

Worship 17th January 2021

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Intimations:

Buildings during Enhanced Lockdown

In light of the recent escalation in Covid-19 restrictions to Level 4, and acknowledging the rising numbers locally and nationally, the Government restrictions prevent us holding in-person Sunday worship services in the church building through January's enhanced level 4 Covid restrictions. We'll continue to monitor the situation going forward.

In the meantime, video services will continue to be uploaded to the Church Website, Facebook and YouTube, and paper copies will be available to those who wish them.

Hymn:

1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free;
to take away transgression,
and rule in equity.
2. He comes with succour speedy
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,

whose souls, condemned and dying,
are precious in his sight.

3. He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth;
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth.
Before him on the mountains,
shall peace, the herald, go,
and righteousness, in fountains,
from hill to valley flow.

4. To him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend;
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand forever;
that name to us is love.

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Prayer

God of all,
as ice melts and rivers flow when spring comes, breathe your
life-giving Spirit into our frozen hearts.
Set our minds on fire,
and our feet running, to seek and serve your truth.
Free us from all that captivates us.
Give us a deeper understanding of your truth.
Increase our wisdom.
Remind us that you have written our names on the palms of your crucified hands,
and help us to know that you call us by name.

Loving God, we give you thanks for our church.

Sadly we confess that we so often fail: we turn from tasks you give us; we shrink from speaking out our faith; we shy away from mission.

Yet gladly we recognize that we meet with some success: sometimes we get things right; sometimes we declare our faith with clarity; sometimes we turn our time and talents to the mission you give us.

We can barely begin to shoulder the responsibility of being your Church in your world; but you choose to make no other plan but that your Word be known through us.

We thank you for that privilege and for the times when others catch the excitement of our faith and are drawn onto the path of pilgrimage through words said and love shown through your Church.

Loving God, thanking you for the Church, we pray for its continuing effectiveness as a witness to the glorious good news of the gospel.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Reading

Luke 4:14-22

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Reflection – part 1

We're now getting well into Luke's Gospel; and the action is starting up. Jesus is getting going, amassing a wee following, the Spirit of the Lord is with him and he is preaching all around Galilee in the synagogues and being well received.

And yet in Luke this comes at Chapter 4 – other gospels are far quicker to get to this stage -so it's maybe worth remembering what Luke has told us in the run up to this moment: was it all just stage-setting?; a kind of throat clearing before we really get to hear about Jesus' ministry? – the things he said and did that have made him worth writing about in the first place?

Luke's gospel has the longest preamble to Jesus' adult years of any of the four. Of all the gospels it is the longest, and probably written the latest. It's very very likely that Luke knew Mark, and probably had a copy of it; and there is material that Matthew and Luke share as well which indicated another source shared. And then there is the just Luke stuff.

And a good deal of that 'Just Luke' stuff is in the first few chapters. And looking at that 'Just Luke' stuff maybe starts to give us some clues into why Luke took so long to get to the action of Jesus' ministry. The common thread throughout is that the good news of Jesus is for everyone, *especially* those normally considered outside the scope of God's family.

Luke begins the gospel with a message to Theophilus, which is a name meaning ‘friend of God’. It might be that it was written for a person called Theophilus – but it may also be that we the reader, the ones who are reading and want to be ‘friends of God’ are who it is addressed to.

And then there’s ‘Just Luke’ who has Mary’s song of joy when she visits Elizabeth: the great *magnificaat* about the justice of God raising up the poor and the humble.

It is just Luke who has the Magi come and visit, those foreigners from the East who come from such a different set of cultural and religious assumptions, yet who recognise God’s coming when they see it written in the stars.

When Matthew takes us through Jesus’ genealogy it goes back to Abraham – the point being to link Jesus in the line of God’s covenant people of Israel, from Abraham Isaac and Jacob through King David and on. But when Luke runs Jesus genealogy it goes back not to Abraham and God’s special covenant, but further to the dawn of creation and Adam. The scope of Jesus’ family extends to all creation’s sons and daughters.

There are hints and more hints about who this Luke’s gospel – this *good news*- is for: and the scope of those included goes wider than most would ever have imagined.

As we’ll read shortly – when Jesus starts to spell that out, it is far from a popular message...

Reading

Luke 4:23-30

²³ Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

²⁴ “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Reflection - part 2

To Jesus’ kin at Nazareth his words are offensive: even if -and it’s a big if- they were ready to accept that Jesus is from God, a prophet, or as Jesus seemed to be claiming – even more than that, a fulfilment of God’s promise; then Jesus seems clear it’s not for them that he exists.

To the small fishing village of Nazareth - a rural settlement in the far north of a land where the importance, power, relative wealth, and status lies towards Jerusalem in the South- it might be

exciting that such an important God thing was happening to them. They may well read themselves as the poor and downtrodden that God has promised good to; and if Jesus was here to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour to them – them perhaps, unlikely as it might seem from joiner Joseph's son- there was good in this for them?

But if that was ever a thought – and we've already said that that thought indicated a bit of a stretch of goodwill shown to Jesus – then Jesus undercuts it nearly instantly. No, not for his own people does he stand – “No prophet is welcome in his hometown” – but for a whole different category of outcast and outsider.

People outside the conventional understanding of God's people.

This came as a big surprise to the folks at Nazareth but to readers of Luke's gospel – to us- it shouldn't be a surprise at all: we've already traced the ways Luke has been at pains to suggest that Jesus is going to be good news for those previously thought outside of God's covenant people.

That *is* of course good news for us: the imperative that the God of Israel is *for* everyone is what spawned the spread of Christianity, first through Paul and the disciples throughout the Roman empire and then through missionaries like Columba, Moluag and Drostan to here.

But we would be no better than those Nazirites if we thought the good news stopped at us. Was *for* just us. So what lesson do we take from them, from their poor reaction to Jesus' message for the last and the least; and for the *outsider*.

I want us to think about what an insider and outsider looks like in our context.

Small communities often cling tight together. In small communities you get talk of incomers and outsiders that doesn't happen in the same way in larger populaces. And in any given community there is always a mixed fabric of folk: from folk who grew up here, whose mothers and fathers grew up here, and their parents before them and so on. There are folk who have generations of heritage. And folk who have simply been around a long time and know the place; there are folk who are newer, who settled here but have after some years 'settled'. And then there is -particularly in places like Aberlour and Craigellachie where there is work, and workforces disproportionately large for their residents- a flow of people who are here for spells; short seasonal spells; or longer seasons of life 2,3,5,10 years.

Churches, particularly churches in smaller communities, are often made up more of the longer in the tooth residents. Of the folk who go back generations, of the folk who *know* how things work, of the folk who have memories of how it used to be, and expectations born from then of *how things should be now*. None of that is bad. But when it is left unspoken, it creates a culture barrier – invisible to the people inside, because they understand how everything works inside the barrier – but fairly overwhelming to someone coming in from outside.

Which is why: having the church doors open wide enough isn't the issue.

Our statement of welcome isn't the end of the beginning.

We have a season to begin to think about what coming back to church in person might look like. How do we – tired as we are from Covid and vacancy – longing for the familiar and the safe – not simply retreat to what we know seek God's good news for just us; but instead *actively* reach out to tell and live the truth that Christ has not come for us, not only for us, so much as Christ has come to:

to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

For everyone.

Hymn – *The canticle of the turning*

My soul cries out with a joyful shout
That the God of my heart is great
And my spirit sings of the Wondrous things
That you bring to the ones who wait
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight
And my weakness you did not spurn
So from east to west shall my name be blest
Could the world be about to turn?

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn!*

Though I am small, my God, my all, you
Work great things in me
And your mercy will last from the Depths
Of the past to the end of the age to be
Your very name puts the proud to shame
And to those who would for you yearn
You will show your might
Put the strong to flight
For the world is about to turn

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears
For the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn!*

From the halls of power to the fortress tower
Not a stone will be left on stone
Let the king beware for your
Justice tears ev'ry tyrant from his throne
The hungry poor shall weep no more
For the food they can never ears
There are tables spread, ev'ry
Mouth be fed
For the world is about to turn

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears
For the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn!*

Though the nations rage from age to age
We remember
Who holds us fast
God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp
This saving word that out forebears
Heard is the promise which holds us bound
'Til the spear and rod can be
Crushed by God
Who is turning the world around

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears
For the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn!*

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Prayer

Holy God, our ears are ringing with the sounds of voices
crying out in distress:

people without names yet whose faces stare at us each day; children malnourished, mothers
beyond hope in their grief; fathers helpless to provide, devastated by famine and trapped by
war.

So we too cry out in despair. We cry to you, the God
of babies and mothers and fathers. We cry to you
for justice and for help to know what on earth to
do.

When our ears are deaf because the cries are too familiar, help us to respond with
urgency once more.

When our tears have dried up because we have seen it all before, rekindle our sympathy and our
generosity.

When our anger has abated because cruelty is a fact of life, stir within us a new
sense of justice.

Save us from hypocrisy:

speaking words of peace but not making peace; praying for reconciliation but
not daring to build bridges; criticizing politicians but remaining hard-
hearted at home.

Save us from apathy:

leaving the hard work to others; complaining that we can't do anything
about injustice; failing to get involved in issues in our local
community.

Save us from insensitivity:

going along with the selfishness of society; reinforcing the prejudices of our culture;
failing to notice the needs on our doorsteps.

Save us from a comfortable gospel:

designed to save our own souls only; aimed at the Church rather than the world;
expecting the glory without the pain, the resurrection without the cross.

Save us from making Jesus into a harmless mascot: a comforter but not a challenger; a story-teller
but not a debater; a donkey-rider but not a turner-over of tables; a teacher but not a
transformer; a lover but not a redeemer.

Then may we be better equipped to be people of your Kingdom which
confronts and challenges the division and hatred in the world, to
the glory of your holy name.

Hymn – “I have a dream” a man once said (Tune: Repton)

- 1 ‘I have a dream’, a man once said,
‘where all is perfect peace ;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
* in freedom and in love.’
- 2 But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade ;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind.
- 3 Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere ;
God calls us now to pay the price
through struggles and through sacrifice
of standing for the right.
- 4 So dream the dreams and sing the songs,
but never be content ;
for thoughts and words don’t ease the pain :
unless there’s action, all is vain ;
faith proves itself in deeds.
- 5 Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
help us to do your will ;
don’t let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace.

** The last line of each verse is repeated.*

Pamela J. Pettitt (b. 1954)

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Blessing

The blessing of God be with you

And

The blessing of Christ be with you

And

The blessing of the Holy Spirit be you.

The blessing of God, holy trinity, be with you always.

Amen