Jesus in his role as God the Son at the end time.]

Our faith in everyday life

Where do we stand in terms of the outward expression of our faith – our alignment to Jesus? Baptism and communion are actually markers for Christians of their profession of faith: the former is a marker of our dying and rising to a new life; and the latter is, in part, a means to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Our faith – baptism and communion – proclaiming the Lord's death

In some cultures, baptism itself is seen in very decisive terms – writing of Japan, Melville Szto (a Singaporean who worked there) says this in a chapter in my edited book *Ministry Across Cultures*:

"It is probably true, not just in Japan, but throughout Asia, that the rite of baptism is seen as the point of departure, the point of radical break with the old in order to embrace the new. ... It is the author's experience that opposition to the faith of the Japanese believer often begins at the point where the believer seeks baptism. In short, the Japanese community sees this rite, whatever else it may not see, as the real point of departure for the would-be convert."

Our faith is to be developed in the loyalty that we show to Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit acting like yeast in our lives to create our Christian character. As we develop in our trust and understanding of God, so we will develop in our capacity to stand firm in everyday life and to prepare ourselves for the end of life – whenever that comes – as we are reminded daily by the impact of the pandemic. Our trust in God is reciprocated in God's care for us – "His eye is on the sparrow" as the next hymn reassures us.

4 – His eye is on the sparrow - v1/ch, v2/ch & v3/ch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CS5vKFSPtM> (follow lyrics on screen)

Response to the Word of God

Responsive Reading

Ps 84:1-7

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!

All: 2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young— a place near your altar,
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

All: 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

We reflect on the mystery of incarnation as we come to prayer in this season of Epiphany - God has not just revealed himself to us in Christ but encourages us to follow Christ's example.

Poem – “Reaching Down” by Don Dowling*

Lord you reach down into our darkness,
into the pits and the traps others make for us,
into the mire and mess we make for ourselves,
into the despair and disappointment of this difficult world.

You reach down and step into our darkness,
making yourself small,
making yourself like us.

Not distant, not holding back
but walking every difficult mile
every foot-wearing journey
of this Emmaus life.

Every Calvary Road, every Valley of Shadow,
you take the stones in our shoes
and place them in yours.
You limp beside us.

Quietly, silently, often in the guise of others,
in the hands and feet, tears and smiles
of friends and strangers,
and in the profound name and caring presence of
the Man of Sorrows,
the Prince of Peace,
the Son of Man: Jesus.

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Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Lord God we echo the thoughts of the psalmist and we give thanks for Your creation
We thank you for the world in which we live
We thank you for the area where we stay
We thank you for the beauty which surrounds us

Lord God we pray for your world
We pray for those who are leaders at this time of pandemic
We pray for those who are scientists
We pray for those in clinical care
We pray for the refinement of the vaccine and the urgent programme of implementation.

Lord God we pray for your church in the world
We remember those sent out to the far corners of the earth
We remember those who face challenges of daily living
We remember those in crisis areas
We remember those who have opportunities to share the good news of Christ Jesus

Lord God we pray we pray for the people in our community
We pray for those in education in the midst of change
We pray for those with children at home to be home-schooled
We pray for those struggling with lack of work and lack of money
We pray for those who grieve

Lord God we pray for ourselves
We pray that you would be with us in difficult times
We pray for those whose workload has increased in the pandemic
We pray for those who feel isolated and alone
Lord God we pray for your blessing in these troubled times – through Christ our Lord AMEN

5 - CH4 192-i All my hope on God is founded – v1, v2 & v4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DohxO6ytsaU> *(follow lyrics on screen)*

Sending**

Leader: God bless us today that we may be a blessing

All: In our seeing,
In our hearing,
In our speaking.

Leader: God bless to us today that we may be a blessing

All: In our reaching
In our holding
In our letting go

Leader: God bless to us today that we may be a blessing

All: In our thinking,
In our feeling
In our loving, AMEN

6 - CH4 796 The Lord bless you (Bless You) – verse / John Rutter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quPGSZ1xEnQ> *(follow lyrics on screen)*

Benediction

May the light of the glorious gospel of Christ
shine in your hearts and fill your lives
with his joy and peace. AMEN

We are using materials from Engage Worship and CofS Weekly Worship.***