

Worship 31st January 2021

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Intimations:

1. **New! 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. **New! 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. **New! Lent Book Group – Thursdays 7.30pm from 18th February**

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

4. **Online Sunday Services and Facebook + New! 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

Centurion or widow,
Powerful or powerless,
There is room in God's heart for both.

In stories of resurrection and restoration,
we come today to listen and learn,
to hear again the faith of high and low.

A story of equality and love,
a love that is on offer to each of us
today and tomorrow and for eternity.

Come in faith and hope
to the one who sees in each of us
someone in need of God's love.

Hymn

- 1 For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead.
*And God will delight
when we are creators of justice and joy,
yes, God will delight
when we are creators of justice,
justice and joy!*
- 2 For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair.
- 3 For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong.
- 4 For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mind-set of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live.
- 5 For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free.

Shirley Erena Murray (b. 1931)

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Prayer

God of healing,
into the balm of your presence we come,
ready to praise you
for all your creativity,
in this time
and always.

We praise you for the story you share,
a story in which we all find our part,
a story which tells of a world reconciled,
a people restored,
of salvation and grace.

As centurions and widows,
those with power and those without,
testify down the ages,
you are trustworthy.

Jesus, healer and reconciler,
we come as your sisters and brothers,
to walk the way of love,
to follow the path you lead,
to share the grace we experience,
and to know, always,
that in you we find God.

God of grace,
we recognise also that we come today
as your fallen children,
with so many aspirations and hopes,
so many good intentions and dreams,
yet we find ourselves causing harm
to ourselves and to others.
In doing so we do damage to your Kingdom,
and are a poor witness to your love.

Forgive us,
in the name of Jesus,
and work in us
that we might strive to be a people
who know and bring reconciliation,
who know and bring restoration,
who know and bring healing
for relationships and lives.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Reading – Luke 7:1-17

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. ³When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy of having you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.’ ⁶And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; ⁷therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go”, and he goes, and to another, “Come”, and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this”, and the slave does it.’ ⁹When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ ¹⁰When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

¹¹ Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. ¹²As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. ¹³When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ ¹⁴Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’ ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favourably on his people!’ ¹⁷This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Reflection

This a healing story. Jesus is at the miracles again, healing people. And not just a normal healing, but two very strange healings. First a healing without even going to the place of the ‘patient’; and a full blown resurrection from death.

I find healing stories in the bible difficult. Partly because they are miraculous, and miracles just *are* difficult. That is kind of the point of them – sometimes we explain away miracles in the bible as if people back then were much more naïve, gullible, or stupid. But on the whole, they weren’t. They understood fine well how ridiculous the events described in the gospels sounded. I don’t think we have any reason to imagine they found them any easier to hear than us.

But the bigger reason I struggle with healing stories of Jesus isn’t so much that they’re miracles as the apparent injustice involved. Why that person, and not this person? And why those people 200 years ago, and not now? What is God doing helping people through Jesus then? And what is it

designed to show? When there are so many folk today needing healing: physical, spiritual, emotional, relational healing: and it's not as simple as Jesus saying what appears to be a magic word and *poof*... everything's alright again.

I don't know if there's a satisfactory answer to that challenge. I know that it's a question I struggle with. But I also know it's probably not the right question. And that even if it had an answer, the answer itself wouldn't make people well again. The fact is that life has all manner of tragedies, disappointments, and heart-wrenching 'It shouldn't be like this situations'. And not only do I know it's ok to feel like that – I know it's ok to be angry about it, and to take that anger to God. God is not only big enough to take it, but after our anger and our tears and our rage and the howls of our souls, after we're all wrung out and exhausted and at the end of ourselves; God is there as love. As peace. As Comfort.

It's a mistake, I think, to try and extract a universal understanding of healing from Jesus' interaction of these two people. Because that is what this story is. An interaction with two individual people. So let's, this week, not look for universal lessons, or tie ourselves in philcopshioal knots. Let's do something more simple, and enter into the story, and look at it again.

Once upon a time there was a soldier and lady
who had been widowed.

They were not connected.

In fact, they moved about in quite different social circles.

The soldier was from Rome, a man of rank and status,

while the widow was on the edge of society,

struggling with the poverty and exclusion,

which was the lot of many a widow in those days.

Yet, they had more in common than first meets the eye.

The soldier had a servant who was sick and on his death bed,

while the widows only son

was also confronting a terminal illness,

with no cure expected.

Both wanted healing for people they loved.

Yet all the money, status or influence in the world

could not find a cure for any of their loved ones.

Only a miracle it seemed would make their life different.

The soldier, was a man used to making plans, and giving orders.

So he sends some influential Jewish friends to Jesus,

to plead that Jesus would take time out from his busy life

to come and heal his beloved servant.

The widow had no one to do her bidding,

and anyway it was now too late as her son had died

and was being carried out in his coffin.

Her only hope of some future stability has been ripped away,

and she is inconsolable.

Her heart is breaking and the tears are blinding her.

Who can help these two people?
Can you or I,
or anyone make a difference to them in their grief and sorrow?

Jesus does not even reach the soldier's house,
when he is told not to bother coming
by some other friends of the soldier.
The soldier feels he is not worthy of attention,
that Jesus must have better and bigger things to do,
than come into his house to heal his servant.
He thought that if Jesus just spoke
with the authority that was within him,
that would be enough to heal the servant.

It all seems a bit presumptuous.
Yet Jesus gets what the soldier is asking him.
He knows that the work he does is the work of God,
and God is capable of doing anything,
so he speaks the word,
and at that very moment the soldier's servant gets better!
A miracle!

Well, as he moves on toward Nain
he sees a funeral procession coming towards him,
and he notices the widow and is moved by her helplessness,
and he stops to coffin processional,
and speaks to the dead man,
who sits up in his coffin to the amazement of everyone!
Jesus now makes it clear that God has come to help his people.

It does not matter what status you have in society.
It does not matter what your hopes and expectations might be,
because God makes a difference to the lives of all people.
A soldier, an outsider, and even an enemy
is shown the same mercy as a poor widow,
and both are blessed and restored
to the community of God's people.

So maybe it is time we stopped limiting the potential
of what God can do in our lives.

...After all, we cannot measure how God heals.

Hymn

- 1 We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.
- 2 The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.
- 3 So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind, and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

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Prayer

Lord Jesus,
healer,
restorer,
reconciler,
hear our prayers for our world,
our community,
and for ourselves.

We pray for your creation, Lord,
our home and source of life,
a world of so much diversity and beauty,
a world of abundance that
reflects your overflowing generosity
and hospitality.

We pray for this world as it groans
under the weight of our desires and expectations
for cheap energy,
for cheap food,
for cheap clothing,
for cheap communication,

for cheap living.

And we know, all the while,
that somewhere the cost for our expectations
has to be paid,
and too often it is paid
by the very environment on which we rely,
by people paid scant wages,
by communities who have few choices.

May we recognise the cost of our living,
and seek reconciliation and restoration.

We pray for people within our communities, Lord,
who know, even this very day,
heartache and heartbreak,
for families that have torn apart,
for relationships broken,
for the burden that grief brings,
for the isolation that loneliness entails,
for the unwell and
for those with life-limiting illnesses.

May we strive to bring
healing to those who are suffering,
hope to those whose dreams of fulfilment lie shattered,
new beginning to those who are ready to give up,
and may we recognise any part we might have played
in the pain of others
and seek reconciliation and restoration.

Now hear us, Lord,
as we take time to bring to mind
people and situations into which
we can breathe your healing grace,
and convict us to action.

Silence for our own prayers

Now hear our prayers,
healing Lord,
as we bring them to you,
in your holy name,
Amen.

Hymn – For the healing of the nations CH4 706

- 1 For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord ;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.
- 2 Lead us forward into freedom,
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.
- 3 All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned ;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.
- 4 You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind ;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind ;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (*b.* 1929)

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Blessing

And so may we go from here
to empower the powerless;
to be empowered by Christ,
who calls us;
to strive for justice and
to work toward peace
until the day is done.

And as we do so,
may God's blessing be upon us all.
In the name of the Father,
the Son
and the Holy Spirit.
Amen