



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 10 January 2021



## Introduction

Dear all,

A very warm welcome our Sunday Reflections on this second Sunday in January I am hopeful that it will be better than 2020 and I hope that you share this hope.

Please stay safe, that means that we no longer encourage you to distribute this yourself, though posting by mail is still considered safe.

### Intimations:

Please remember or video and audio services

We will start out North Ayr Prayer meetings again on zoom, the first will be on 11 Jan, hosted by Newton Wallacetown

Please join me now in our weekly prayer and reflection

In the book of Joshua we read:

“Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous.  
(Jos 25,10)

## **Prayer**

Loving God,

You are a God of truth and of grace, a God of hope and strength, a God of courage. Today we come to you because we need you, we need the courage that comes from faith, the trust that comes from clinging to you, the hope that comes from prayer.

Gracious God,

We give you thanks that you hear us when we cry to you, when we turn to you, when nobody else is there to listen, is there to help. We thank you that we can come to you for help whether we are leaping with joy or crying with sorrow.

We give you thanks for your son Jesus Christ who offered himself to us, who was willing to carry our burden and promised that his yoke was easy, we invited all who are tired and discouraged, sad and dispirited to bring our troubles to him.

We give you thanks for the Holy Spirit by which you encourage and strengthen us like you encouraged your prophets, by which you inspire us like you did your apostles, so we can serve you in good times and in difficult times.

Forgiving Father,

We know it is difficult to keep up our spirits for you, to serve you joyfully when we feel overwhelmed and tired, when uncertainty and worry gnaws at us, when we find life tough to deal with as a society and as individuals. Grant us the strength of faith, we pray.

We know it is not always easy to look to the future with hope and faith when our hopes are crushed again and again, when the news of a vaccine are followed by the announcement of another lockdown and a new virus strain. Grant us the perseverance that comes through your spirit, we pray

Loving God,

We know that we are not always strong in faith, not always joyful in hope and in trust in you, but we also know that you have sent your son to share our burden and our weaknesses and that through him you have forgiven us and so we pray to you in our hearts:

Lord's Prayer

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 today 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 and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

## READINGS

### *Isaiah 62, 1-5*

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. <sup>2</sup>The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. <sup>3</sup>You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah,<sup>[a]</sup> and your land Beulah<sup>[b]</sup>; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. <sup>5</sup>As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

### *Lesson 2: John 2,1-11*

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."<sup>4</sup> "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."<sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so, they filled them to the brim. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."<sup>11</sup> What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

## Reflection

### A New Year's Celebration

*You will have noticed that the last reflection mentioned the new year only in passing and there is a very simple practical reason for it: it was not yet the new year (even if I pretended that it was), it was still 2020 when I wrote last week's reflection, when I recorded the video and when I sent it away to be published. It takes a little time to prepare and put things on the website and so naturally it needs to be ready a few days early, so it comes to you by Sunday.*

*And so, I can only today with any sincerity ask: How was your Hogmanay? Quiet, I guess, most of us will say. A bit underwhelming maybe for many and not what we would have anticipated at the last New Year celebrations. I for one watched a programme on YouTube, that is traditionally watched on New Year's Eve in my country, (it is an ancient BBC production called "dinner for one", if anyone is interested), I watched the drone show put up by BBC Scotland as a replacement for the Hogmanay festivities in Edinburgh and went to bed. I was woken up just before 12 by the family right enough, but there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm for celebration. And I suspect that it was the same for many of you. And for good reason, too. Not only because of the restrictions that were in place then and are tightened and inscribed into law now, but also because it becomes increasingly hard to celebrate, when we look back on a year so full of heartache, so full of dashed hopes again and again, so full of loss and sadness. And despite the hope and the promises made, it is hard to ring in a new year that starts pretty much like the old one with more restrictions necessary, with a new lockdown, with more loneliness and with more sadness to come. It is important to acknowledge that, it is important to allow sadness and grief, because if we do not, it will fester. I am not saying that we all should now sink into misery, stay in bed and do nothing, allow ourselves to become inactive and depressed, that would be equally unhealthy, but I am saying that it is important to accept that going about our business is difficult these*

*days, to accept that we are struggling some days, accept that it is okay, not to be okay at times. It is okay not to keep smiling and even to cry when necessary.*

### *A wedding celebration*

*And so, our New Testament Reading – a wedding, a celebration, no less- seems strangely out of place in the situation we find ourselves in, that we cannot control – a story that seems to come from a different time and space (which of course it does), a story that is not really compatible with our reality. As if too little wine at a wedding feast was not the least of our problems just now – and with only five wedding guests allowed and most weddings postponed or cancelled that is not going to happen to us anyway. So why tell the story, why keep to the lectionary, why not postpone the reading and keep it for better times, for times when a wedding celebration with scores of guests and clinking glasses is again a part of our reality. I think there are two good reasons for it: Firstly, this reading- as does our Old Testament reading - points to the future, to new beginnings and what would be a more appropriate example for this than a wedding (or maybe a New Year's celebration) and secondly because it is a story of faith, a story of Jesus' glory revealed and that is timeless, that fits anywhere, maybe now more than ever.*

*When I got married my mother -in-law made a wedding album for us where she asked all our friends and relatives to submit a handprint, a photo, and something written, and the latter was as varied as one-line quotes, poems, prayers or simply good wishes. One quote that occurred at least three times (as our wedding guests did not know about each other's contribution) was the famous sentence coined by the German novelist Hermann Hesse: "and there is magic in every new beginning". Because a wedding for most people is the beginning of a new exciting and hopefully magical part of our lives. We felt that when we were married, I imagine you felt that when you got married and I would think, the couple of our story felt that, too, although the bride*

*and groom do not exactly have a pivotal role in the story. The story is really about Jesus, about his mother and about his disciples. The fact that it is a wedding, symbol of new beginnings, is enough. It is also a new beginning for Jesus, for his ministry and for the disciples: "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" John comments. And that is at least as much of an exciting new beginning as the new life of this unnamed couple in our New Testament reading, not just for Jesus and his disciples, but also for our journey with him. We are invited to join Jesus and his disciples on the path of his ministry, we are invited to accompany him all the way from this moment of new beginnings to the end at the cross. And that is good news. Because as we walk with him towards the cross, so conversely does Jesus walk with us, through our lives, through thick and thin, through good times and through hard times. In fact, he is walking with us just now, through the darkness of our times, through the challenges and difficulties of these days.*

### A new beginning

And this story of a wedding, of a celebration, this story that at first sight seems so far removed from our reality today, is a first glimpse of where we are going, is the first glimpse of Jesus' glory. We are not quite there yet, we know that, Jesus says so himself when he addresses his mother, responds to her request to help the newly wedded couple out: "Woman, why do you involve me?" ... "My hour has not yet come". Jesus' hour is not yet there, we are not yet there we know that, we can feel that, we are just at the beginning, but we can already see the light, can already see the glory. And that is also the tone of our Old Testament Reading: It is written for the future. It is written for a new beginning, but Isaiah's people are not quite there yet: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch" the prophet says. But for the moment Israel is suffering, Israel is hurting, it is called the deserted, the desolate. And it is the prophet's job to make the people see beyond

the suffering and desolation, it is his task to enable his people to see the light beyond the darkness, the blazing torch of salvation. And I think, that is the message for us, too: that we can see the light beyond our night, the bright glimpse of glory and salvation beyond our shadows, that we know that our journey with Jesus from darkness into light, from here into glory has only just begun. AMEN

### Prayer of Intercession

#### Loving God

Today we give you thanks for what we still have, what we do not have to do without, we thank you for shelter from wind and weather in our houses, we thank you for nourishment for body and soul, for food on the table and we thank you for friendship and laughter and in giving you thanks for all this we remember in prayer all who struggle in these harsh times.

We will continue to pray for all who live in regions of terror and bloodshed, of violence and fear, be that in Afghanistan, in Yemen, in Ethiopia, we pray for all who live in fear, who know untimely loss, for all who are wounded in body and soul.

#### Grant them your peace

We will not cease to pray for all who still suffer from the global coronavirus pandemic, for all who fight for their lives in hospitals and ICUs, for all who cannot visit someone they love, for all who live in isolations and loneliness

#### Grant them your hope

We will never forget to pray for our key workers and NHS, for all who keep the wheels turning, look after our health, deliver food and

essential items, stock shelves in supermarkets and sit behind tills, daily scared, daily worried for themselves and their families

Grant them your courage,

We will always pray for all in our community and in our congregation, for all who are lonely and bereaved, for all who are struggling in care homes and hospitals and at home, who bear their lot uncomplainingly who are there for others, and we pray for all who care for a loved one, for whom restrictions mean that they cannot see those who need them the most.

Grant them your love

For this we pray in Jesus name. AMEN

**Benediction**

And the God who walks with us guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN