

## Worship at Home—Sunday 19 September 2021

**Rev Easter Smart; Heather Merriman; and Louise Lamont**

### Call to Worship—Heather

The Lord your God is with you,  
the Mighty Warrior who saves.  
He will take great delight in you;  
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing.  
*(Zephaniah 3:17).*

### Opening Prayer—Easter

O God of all life  
Whose wisdom in the beginning  
Fashioned the body and soul of each creature  
And filled the earth, sea and skies with good things

Before you the mountains break forth in song  
The heavenly beings rejoice  
The trees clap their hands  
The seas and the rivers, whales and all that live in the waters exalt you.

You are in the blowing wind and the coloured leaves  
and night and day you watch over your children and your ears are ready to listen to their prayers.

We wonder at your endless creativity calling forth new life  
Loving God help us realise how much we depend on you  
You have given us life and you have made us able to think about its meaning  
And to choose and work for what is good.

We come to worship you but we also come in need of your guiding love for we live in a world where  
much is confusing  
Where many voices and opinions strive to be heard  
We confess that we are in need of your guidance to know what is true.



It is with great sadness  
that we have to  
intimate the death of

Ann Williamson  
32 Thomson Drive

Please pray for the  
family

At other times, we are so preoccupied with our own needs, so distracted by the clamour of competing pressures or demands that often we do not see with eyes of faith or hear with understanding- what you would say to us. Forgive our sins,

Forgive the times when we doubt your power or forget to trust in your love and providence  
Rid us from any harmful or unhelpful thought or habit which keeps us from the good life you intend for us.

Renew our love for you and open our hearts to receive the love you have to give to each of us  
We have known your hand holding us fast before  
Your steps marking out the way for us  
Awaken us to your presence which transforms our hearts and minds you assure us that nothing in all creation can separate us from your love

BE our refuge and our strength and hear us as we pray together our the prayer our Lord Jesus and Saviour taught us to pray.

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 the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

## **The Scriptures—read by Louise**

### **Revelation 7: 9-12**

#### **The Great Multitude in White Robes**

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb.”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

“Amen!  
Praise and glory  
and wisdom and thanks and honour  
and power and strength  
be to our God for ever and ever.  
Amen!”

## Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face shine on us—  
so that your ways may be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.

May the peoples praise you, God;  
may all the peoples praise you.  
May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you rule the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations of the earth.  
May the peoples praise you, God;  
may all the peoples praise you.

The land yields its harvest;  
God, our God, blesses us.  
May God bless us still,  
so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

### Sermon—Heather

I don't know how familiar you are with this Psalm but it's one that I often reflect on. So, I hope I can share with you this morning why it's one that I think is important to remind ourselves of and bring to mind often as we seek to serve and follow God.

The first verse of Psalm 67 is an echo of a prayer God gives to Aaron and the priests in Numbers chapter 6. Verses 22-27 say this:

*"The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.'"*

*So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."*

These words were given by God. It was God's desire and longing to bless his people.

But there's another passage from Genesis that the verses of Psalm 67 can be linked to, and that is the promise God gives to Abraham. In Genesis 12:2-3 God speaks to Abraham:

*"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

God's desire to bless his people does not belong only to the Israelites, only to those who already know God. God's heart is for all people, all nations to be blessed, through Abraham and his descendants. Psalm 67 combines the priestly blessing with God's promise to Abraham to create a renewed vision of the way things are meant to be. We are meant to seek God's blessing, to ask for it, and later on I'll go into more detail as to why but I read somewhere that "we should seek God's blessing so that our gladness in God will spread to all the nations".

So, how seriously do you take the gift of God's blessing? How often do you hear or read or use the words "God bless" as a kind of greeting or sign off message? Is it something we take for granted; something we expect God to give us (purely) because we are His children or because we think we've earned it? If so, we shouldn't. Because by ourselves we are undeserving of it. The writer of Psalm 67 recognises that. The opening line of his song is "God be gracious to us", other versions translate it as "God be merciful to us."

Mercy and grace are terms that as Christians we are familiar with, but out of interest and to remind myself of their true definitions I looked up both terms this week. The first one I found for mercy said it is "a broad term that refers to the benevolence, forgiveness and kindness in a variety of ethical, religious, social and legal contexts." Benevolence, in case you're unsure, is "the quality of being well-meaning, kindness."

Not all that helpful but I then looked up a second much more helpful definition of the word mercy which is, "the compassion and kindness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm".

God is a just God, he is sovereign, and he has all authority and power to punish or harm us, but instead he is merciful.

Grace is "courteous goodwill". It is not asked for, cannot be earned, is not deserved but is freely given. God is a just God, he is sovereign, and he has all authority and power to punish or harm us, but instead he is merciful, and more than that he is gracious to us as well. When I was growing up I was taught that God's mercy was not receiving what we deserved, *ie* punishment for sin; and God's grace was receiving from God what we did not deserve.

Here's a scenario that may help us understand further: Suppose someone attempted to rob your house. You learn that the thief didn't intend to do any harm they were just in a desperate situation. Instead of calling the police, you choose to pardon the robber and let the matter go—that's mercy. Then you give them some food and a small amount of money to help them through this trying time—that's grace.

And we, as human beings, are all in need of God's mercy because we are sinners. We need God's mercy. God's mercy which, let's be honest, he could have given to us simply by leaving us alone, by not destroying us and punishing us as we deserve. Yet not only does God bestow mercy on us but we are all gifted God's grace as well. God in his great abundance and love chose to show us mercy and grace by offering us salvation through Jesus' death on the cross.

Psalm 67 reminds us from the very beginning to humbly enter God's presence, to remind ourselves that we can only enter the presence of a holy, perfect, just God because we have been set free from the power of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Then the Psalmist goes beyond asking for mercy, he recalls the words God himself gave and asks God to bless him. "God be merciful to us and bless us". We should not be content only with God's mercy but be bold enough after forgiveness to ask for blessing. God's love for us is so great that he wants us to receive his mercy and ask for blessing. God's desire is to bless us. As we heard in our call to worship God rejoices over us with singing, he wants to lavish his love upon us.

The next part of the verse says "May God (be gracious to us and bless us and) make his face shine upon us." I love the image of God looking down on us and smiling, his face beaming. A shining face is the opposite of an angry or displeased face, a shining face implies favour. To know that as God looks upon you he is well pleased—not because of anything you've done or because you're special or better than the person next to you, but simply because you are his through Jesus Christ. I'm struck by the picture in my

mind of a parent gazing on their child smiling, their face shining and happy, not because of anything their child is doing or saying but simply because they belong to them. We want God to look on us as a parent dotes upon their baby. What a calming, peaceful and pleasing thought that is (to know that God doesn't expect any more of us than our presence).

In some versions of the Bible there is then a word in here—selah. The translation of this word is still relatively unknown and people understand it to mean different things, but one definition is to pause, to rest, to stop and consider what has come before. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us. Selah.

Then as we enter verse two we begin to see why we are to ask for God's blessing. "So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations."

Blessing should not be a selfish endeavour; rather it should seek to glorify God. As in everything we do we should be looking to honour God.

In some ways this alters the whole concept of blessing as some understand it. I think a lot of times, myself included, people say God bless without considering the depth of what they are saying. Perhaps they are praying that a person will receive a gift from God that is simply for them to enjoy. Like receiving a present for no other reason than to enjoy it.

Yet, that is not the purpose of God's blessing. Blessings are to be used for God, to enlighten ourselves and others about God and give him glory. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33:

*"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

This was part of what we know as the sermon on the mount. Crowds of people on a mountainside listening to what Jesus had to teach them about God and what he is saying here is that God is not indifferent to our needs. We are instructed not to fret and worry about those things but instead look to God, be led by Him, serve Him, knowing and trusting that as we do He will provide all that we need.

God's blessings are not individualistic. The Psalmist says God bless us so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. Not simply that I would receive salvation, or us, or Currie, Edinburgh, Scotland, but the entire world. That the whole earth would have the same heart and vision of who God is and what he's like. That it would be as it was meant to be and that the whole earth would recognise, accept and praise its creator. That every living being would glorify God. God bless us so that the whole world can see how great you are!

Why? Verse 3, 4 and 5 tell us—So that the peoples may praise you, may all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy ... This is a plea, it's a prayer—God don't let them just hear and know about your mercy and blessings and salvation but let them choose to accept it for themselves and join in praise of you too! Because God, when you look at the earth you see all, you see everything and everyone you created, in all their diversity and individuality and you smile over it. You bless it. Call the people back to you by your mercy, salvation and blessing so that once again we will live in union with each other and with you.

Isn't that a reflection of the promise God gives Abraham? "All nations will be blessed through you." Not only Israel, but the whole world. Blessing is to be missional. It is to reach beyond ourselves and lead others to God.

Jesus will return one day, and that should make us more excited and passionate about bringing all people to God; to his salvation and praise. We need to be prepared for the day when Jesus will return. We don't want to get to that day and go, hold on Jesus, let me just go and tell my neighbour that you've come back so they can come too. When that day comes it will be too late. People need to know now and it's our job to tell them. That's why I do the job that I do. It's why I go into schools and lead clubs and run exhausting holiday clubs and camps to tell children and young people about God. They need to know and if we don't tell them then who will. Everyone deserves the opportunity to choose God.

I don't say this to guilt trip anyone, to make you feel bad, I say it only to revive us, to remind us that God's desire is for all to know him and he invites us to be part of the journey with people. God doesn't need us to convict people, that's his job, but he invites us to walk alongside people, to share our story, our experiences of God at work, so that we can delight and rejoice with them and God when others choose to follow him. So that together we can praise him and celebrate all he has done.

Jesus prayed, God, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We say these words every week. Yet, it's so easy to go through each day focused on ourselves, even unconsciously we do it. But God wants us to be looking to him first of all, and to be looking out for one another. God wants us to be united with him and with each other, to share in his blessings and glorify him.

And what will be the result of all of this? Verse 6 says "The land yields its harvest, God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him." When the earth knows God's way, God's salvation and God's praise, then the earth will flourish. When we share God's heart and vision for the world things will be as they were meant to be from the very beginning. By the end of this Psalm the author is not praying a hopeful request for God's blessing, it is a confident expectation. God promised to bless the nation through Abraham, He tells us to ask for blessing and he will provide it.

Perhaps you're sitting there thinking, well that's all very well but what are God's blessings, and what about when life is hard? I believe that God's blessings are anything we have or experience or witness that reminds us of who God is and his love for us. Not only material objects, which are perhaps easier to understand how we could share those with others, but also spiritual blessings like salvation, forgiveness, eternal life. Also gifts like family, friends, prosperity, good health, things that we can be thankful for. Blessings are anything that brings us closer to God.

But we all know that life is far from perfect or easy. We will face challenges and difficult circumstances, experience hardship or sorrow or pain. Even if we could claim to be the "perfect" Christian there would be times of struggle. Just look at Jesus' life on earth as an example. But there can be blessings in times of trial too—the peace of knowing God's constant presence, brief moments of joy perhaps or comfort from a friend. And if we keep our eyes fixed on him, we can be blessed by God and used by him so that even in the most difficult situations we can praise him and draw others towards God. And when it all seems too much, look to those verses in Revelation 7:9-12 and be encouraged that one day we will be in eternity with God, free from suffering and praising God forever.

So be bold, ask for God's blessing then look out for the ways in which He does so, and use them to praise God and to tell others about Him.

There is a wonderful video made by PrayerCast that retells this psalm in a song alongside some beautiful images. Watch it here and use it as a chance to reflect on what God has been saying to you:

<https://www.prayercast.com/shine.html>

Here is the link to the holiday club photo video as it will be shown in church on Sunday, in case you need it: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/tSbp9WpjaFZpuAu36>

## **Prayer of Intercession—Louise**

Heavenly Father,

Our precious time with you in your house draws to a close and we take the time to offer up prayers for others. In particular we ask that you embrace our children and young people as they gradually return to their face to face studies. Our schools have already returned and universities will be doing so in the next couple of weeks. Give them and their teachers the courage to overcome any obstacles that may stand in their way. The last 18 months have seen a series of disruptions which have caused physical, emotional and mental health problems for many of them. Through it all your all embracing love has helped many of them to overcome these. Continue to enfold them in your arms and make them feel safe.

With the reopening of churches and halls other youth groups are returning. Assist the leaders as they restart The Boys' Brigade, Scripture Union and various fun holiday activities which bring your word to them. In the midst of a world gone mad, it is vital that all of us are aware that you are with us every step of the way. Enable our young people to realise that you will never desert them.

Sadly the pandemic is still with us and our politicians and advisors are busy coming up with contingency plans to minimise the risks. Guide them in all they do and ensure that they make the best decisions they can. Let us also remember that they are only human and send us the patience and willingness to accept their instructions. We pray for those who have contracted covid, who may be in hospital or may have lost a loved one in the recent days. Be with them and comfort them as only you can.

Further afield there are still a number of areas of unrest worldwide. We pray for the people of Afghanistan and other middle eastern countries. As our children return to school, theirs are living in fear under an oppressive regime. Help us to help them in any way we can. Enlighten their leaders that this is not the way they should be governing a nation.

Finally, in a moment of silence, we pray for those special people that we carry in our hearts.

We pray this in the name of our lord, your beloved son, Jesus Christ,

Amen

## **Blessing—Easter**

May we carry with us boldly yet humbly  
our calling to live as followers of Christ  
May his claim upon you strengthen you  
and may the love of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
Dwell within you this day and forever more.

## National Giving Day—25—26 September

Over the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September we are running events to help rebuild Currie Kirk in the community. This is part of the Church of Scotland National Giving Day.

Saturday morning will be a fun event for families with the magician Tricky Ricky then in the afternoon we'll be serving tea and cakes whilst being entertained by the Currie Community Choir and our very own comedian Ronnie Moyes. There will also be a few stalls, raffle and a hamper to be won.



**Currie Kirk Buy a Brick Appeal**  
**Buy a brick for £10 in your name**  
**or in memory of someone.**

On Sunday afternoon the Kirk will be open to look round or enjoy a tour with Louise or Hamish. There will also be a treasure hunt for the children. All events are free but due to Covid restrictions tickets need to be booked in advance through Nina in the Kirk office. Throughout the weekend we are offering the opportunity to buy a brick (or part of a brick) for £10 in your name or in memory of someone.

Donations can be made by cash, cheque, card or get in touch with the Treasurer (Eddie Pigott). We're looking forward to a dry and sunny weekend and being able to meet again in person. If you want any further information, please contact Nina at the office or Fiona Pigott on 466 1459.



### Currie Kirk Guild

The next meeting of the Guild will be on Tuesday 21 September at 2pm. Our speaker will be Helen Brown talking about "The Water of Leith".

Remember to wear a mask and remain socially distanced. If you could bring the exact money—£2—for your meeting fee, that would be greatly appreciated.

Next Sunday is also Harvest so donations for foodbank etc would be gratefully accepted.

No doubt there will be further information in the PDF. Finally don't forget to bring any knitted items ready bagged with the quantity clearly marked.

As ever, if you require further information, please contact me on 0131-466-3472 or email [elf.lamont@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:elf.lamont@blueyonder.co.uk)

Louise Lamont  
Guild President



## **Harvest Thanksgiving Appeal**

This year we are collecting non-perishable items for the local Food Bank—donations can be handed into the Kirk Office—contact Nina. Alternatively handed into the Gibson Craig Halls this Tuesday 1—3.30 pm when the Guild is meeting—the hall will be open. Please leave in the corridor if you are not attending the meeting.