

Worship 7th March 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
coming just as we are:
we are lost, waiting to be found,
we are searching, hoping to rejoice.
Accept all we bring before you today.
Accept our worship we pray.

Prayer

God our God,
We seek your welcoming, open arms,
we want to be wrapped up in your embrace.
We take this time to worship you.

And yet, you are the One who - even as we seek you -
has found us.
And meet us wherever we find ourselves,
even if we don't know how we got here.
You are the One who leads us through times of trial;
the One who supports us in sorrow and struggle;
the One who is beside us when all is bleak.
Holy One, we praise you.

God our Shepherd,
we confess that we often lose our way.
Sometimes, we follow like sheep
and end up in places that we should not be.
At other times, we choose our own paths
and end up hitting a dead end.
In a moment of quiet,
we bring before you those things we have done in our straying
and ask that, in your mercy,
you will bring us back on track.
May we, like the Prodigal Son,
come to ourselves.
May we trust and follow you alone.
May we listen and follow you alone.
May we act after worshipping you alone this day.
Amen

Hymn

- 1 The King of Love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never ;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.
- 2 Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.
- 3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed ;
but yet in love he sought me,

and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.

4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me ;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight ;
thy unction grace bestoweth ;
and oh, what wonder and delight
from thy pure chalice floweth !

6 And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never ;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever !

Henry Williams Baker (1821–1877)(*alt.*)
from *Psalms* 23

CCLI Licence No. 649173

Reading – Luke 15:1-32

15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3So he told them this parable: 4“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 7Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

8“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ 10Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

11Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them.

13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

17But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Hymn

1 "You are always with me.
Everything I have is yours"
The father threw his arms around
his son, once lost, and now is found.

2 What if you lost one of ten coins?
Would you care enough to look?
Search high and low and all around
God will rejoice when we are found.

3 On the mountains keeping sheep
One goes wandering, now has gone
Leave it alone? Not for a day
God's joy and love is on display.

4 Jesus speaks to us today
Words mysterious, we're the clay
Love for us all, God always shows
Help us to listen and to grow.

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Reflection

I don't like to assume that any particular given reading that we turn to in worship will be known before we turn to reflect on it. But this trio of parables from Jesus have, each in their own way, entered into our shared cultural awareness in a way that very few passages of the bible share.

As parables themselves they seem, at the outset, to be among the more straightforward in terms of the point being made. Jesus is being criticised for the company he keeps (a common theme throughout the gospels) and those of religious and social standing are grumbling about the fact that this supposed Man of God is consorting with people who – in their eyes- are certainly not ‘of God’.

And he is not simply telling them to change their ways, or healing them, or teaching them: he is *eating* with them. In their culture, surrounded as it was by laws about food purity, the act of eating together was a sacred thing. In ours, it remains an important social gesture – there are lots of things that go said and unsaid, many social codes about how we eat and with whom. We communicate much about who we are and who we belong to by the company we keep at mealtimes.

To castigate the grumblers, Jesus tells three well-known parables and their point is obvious: through Jesus, God has not come for the good, the worthy, the holy; but for the lost, the broken, the wayward.

And there are all sorts of interesting subtleties and questions to get our teeth into with the parables. There are sermons upon sermons to be preached about the fact the supposedly ‘good’ shepherd left the other 99 alone to fend for themselves; about the widow who maybe burns more than a coin’s worth of oil in looking for the lost one when it might have waited until morning. There are observations about what ‘wild’ living does; about riches-to-rags catastrophe; about the hubris and folly of youth; about what we *think* we want versus what we actually flourish from.

There is intricate psychological profiling to be done on the younger son, his older brother, the father: what made the Son want to leave? Why the rush to receive his inheritance? And how insensitive of him to ask for it? Was the father really so stingy towards the older son in the meantime? If so was it from grief for that younger son? Or had the older son simply never asked for anything, instead expecting that the father would somehow guess what his desires were? What is the son really bitter about? How far do we relate to him? What does it mean to be deserving? Or undeserving?

That is the real *joy* of parables – that as stories they are they to be poked and prodded and interrogated. They are stories that illuminate part of *our* story, in them we can see ourselves, and we can be shaped by them, and they will shape us – as individuals, as community. So if you get a chance, later today, later this week – I’d really encourage to spend some time with these stories and ask those sorts of questions. Not because there are obvious or right answers, but because in the asking we might find we learn something about ourselves, and something about God. Those us in the Lent book group this year read the poet Padraig O’Tuama say something similar about a litany of questions that might be raised in a different biblical story – but what he said about Ruth holds true for the parables:

“None of these questions are answerable, which is their glory. And the text is so determined to rest [with what it tells us – no less, no more] that it omits much detail from the lives of people who already – even in a few short verses – have become impressed on the reader’s mind. In doing so, the text provides a container for the readers, while also allowing for many small openings through which the imagination can travel”

Those small openings for our imagination become the windows through which we glimpse something of God.

Of course, all these pondering and wonderings hang under the obvious headline that we’ve already seen Jesus make clear: God is for the lost ones of the world; there is heavenly rejoicing greater than we can imagine over the one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Now, two millenia of church thought and preaching on the idea of ‘sin’ and ‘repentance’ comes with two millenia’s worth of baggage. For many with an upbringing in the church, talk of sin and repentance is at best unappealing, for some it is language that has been wielded as a weapon, leaving harm, destruction, guilt, and shame. I suspect for the vast majority of folk in society today, it is language that seems quaint, outdated, and simply irrelevant.

All of which is, I think, understandable. And I’m not particularly wedded to the *language* of sin and repentance – albeit that this is the language of the bible. I do, however, think that the sort of things Jesus is talking about here are very real and relevant for society today. Every day the newspapers and social media are overflowing with stories about who has done what wrong; who is willing or unwilling to say sorry for what; and whether such apologies are merited, genuine, or make any difference. Our public conversations are full of chatter about fault and blame, what amends and recompense should be sought, and whether there can ever be amends that will be sufficient. These all seem to me to be conversations in the arena of what Jesus talked about in terms of sin and repentance – albeit that in place of the heavenly God against whom is sinned and to whom one repents; a nebulous entity of ‘society’ or ‘the public’ has been established.

And then there’s the language, in Jesus’ parables – less freighted with unhappy connotations than ‘sin’ and ‘repentance’ – of being lost. And I think that language speaks to a very real and raw feeling that many of us have. A feeling that manifests in very many ways: of not being sure quite who or what we are; or why we are the way are; a sense of not being sure what to do or how to go about doing it; a sense of dislocation from

ourselves. What I'm calling 'lostness' can be a sort of sadness, weariness, subtle but deep discomfort. It often comes in the form of nostalgia and remembering the 'good old times'. The word 'lost' bring to mind an idea of 'place' and of not being in the right place, and not sure which place you're in. The 'place' we're talking about here is of course not simply geographical (though it may well be...); but can be about emotions; relationships; sense of self; belonging.

All of which makes me certain that these parables have a life and a role for us today, a profoundly relevant role for us today. I suppose that's probably why I began by encouraging us to take more time with them later in the day and week.

But I think we'd miss the point of them completely if we focus so heavily on the parables themselves that we forget about the one telling them. The whole point of the parables is to reveal something fundamental about the one telling them: the one who is both the man eating with undesirables, sinners and tax-collectors; and the God who seeks those who have become lost – in whatever sense- and who provides direction, shelter, and a home for those lost ones. These parables speak to the heart of who God is: God is a God of grace. And these parables reveal what that grace looks like.

In one sense or another, we are all lost and we are all sinners. We all rely on God's grace. And through God's grace we are promised and given a wholeness that nothing else comes close to providing. It is amazing grace, and whatever the form of our lostness, it is God's grace that leads us home.

Amen.

Hymn

- 1 Amazing grace ! how sweet the sound
 that saved a wretch like me !
 I once was lost, but now am found,
 was blind, but now I see.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 and grace my fears relieved ;
 how precious did that grace appear
 the hour I first believed !
- 3 Through many dangers, toils, and snares
 I have already come ;
 'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
 and grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me,
 his word my hope secures ;
 he will my shield and portion be
 as long as life endures.

John Newton (1725–1807)

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Prayer

God of all stories,
Father to Christ of the parables,
In you are wrapped up the stories of each of us,
intertwined as they are with each others,
each thread a magnificent cloth of your people.

We have heard stories
of being lost and being found.
Some of the best known words...
Some of the most comforting words...
We have rejoiced at stories

of being lost and being welcomed safely home.
We have reflected upon stories
of being those who were lost
as well as being those who were left behind.
As we think of these familiar parables once more,
We take time to think about ourselves
and all across our world who need to know
of your generous mercy
and unconditional love.

God of love,
you never cease to open your arms to us
when we turn to you.
Give us grace and understanding
to recognise the distress of others.
We pray for all who are in dark places
be it through their own choices,
the misguidance of others,
or by force.

May all know
that nothing can separate us
from your love.

May the arms of your followers
reach out to touch the lost and the weary
the lonely and the broken,
and may knowledge of your all-encompassing love
be with all who struggle to hold on for hope.

Lord, hear our prayer.
Amen.

Hymn

*Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning
New mercies I see
All I have needed
Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me*

1 Great is Thy faithfulness
O God my Father
There is no shadow
Of turning with Thee
Thou changest not
Thy compassions they fail not
As Thou hast been
Thou forever wilt be

2 Summer and winter
And springtime and harvest
Sun moon and stars
In their courses above
Join with all nature
In manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness
Mercy and love

3 Pardon for sin
And a peace that endureth
Thy own dear presence
To cheer and to guide
Strength for today
And bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine
With ten thousand beside

CCLI Song # 5196100
Thomas Obediah Chisholm
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Blessing

Go into the world
loved,
forgiven,
and found.

May you see the love of God
all around you.
May you show the compassion of Christ
in all that you do.
And may you be surrounded by the Holy Spirit
as you seek her guidance today, tomorrow and forever more