



WORSHIP AT HOME – 6th JUNE 2021

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

WORSHIP LEADER Grant Gordon
SCRIPTURE READER Gordon Cranford

CALL TO WORSHIP (FROM PSALM 8)

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

HYMN - All things bright and beautiful CH4 137 (words on page 7)

PRAYER of APPROACH, CONFESSION and THANKSGIVING

Creator God, You made air and water, shape and movement, large and small, fierce and calm, strong and weak. Lord, we come this day, having seen the miracles of everyday creation in our world. We have enjoyed both the bright sunshine and the gentle rains. We have marvelled over the beauty of flowers and the complexity of your creation.

With the mountains, islands and deserts we honour Your glory in creation. With the lakes, rivers and seas we come to You, the source of living water. With the land, its soil, seeds and sustenance we give thanks for Your generous provision. With the forests of great trees, the lungs of the planet, we will sing with joy and clap our hands.

And so loving God, we turn to You with our hearts full of gratitude, our eyes focussed on Your Kingdom, but yet we know we are not always like this. Lord we are inflexible, we cling to tradition, we resist change, we yearn for past securities, we reject risk, we are rooted in routine. Forgive us, and help us to let go of that which makes us hesitant, fearful, reluctant. In our humanity, we stumble, fail, hurt.

Turning to You now we offer our confession, trusting in Your forgiveness. Let us in silence confess our failings and acknowledge our part in the pain of the world..... This prayer we ask in the name of the Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: PSALM 1 and Matthew 13: (read by Gordon Cranford)

PSALM 1

The Two Ways

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.



The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

MATTHEW 13: 31 -32

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

HYMN - God the Father of Creation CH4 113 (words on page 7)

WHAT KIND OF TREE ARE YOU?

Let us Pray. In the silence of the stars, in the quiet of the hills and in the heaving of the sea, you speak O Lord. In the words of the prophets and the message of the apostles, you speak O Lord. Now we pray, speak to us in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, through the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts. Amen.

It is sometimes said that this life is preparation for the next, and while in that context all scripture is useful some scriptures are infinitely more so, and so it is with today's passages. The Bible is far more than a doctrinal guide book and when we read through it we sense, we feel, we come to know that God's word generates life, creates faith, produces change, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds, brings things into being, and guarantees our future forever! We cannot live without the Word of God; it is as essential to life as food. For life on earth is just the dress rehearsal before the real production. Earth is the staging area, the pre-school, the try out for life in eternity. It is the practice workout before the actual game; the warmup-lap before the race begins. In short, we are given a basic blueprint that gives our lives constancy and security.

So, as we turn our minds to the blueprint recorded in the very first Psalm, I cannot but help think of a poem, which because of its simple rhyme and meter, makes it a favourite target for ridicule.

Written by Joyce Kilmer back in the early 20th Century it is called "Trees". Listen to these simple, yet evocative words:

I think that I shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree;
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
against the sweet earth's flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day
and lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in springtime wear
a nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain
who intimately lives with falling rain;
Poems are made by fools like me,
but only God can make a tree.

The Psalmist shares Kilmer's reverence for trees, using a tree as a metaphor for a well-lived life. *"Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers. But their delight is the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper."*

When I think of trees I think of what I learned about trees in the biology class in Secondary School - how each tree is a living system of roots and trunk and limbs and leaves; how water is absorbed by the roots and carried up to the leaves; and how sunlight and water combine to create nutrients that are then carried back down to the roots. I remember how vital trees are to a healthy environment, absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and giving off oxygen for us to breathe. I remember how the roots of trees check erosion and how the fruit of trees serve as food and when the leaves and fruit fall to the ground, it all decomposes into more nutrients that keep the cycle going.

Trees have been central to Biblical storytelling all the way back to the Tree of Life in the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden through to Jesus at birth being placed in a wooden manger, growing up as a carpenter and crucified on a wooden cross. So, when the Psalmist uses a tree as a metaphor for a life well-lived, it is with deep reverence and clear intent. And the well-lived life is not judged by some arbitrary standard, but by the standards of living that are the gift of a gracious, life-giving God.



Now for a moment or two I would like each one of us to think what if we were a tree what type would it be. Would we be an evergreen, keeping going all year? Or a deciduous giving up our leaves in autumn and being exposed and hibernating during

the winter. Perhaps we think of ourselves as a thin but strong and supple willow swaying gently in the wind. Or a Rowan with its bright red berries in the Autumn. A pretty Cherry Blossom brightening up the Springtime. Or are we a prickly Holly Tree or a Redwood, the



biggest and oldest of trees, 400 feet high, over 30 feet thick and living for up to 2,000 years? Or are we a lone Pine Tree, bent by years of winter winds?

I don't know if you have ever walked through a man-made forest where all the trees are the same, probably fir or spruce, and all are planted in lines; very neat and ordered, but very unexciting and predictable. All the same type and ages, the same distance away from one another.

And so there are many different types of trees. Different ages, some closer to some trees than others. There are times when we might long for an unexciting, predictable forest, but God's forest is a mixture, a variety, each one of us different, producing different fruit for the benefit of the forest, and of the world. The fruit that falls gives its seed to produce a young tree, so as Gordon read of the mustard seed in Matthew's Gospel we need to be involved in sowing seeds and sharing with others in word and deed the difference Jesus makes to our lives.

A mustard seed! You can't get much tinier than that, can you? One breath, the faintest of breezes and it's gone. It's hard to believe that it grows tall enough for the birds to build their nests in. Yet isn't that the way that life turns out, small acorns to mighty oaks, small beginnings yielding the most surprising of results? From a gentle spring comes a mighty river, from a single spark a leaping flame. It may not seem much, a word here, a deed there, a small act of kindness, a simple expression of love, but little by little each takes effect, now here, now there, attitudes being changed, hearts stirred, imaginations fired, lives transformed. Whether we see it or whether we don't, it's there slowly growing – seeds starting to sprout, shoots bursting into flower, fields ripening for harvest, God's hand inescapably at work, refusing to be denied. We have a responsibility to help it happen, through word and deed to bring the Kingdom closer; and if we fail in either as the Psalmist warns, we may find ourselves excluded when judgment day finally comes. But that doesn't mean we must try and do everything, bear the whole burden on our shoulders, for we're in this together, partners in faith, dependent ultimately on God to take what we offer and use it to His glory.

Look at this another way. God loves to decorate. God has to decorate. Let Him live long enough in a heart and that heart will begin to change; Portraits of hurt replaced by landscapes of grace; Walls of anger demolished and shaky foundations restored. God can no more leave a life unchanged than a mother can leave her child's tear untouched. It's not enough for Him to own us; He wants to change us. Where we might be satisfied with a recliner and plasma television, He refuses to settle for any dwelling short of a palace. No expense is spared. No corners are cut. But that remodelling of the heart is not always pleasant. We don't object when the Carpenter adds a few shelves, but He's been known to gut the entire west wing. He has such high aspirations for us. God envisages a complete restoration. He won't stop until He is finished.

And trees too are not excluded from God's process of restoration. A number of weeks ago walking along the Water of Leith I noticed how some of the twigs at the end of the tree branches were changing colour; signs of spring and new growth. Between the bark and wood is a layer of cells called cambium and each year the cambium adds a new layer of cells to the older wood. From this we get the rings that enable us to tell the age of a tree. The rings of a tree can be different. Where there is

good rainfall there is healthy growth and a thick ring. Where there is drought and little growth there is a thin ring.

As a tree if we were to be cut open and we examined our rings I wonder what we would see? We might be able to look back with fondness on some years where the rings are thick because life then was good and nothing seemed to trouble us. But there may be others where the ring is thin, reflecting the times when we tried to lay hold on that which we thought was the way and the truth and the life only to turn away feeling frustrated and disappointed, perhaps even deceived; when we have spoken our prayers only to discover that there is a silence out there. And what are the last few outer rings like? Has there been healthy growth and good fruit or has it been a time of drought? Perhaps we have been going on in our own strength, preferring to seek out our own water, rather than the river that God provides for us.

But when we are in the midst of that questioning one draws near to us who is our friend, who puts His arm around us, who welcomes us without restriction and without condition, who pays the price of our debt, who encourages us to become what we're most good at, what we are called to truly be, who allows us to rise to the heights which He has fashioned us to become. When the flames of faith are flickering, when hope is at a premium, when life seems to be flattening us out, rather than bolstering us up, when the tough times comes – so we rest in Him; His heart becomes our heart, His way of looking at the world becomes our way of looking at the world and perhaps not dramatically but certainly, surely, step by step, day by day, we find at the centre of life things begin to alter and shift, imperceptibly perhaps, but they do move. Our roots are no longer shallow but deep and strong like the oak fed by the streams of water that both the Psalmist and Joyce Kilmer wrote about.

Joyce Kilmer was not only a poet, but he was a man of deep Christian faith, and one who, when the time came, stepped forward to serve his country in the First World War. He was, by all accounts, universally loved by those whom he led and he was one of those soldiers who never held back from volunteering for the most hazardous duty. His last duty was to lead a scouting party in search of an enemy machine gun post. He was killed while on that mission by a sniper's bullet on July 30th 1918, aged 31.

The fruit that we produce, what we say and do, will show the world what type of tree we are. This is an enormous challenge because it means showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control – all of them fruits of the Spirit. It takes boldness and courage to rise to this challenge and difficult though it may be the master gardener, the master carpenter, our Lord Jesus Christ, has assured us that He is with us always and so, rooted as we are in God's love, we can confidently begin again our service in the world to sow the seeds and share with others in word and deed the difference Jesus makes to our lives. So be it. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lord God give us now a sense of your presence, as we bring our prayers and requests to you, and enable us to open our hearts and minds to you as we journey through this time of deep uncertainty and challenge, set us free from all that weighs us down and holds us back. We know that you understand our worries and fears, and so we pray trusting in your willingness to share our concerns for ourselves and others.

Lord we thank you for a world of diversity and difference. What would we do if we all were alike in our thinking and doing? The world would be a boring place indeed!

But we aren't all alike and the world is far from boring. We pray for all who are made to feel different and are abused because of their colour, their culture or nationality. Imagine how different it would be if we listened to each others story, if we took time to walk in someone else's shoes for a day. Then we might be able to understand what it is like not to be heard, to be put down, how it feels to be treated with scorn and hatred. The world would be a better place if only we would learn to stop and listen, to pay attention, to seek your will, to let others be blessed and be humble enough not to seek all the blessings for ourselves.

We pray for countries where differences in culture or nationality have spiralled out of control and led to war. Lord may they experience your peace.

We pray for those experiencing illness in body or in mind, and for those who practice the healing arts of medicine and nursing. We bring before you those who have been deeply affected by the Covid pandemic. We think of those who have lost loved ones; those whose jobs and income have disappeared; those who are fearful for what the future will bring for them and their families. We think of the lost opportunities, the changes in life direction, the unsettling of assumptions.

Lord we pray for the Church of Scotland and the decisions taken at the recent General Assembly. Far reaching decisions that affect every church, every congregation, every parish and we pray that in implementing these there is an openness and grace by all in accepting the agreed changes and the missional way forward.

Gracious and loving God we all have people and situations that are a concern to us, in the silence we bring them before you now.....

Into your loving hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your abundant grace and mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour who taught us to pray saying:

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. Amen.

HYMN - Take my life, Lord, let it be CH4 502 (words on page 8)

BLESSING

As the dew falls in the morning, so may the grace of God descend upon us.

As the sun bathes all in its life-giving light, so may the radiance of Christ shine in our hearts.

As the wind blows where it will, so may the breath and fire of the Spirit move freely in our lives.

Living God, work in us, and with us, and through us, to your glory.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all this day and evermore. Amen.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL (CH4 137)

Chorus: All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings:

Chorus:

The purple headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky:

Chorus:

The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one:

Chorus:

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

Chorus.

GOD THE FATHER OF CREATION (CH4 113)

God the Father of Creation,
source of light and energy,
your creative love so shapes us
that we share your liberty.
Teach us how to use this freedom
loving children all to be.

Jesus Christ our Lord and brother,
in your cross we see the way
to be servants for each other,
caring, suffering every day.
Teach us patience and obedience
never from your path to stray.
Holy Spirit, love that binds us

to the Father and the Son,
giver of the joy that fills us,
yours the peace that makes us one,
teach our hearts to be more open
as we pray 'God's will be done.'

Members of our Saviour's body,
here on earth his life to be,
though we stand as different people,
may we share the unity
of the Father, Son and Spirit,
perfect love in Trinity.

TAKE MY LIFE LORD LET IT BE (CH4 502)

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee;
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love;
take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing, always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine:
take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store:
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all, for Thee.

Kirk Contacts

Minister: Rev Dr Easter Smart—Tel: 449 4719 email: esmart@churchofscotland.org.uk

Session Clerk: Hamish Leal—Tel: 449 3288 email: hamish@hamishleal.co.uk

Family worker: Heather Merriman email: Familyworker_JVP@outlook.com

Please get in touch with Nina at the Kirk Office—451 5141

email currie_kirk@btconnect.com> if you need anything.

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