

Worship 28th February 2021

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Intimations:

1. Wednesday Zoom Coffee Break 1030-1130am

Each Wednesday from 3rd February onwards you are invited to join with a morning coffee break over Zoom meeting – come and say hi to friends and familiar faces and meet new folk. Whether you're stuck with too much time on your hands, or homeworking and taking a quick break, feel free to drop in and out at any time over the hour. The meeting will have lots of small 'breakout rooms' that you can join so you can catch up with a small group of folk rather than a huge Zoom call.

To join the Zoom meeting you just need either:

The link: www.aberlour.video/coffee

Or

To manually enter on Zoom:

Meeting ID: 917 8188 1669

Passcode: coffee

It'd be great to see you any Wednesday!

2. Bible Study group Tuesday 4pm

By popular demand! Each week we'll meet for a short discussion time about a bible passage, followed by a time of prayer. One way to delve a little deeper into the world of the bible and spend time nurturing a relationship with God. If you're at all interested – or if you would be interested in another time – please drop a line to Andrew at akimmitt@churchofscotland.org.uk or call/text/WhatsApp on 07752306462

3. Lent Book Group – Thursdays 7.30pm from 25th

A few weeks ago I included a thought in a sermon about the Insider/Outsider dynamics of church life. Who feels like they belong? How do we become a place where people are welcomed and embraced into our community?

This Lent Season we'll take a journey of reflection with the poet Pádraig Ó Tuama and public theologian Glenn Jordan (both of the [Corrymeela Community](#)) looking some of these themes the biblical book of Ruth with their book: 'Borders and Belonging' – this short book comes very highly recommended and will be a touching, searching, and life-giving journey through Lent. Each week will involve around 10 pages of reading, and then a group discussion on Thursdays at 7.30pm (initially via Zoom, in person if ever possible).

The book is £12.99 RRP available from The BookShop.org (which supports local bookshops) at <https://uk.bookshop.org/books/borders-and-belonging-the-book-of-ruth/9781786222565>; Direct from the publisher at <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786222565/borders-and-belonging> as well as on Amazon and other bookshops.

Please(!) don't let the cost of the book put you off if you would like to join along - we can get copies for anyone who needs it.

Again, if you're interested please drop a line to Andrew at akimmitt@churchofscotland.org.uk or call/text/WhatsApp on 07752306462 or drop in on zoom via www.aberlour.video/lent

4. Online Sunday Services and Facebook + Church coffee Sunday 1000-1100

Finally a reminder that we are sharing our Sunday morning worship digitally on our [website](#); on [YouTube](#); and on [Facebook](#) where we also post daily 'Prayer points' and publicise other news.

From Sunday 7th February we'll also be meeting for Zoom coffee (in the same way as Wednesday coffee above) between 10am-11am. Feel free to drop by and say hi:

To join the Zoom meeting you just need either:

The link: www.aberlour.video/coffee

Or

To manually enter on Zoom:

Meeting ID: 917 8188 1669

Passcode: coffee

Call to Worship

Holy One,
we gather this day
and come as we are
with our repenting hearts,
with our persistent dreaming.
Accept all we bring before you today,
accept our worship we pray

Prayer

God our God,
Throughout time and history,
from Your eternal glory
You have called through the clamour of a creation too often too busy for you
You have called individuals
Prophets and Kings,
and women of wisdom
You have called communities,
families, and towns, and nations,
and today your call is to everyone, the world over
that they might come to you, and might know your love.

And so we have come.
Come this Sunday morning,
come as a community of your people,
gathered as your body, Christ's church.

And each of us have come from different contexts,
from different lives,
with different joys and troubles,
with differing aches and strains,
Yet we all come – in need of your healing love.

So heal us Lord

Heal us from the wounds we carry daily
from the weights of daily living – the endless to-do lists,
and the stresses of the week.
Heal us from our worries and anxieties.
let us find in you a time to be still, to breathe afresh,
and to find peace.

“Come to me all who are heavy laden, I will give you rest”

Heal us from the wounds of our strained relationships;
release us from words said that cloy to minds, spinning around on repeat, pulling us down,
ease our pent-up frustration, our hurt and our anger
it is weight we need carry no longer|
and is a risk only to ourselves, and those to whom it might spill out, misdirected
break bonds of hate and apathy, replace them with relationships definted by love.

“Come to me all who are heavy laden, I will you rest”

Heal us from the wounds of our sin,
When we ought to have lived as those worthy to be called your children,
we confess we have not.
In the process, we have hurt others, or neglected to love fully,
and we have hurt ourselves, and failed to see ourselves with the love you show us.
Heal us, that we might grow in your love,
that we might be made in nearer likeness to Christ,
that we might be claimed as your redeemed children.

“Come to me all who are heavy laden, I will you rest”

So we pray, asking your Spirit will be with us as we worship together,
that our days might be blessed, and we know more deeply Christ who taught us all to pray together saying:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is 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, the power and the glory, forever.
Amen.

Hymn

PSALM 122

- 1 I rejoiced when I heard them say :
'Let us go to the house of God.'
And now our feet are standing
in your gates, O Jerusalem !
Shalom, shalom,
the peace of God be here.
Shalom, shalom,
God's justice be ever near.
- 2 Like a temple of unity
is the city, Jerusalem.
It is there all tribes will gather,
all the tribes of the house of God.
- 3 It is faithful to Israel's law,
there to praise the name of God.
All the judgement seats of David
were set down in Jerusalem.
- 4 For the peace of all nations, pray :
for God's peace within your homes.
May God's lasting peace surround us ;
may it dwell in Jerusalem.
- 5 For the love of my friends and kin
I will bless you with signs of peace.
For the love of God's own people
I will labour and pray for you.

Psalm 122

Bernadette Farrell (b.1957)

CCLI Licence No. 649173

Reading – Luke 13:1-9

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

⁶ Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' ⁸ He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Reflection

We're all in the same boat – we're all in the same storm:
freedom to the tarrying; challenge to the comfortable and complacent.

This reading has at its heart one of the biggest questions of life; one of the questions that can shake us, and which can overshadow our sense of faith and relationship with God completely.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Some people tell Jesus about the violence that the Romans had perpetrated against some Galilean Jews. The cryptic phrase in the reading is 'the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices' – a euphemism for Roman soldiers murdering Galilean Jews during their time of worship and offering before God. The question in the background is a version of 'Why would God let this happen to people only doing what is good and holy?'

Jesus seems to pick up an insinuation from them that perhaps the questioners thought these Galileans had done something to make them *deserve* their murder. WE know similar sorts of questions are asked of Jesus elsewhere in the gospels: there's the man who was blind from birth and Jesus was asked whether it was he or his parents who had sinned to cause it. Jesus, in that case, rebukes the question and states what ought to be obvious: neither. The man's condition was not a punishment for sin at all.

He does a similar thing here in this reading: the Galileans had done nothing to make them *deserve* the violence they experienced. Taking up what must have been another talked-about news item of the day, he says the same about the 18 people who were killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed on them. Another catastrophe, this time of sheer chance and accident rather than violence.

Jesus is clear, and Christians need to be too: bad things don't come to anyone because they deserve it.

No rhyme or reason to these things – certainly not a divine one.

I think this point is really important to consider in the climate we've been living through in the last year. With Covid, so many people have died, so many people have been desperately unwell and survived, so many people had it 'relatively mildly' but live with long-term lingering symptoms. And it's been so clear that while there might be general trends to identify; in any given individual case there is no rhyme nor reason to how it unfolds. There are those amongst us who have followed the restrictions and advice in only the loosest sense, and been fine – either not catching it, or being asymptomatic. And there are people who have done *every little thing* by the book: the 20seconds, the mask, the sanitiser, the distancing and isolation, and who have still caught it. I know of a couple who lived in complete housebound isolation for 9 months, with he only contact being through socially distanced deliveries from a family member: who both contracted and died. Your heart breaks for the daughter whose care for her parents was the avenue for the lethal virus.

Stories like that have been terrifying us for a year now. And a year is too long for anyone to live in terror. So it's maybe natural that we cling to anything that might give us a sense of security, even if it's based on a fiction.

One such fiction is that people who have had the bad things happen to them must've done something to deserve it. A lapse in concentration, a reckless meeting, not staying the 2metres, or forgetting to wash hands that one time. The temptation is to pretend that tragedies are always preventable, and that therefore there is always a blame or a fault at the root of it all.

Of course there are things we can do – in all walks of life – to reduce risk. And movements and legislation to make life safer, from seatbelts in cars to health&safety legislation at work, to the restrictions and guidelines for Covid, are literally life-saving measures.

Risk can and should be reduced. But it can never be eliminated.

So why do we so often cling to an idea that we deserve what we get? Some might call it karma, others a type of natural order, the justice of the universe. I think it's an attempt to give ourselves a false sense of security – that if we do everything right, then we'll be alright. But it's a lie. And if we project that lie onto others, and ever get even close to suggesting that those who are beset with struggles and tragedy are somehow to blame, then it becomes a deeply deeply damaging lie.

The truth, of course is – in one sense much scarier. Facing the reality of just how frail and vulnerable we are, how the line between our comfort and wellbeing and utter tragedy is much thinner than we'd like: that's the stuff existential crises are made of.

And yet it's the fact that so many people live with every day: the car journey that should never have ended in a crash; the rogue 1-in-a-million cancer cell cancer division and growth is too fast, and whose spread results in an eventual life-changing diagnosis; the normal day which is turned upside down by fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane.

Some of us know the shuddering, gut-twisting, all-consuming way such events crash into our life. For the rest of us, there are few words and no depth of love that we can adequately offer.

The fact of our life's fragility is universal. I said that in a sense, that is terrifying. But only in one sense.

There is another sense, from Jesus' words, that it ought to be universally comforting.

Jesus says in rebuke to those who come to him that we *all* must repent lest we perish. I've talked before about the true sense of that message – that where the word 'repent' has become, through frankly abusive preaching, involved with a threat of hellfire and damnation, what we should actually hear is a call to transformation, and a transformation shaped by a response to God's love and grace. God, in Christ, offers the free gift of life.

To the temptation towards existential terror we have to say – in the Words of Saint Paul - If God is for us, who can be against us?. While life might be fragile, while tragedy seems a fact of life: in the ultimate and heavenly sense, the sense that *really* and *eternally* matters, God is for us.

We have nothing to fear if the God is on our side. Also true in reverse: The lord is on our side; therefore we have nothing to fear. In Christ, God has determined to be 'on our side' once and for all. He is the human in which we find our own humanity; and as the human who is God's own beloved, we take up place as God's own beloved.

There is no rhyme or reason to the suffering of the world. Which is neither to downplay it, nor simply stoically to accept it: where lives are shattered and hearts are broken we are called to comfort, to pray, to lament and howl against human suffering. Like the gardener in the parable we must plead for the chance of flourishing life, and do whatever we can to preserve and nourish it. But we do so as the secondary caregiver: we do so in response and alongside the care of God; who in the ultimate sense – in this life and the next is the one who secures us and envelopes us in love so great that it goes beyond, way beyond, our understanding.

Hymn

1 How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory

2 Behold the Man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished

3. I will not boast in anything
No gifts no pow'r no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

CCLI Song # 1558110
Stuart Townend
CCLI Licence No. 649173

Prayer

Generous God,

This week we bring before you the pains of our world and our lives. We bring before you're the howls of injustice, the cries of anguish, and the despair of those with little hope.

As we pray now, bringing the generalities of situations all too common – we shall pause to bring silently to you, those specific situations which burden our hearts. You are, after all, not a God of Generalities, but the God of specific named people, beloved to you, and known by you with an intimacy beyond our understanding.

We pray for all people around the world in fear of such violence: acts of war and destruction committed in the midst of peaceful civilian lives. Where terror has a grip, where violence dominates, Lord bring justice, bring peace.

We pray for those who know the harshness of natural disaster; where lives are lost in unpredictable catastrophe. Where floods or drought ruin crops, where there will be no bountiful harvest this year; we pray for generosity and provision for all your people.

We pray for those who are of poor health. We pray for those known to us, where poor health prevents full living; where pain is a daily reality; where frailty causes bodies to falter. Lord, give healing, give comfort, give perseverance.

We pray for those who mourn: those who mourn lives that have been lost; long lives well lived, which have come to an end; and lives which had still much promise and feel to us to have ended far far too soon.

We trust each life to you, saving God, and we trust that each soul finds its home in your eternal love; but for those who mourn, who know any loss; give comfort, give reassurance, give your gentle presence in the lives of us still living.

We pray for all those growing: for young people who so often are at the heart of a story of faith that we can overlook. WE trust them to your nurturing, and we pray that all those involved in their lives of young people and children will bring them to a flourishing today and tomorrow.

And we pray for those close to us, known to us, the people of Aberlour and Craigellachie, our own friends and families, and we name before you in prayer those remembered in our hearts this week.

Lastly, Lord God, we pray for ourselves: give us this day our daily bread, the earthly bread and nourishment which we need to sustain us, and too, the bread of life – the relationship with you on which our soul depends.

All this we pray, the prayers of our own hearts, and the prayers of this community of your Church, in the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Hymn

- 1 Mothering God, you gave me birth
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of every breath,
you are my rain, my wind, my sun ;
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.
- 2 Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of life, and grape of love,
your very body for my peace ;
your very body for my peace.
- 3 Mothering Spirit, nurturing one,
in arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow,
until I flower, until I know ;
until I flower, until I know.

Jean Janzen (b. 1933)
CCLI Licence No. 649173

Blessing

And so our God remains patient with us once again
as we seek ways to be better bearers of fruit.

May we go from here to love and to serve God
with all we have and in all that we do.

And may we do it in the name of the Holy Trinity,
the Father,
the Son
and the Holy Spirit.

Now and forevermore, Amen.