

Worship 15th November 2020 – Remembrance Sunday

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Introduction

Hello and welcome to online worship for Aberlour Parish Church on Sunday 15th November.

This week we are reflecting on *hope*. Here's one thing Paul said about hope in his letter to the church in Rome:

'We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.' *Romans 8:24-25*

In patience, and trusting in the presence of the God whom we do not see, and yet proclaim is with us, let us pray.

Prayer of Approach

God of all hope,

You have planted the seed in our hearts that
-when we look around at the world we see -
is moved to look beyond creation,
and to seek the Creator.

We come to worship you:

as people who know the weariness and heaviness of the world,
as people seeking refuge and comfort,
as people who long for hope.

As we take this time,

and set it apart to be present with and for You our God,
Unite us with our brothers and sisters in these communities and around the world -
that in relative isolation, we may know ourselves as part of your body,
and worship you not alone, but as part of a family.

Loving God,

we see our world, and we can name so readily all that we feel is not well with it.

And we long for better.

Give us the grace and humility too,

to survey ourselves, and name what we not is not well with us.

In your light, that which we try to keep into the shadows is exposed.

Help us to see your light not as threat, but as freedom,

not as condemnation, but as a call to new life.

We confess our sin before you.

And we seek your mercy – that our burden of guilt may be taken away.

We seek your healing, that our wayward hearts be made right,

We seek your forgiveness, that we may be freed to live well in your sight.

Saving God,
you have promised us grace,
may we know the certainty of your saving love.

Love which was born, lived, died, and rose again in Jesus Christ,
who taught us how to pray, and whose words we say together:

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.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, the power and glory forever,
Amen.

Reading

Matt 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶ He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Voice of the woman



17th Century etching by P. del Po
after Annibale Carracci.
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Some call me strong willed; others call me outspoken. And as with too many women like me – who have a tongue in their head and use it - most call me much worse than that.

The thing is, my daughter is not well.

It seems to have come from nowhere, but now she is at her wits end, tormented and anguished. Day and night, she struggles to find her right mind.

She says things that don't sound like her; she does things that are so out-of-character; and I can see it alarming her, even more than it worries me.

I know in your day, there are dictionaries full of terms that might describe my daughter’s condition; medical textbooks that would describe symptoms and conditions and treatments, and talking of mental health. I know in your day, there is increasing understanding of people who suffer like my daughter.

Those are not the words of my time, and who knows what words one of your psychiatrist healers might use for her? What I do know is the stigma and the social shunning we've experienced because my daughter has been deemed at the mercy of a tormenting demon.

She's been like this for some time now. It's getting so that I find it hard to recognise the child I once knew so well, it's getting so that I start to wonder where the child I brought into the world has gone.

I try to soothe her: I stroke her hair, and speak calm when I feel anything but – and I look in her eyes, and wonder about what it is she sees, how she sees the world that it alarms her so.

They told me a healer was nearby, come from Israel. I regularly visited the local healers for my daughter – they promise so much yet I can't see any benefit.

But anything - anything- if it might help her.

So I go and find him. He's surrounded by a throng of men. A mix of older and very young – all hanging on his words. Their faces show they don't have the beginnings of truly understanding what he's saying, but they want to.

And I tell him,
about my daughter.

And he ignored me

So I tell him again

And again

It's embarrassing. I can hear myself pleading to this stranger. But, away from my daughter, not today needing to be the strong one or the calm one, I can hear desperation putting out of me. I think I'm screaming by the time he answers me: "Lord, help me!"

...

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

It wouldn't be fair?! The dogs?!

Some healer this! Some prophet of love and peace! Just another arrogant man, who thinks he's too good to spend time on me.

If I had any pride left, I should have spat a goodbye and turned on my heel.

But there is no hope for her if I do that.

So I pause. I take a beat to hear the insult he'd thrown at me.

And I see the gap.

This oh-so-clever teacher healer was about to be exposed by his own words.

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

There is a beat of a pause.

"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

....

I don't know if it was 'great faith', or simply desperation.

I do know that when you love like the way I love my daughter, you don't give up.

Hope demands it.

Hope fuels it.

And through all despair, desperation, and humiliation: hope triumphs.

Reflection

It has been a long time since I've been an even semi-interested fan of football. Perhaps that's because there are only so many seasons of following Stirling Albion a child can take before it all becomes too much. Perhaps it's because I took for granted -naive 8yr old I was- that Scotland would always play in World Cups and European Finals, able to mix with and nearly overcome Brazil. Perhaps it's because in my teenage years the sport with the oval-shaped ball came along, and had more use for my bulky frame. Whichever, it had been a while since I'd watched a full football match, but this week I watched and rejoiced with the rest of the nation as Scotland qualified for Euro 2020, to be played in 2021!

I have to say, I did however feel a pinch of guilt. I had given up, and moved on for many years. Mine was a fair-weather celebration. I have friends who have travelled around Europe to see Scotland try to do what they did this week, and who for over twenty years, were left only with sorrow, 'glorious defeat' and "maybe next time." For them, I can only imagine the joy. And they deserve it. Because their steadfastness capture something of the character of *true* hope.

It takes a certain madness to keep going, keep supporting in the trouble times – not for nothing was Barack Obama's pre-presidential bestselling book titled 'The Audacity of Hope'. Hope does require audacity.

And relative to the rest of the year, this has been hopeful week: a vaccine appears to be on the horizon that might be the beginning of the start of the return to a life without coronavirus.

But: true hope is not so much seeing the light at end of the tunnel, as hope is that which pushes us through the steps taken in darkness.

Hope is central to our faith. The bible names it alongside love and faith as lasting forever. Nothing that is born of true hope is wasted, and a life without hope is an impoverished life indeed.

There are two misthinkings of hope, misunderstandings that skew our view of hope into unhelpful territory:

1) The first is when hope is confused with optimism. Optimism is a choice to view something favourably; it is the decision to think of the good as more likely than not to come through. Optimism chases after good odds, and places its bets on them. Hope isn't about chance, or whether something will materialise or not. It isn't a choice to view something as favourable (when it may or may not be). The problem with mistaking hope for optimism, is that when the good doesn't come through, when bad things happen, optimism vanishes, and it appears hope is gone. But hope, we know, is never absent.

Hope is the deep rooted conviction that ultimately all will be well. Hope speaks in terms of certain good, even when situations are dire, and helpless. Hope is unscathed by defeat or setback, because hope's victory doesn't depend on the outcome of *one* thing – hope is bound up in the end of all things. In Christian terms, the end of all things, in which the love of Christ reigns supreme.

2) The second misunderstanding launches off from exactly that point. That in the end, everything will be alright. God has got it in hand. No need to worry. It is a Bob Marley philosophy: "Don't worry, be happy, coz every little thing's gonna be alright" – some time, in the end. When all is said and done. The problem here is that the troubles and woes of today are minimised as if they're not important. The answer to any strife we might encounter is to just 'wait it out', be passive and patient. I've heard this view of hope called: 'pie in the sky after we die'

Hope does not let us stand back and wait. Hope calls us to action, and demands our involvement in seeking the good.

True hope shares some qualities of these two misunderstandings. Like optimism, hope does look for a good outcome; and while true hope is rooted in 'it'll be alright in the end'; the problem both of these tend towards a passivity, a wait and see.

True hope also goes to work. True hope doesn't accept things as they are. True hope states the case. Like the woman who sought healing for her daughter.

The woman who, even in the face of criticism and denial from Jesus, finds a way.

Jesus tells her she has great faith.

But I add to that she had great hope. Of course, faith hope and love are often found together. And this episode springs from tremendous love – of daughter and God.

For us, unlike with the woman, not every action of hope has a happy ending.

But that doesn't mean hope has failed.

It certainly doesn't mean faith or love has failed. Sometimes, in the face of disappointment or pain we are tempted to think: 'If only I'd had more faith, it wouldn't be this way'; 'If only I'd loved better, things would not be how they are...'

No our pain stems not from the failure of faith, nor love, nor hope.

It means we live in a world where hope is necessary. And it means understanding that some of the most courageous hope of all is when we are broken, shattered, exhausted, and yet still keep going: trudging one for in front of the other; dragged along by those who love us; carried by the Christ who turned a death-march to Golgotha into a path towards life, and life in all fullness.

When we see a light at the end of the tunnel, that is not hope. Hope is what got us far enough through the tunnel to see it in the first place. Hope was in the tired, weary, dark steps towards the unknown.

So I invite us to ask ourselves today:

Where do we need hope?

Where in our lives are we tired and broken and clinging exhausted on? Where has optimism dried up, but the will for the good remains?

God give you strength today to kindle the survival-fire of hope.

And where is our commitment to action, in hope?

What are we willing to do towards hopeful living, to being-the-change-we-want-to-see in the world?

God give you strength to be light for others.

And where is our trust? What is our hope rooted in?

Let it be in the Christ who has already overcome, in whom love's victory is manifest, and in whom all life finds its fulfilment.

Amen.

Hymn - *Fresh as The Morning*

Chorus

**Fresh as the morning
Sure as the sunrise
God always faithful
You do not change**

1. God of the Bible
God in the Gospel
Hope seen in Jesus
Hope yet to come
You are our centre
Daylight or darkness
Freedom or prison
You are our home

2. God in our struggles
God in our hunger
Suffering with us
Taking our part
Still You empower us
Mothering Spirit
Feeding sustaining
From Your own heart

3. Those without status
Those who are nothing
You have made royal
Gifted with rights
Chosen as partners
Midwives of justice
Birthing new systems
Lighting new lights

4. Not by Your finger
Not by Your anger
Will our world order
Change in a day
But by Your people
Fearless and faithful
Small paper lanterns
Lighting the way

5. Hope we must carry
Shining and certain
Through all our turmoil
Terror and loss
Bonding us gladly
One to the other
Till our world changes
Facing the cross

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Prayer

God of faith, hope and love,

We remember that you are the God of all – the joyful, the busy, the questioning and the grieving.
We remember that you are, above all, the God of the suffering, those who cling by a thread to your love. Those who need true hope.

With them, we dare to ask you why? Why the suffering? Why the pain?

And where is the justice?

Today, we are bewildered by the difficulties of the world. We see suffering and pain: at home, in our street and city, in this country, and across the world, we ask why so many should suffer? And we pray for justice to be done

We think of those who suffer ill health, and we pray for health and well being
We think of those who go hungry, and we pray for food.
We think of those who thirst for clean water, and we pray for their need.
We think of those who know poverty and hardship, and we pray for provision
We think of those who suffer stress and strain, and we pray for rest and nourishment
We think of those who are oppressed, and we pray for their struggle
We think of those who know grief or loss, in the past or present, and we pray for comfort
We think of those who are depressed or anxious, and we pray for soothed souls
We think of those who struggle through life, and pray that you help them hang on

Loving God, we bear our questions because we have care and concern for your creation, and we believe that your promise of love is real. Hear our prayers for others, and hear us as we bring to you those people, places and situations borne in our own hearts, in this moment of quiet.

Merciful God, hear our prayers, which we trust to you, in the name of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Words of Sending

Look at your hands, see the touch and the tenderness...

...God's own for the world

Look at your feet, see the path and the direction...

...God's own for the world

Look at your heart, see the fire and the love...

...God's own for the world

Look at the cross, see God's Son and our Saviour...

...God's own for the world

This is God's world

and we will serve God in it.

Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go, for God's blessing is with you

In the name of Christ

Amen