



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

A warm welcome to our Sunday reflection on communion Sunday, as we remember the Lord's sacrifice

Please consider sharing this document if it is safe for you to do so.

INTIAMTIONS

2 Nov Prayer for Peace 11am, St Leonards

10 Nov: Remembrance Day 10.50am

14 Nov Kirk Session

Call to worship

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life.

How can I repay the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the Lord by name. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Loving God,

You have sent your son into this world to share our joys and sorrows, to live with us and to die for us. As we share bread and wine today we do so in remembrance of him and with gratitude for his sacrifice and our salvation.

Gracious Lord,

You have given your people manna from the skies and water from a rock, when they were hungry and thirsty in the desert on the way to the promised land, You have provided for their every need and you provide for us today, you give us our daily bread. We thank you for your generous providing.

You have given us your only son Jesus Christ, who broke bread and shared wine with his disciples on the night that he was betrayed, who became their servant and washed their feet, who became our servant and our Lord and gave his life as a ransom for many. We thank you for your son, the servant king.

Your Holy Spirit restores and nourishes our souls, through your Spirit you and your son are present in us as one holy trinity, through your spirit you and your son are among us as we share bread and wine together today. We thank you for this Holy Sacrament.

Forgiving God,

As we take bread and wine together, as we remember your son's death we try to overcome discouragement and hopelessness as we worry for the future of your church. Help us to serve you here and now trusting in your loving presence, as we celebrate Holy Communion.

As we share the elements today we are conscious that we are not always as united and loving as you would have us. We split into factions, we take sides, we hurt one another. Cleanse us from ungracious thoughts and words and deeds and let us come together in bread and wine, we pray.

Gracious Lord

We know that we have hurt you and each other in word and in deed, but we also know that you have sent your son Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins and in this assurance we now pray as your son has 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 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

Hymn:

READINGS

Jeremiah 31, 7-12

This is what the Lord says: “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, ‘Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ ⁸See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return. ⁹They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. ¹⁰“Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’ ¹¹For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. ¹²They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord— the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.

Mark 10, 46-52

⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” ⁵²“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

As we celebrate and remember your son in bread and wine we are united with you and with him, we are united with each other as your church. We thank you that we can celebrate this holy meal together and in gratitude we also ask that you may send your Spirit into our hearts, so we can be and feel one with you.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

Next month I will make a trip to Germany to see friends and family of course, and maybe a former teacher or two. One trip will take me back to my student town, Marburg an der Lahn. Marburg is divided into an upper and a lower town. Apart from the magnificent gothic St Elisabeth church, or E-church as the locals call it, and maybe the river Lahn with its ancient overhanging trees, the lower town is a fairly modern place, with a large cinema complex, trendy hotels and restaurants and the town's only department store. If you take the steep flight of stairs or the lift up to the upper town, however, you will find a completely different scene. I always feel transported into a time and place straight out of a Grimm's fairy tale as soon as I step out of the lift (and indeed the brothers Grimm have lived and worked here for a while): half-timbered houses, cobbled streets, a medieval town hall and towering above it all: Marburg castle, once one of the residences of the influential Duke of Hessen. It is here that in the year 1529 a historic dispute took place, the Marburg Colloquy, a huge international religious and political summit, if you like: the bone of contention: communion and the significance of the elements, the two opposing parties: Lutheran and Reformed protestants: Luther maintained that while bread and wine were symbols of the body and blood of Christ, he is still present in the

elements, the reformed party, on which the Church of Scotland is founded, saw bread and wine as just that: bread and wine, a sign and symbol of God's grace, nothing more. And the Duke of Hesse scratched his head, because what he really wanted, was to unify the Protestant factions. He failed and it took centuries until the different factions were able to celebrate communion together. Today we welcome everybody who loves the Lord to the table, of course we do, it is hard to imagine it otherwise in this day and age, but it had not always been thus, in fact it is only 50 years ago, that the Protestant churches in Europe agreed to come together and to invite each other to share bread and wine, while also respecting their different take on the meaning of communion. It was a century long process full of hard work, but today when we celebrate communion, we can also celebrate this achievement: that we are united in Christ.

Unity, uniting a people that is also the theme of our Old Testament text. And unlike so many prophetic passages, this one is full of joy, a testimony of faith that with God's help this unity can be achieved. And for the first time since the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar defeated God's people and deported their elite to his capital in an attempt to keep them under control and squash their opposition, there is hope, hope that a remnant of God's people at least, now scattered and disjointed, will be united and will come home. Jeremiah paints a positive and hopeful picture of his reunited people: "See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return". And it is not just the strong and the hardy, those who can easily bear the hardship of a journey of hundreds of kilometres from today's Iraq back to Israel; the weak and the vulnerable, the lame and the blind and pregnant women have a place among God's people. Nobody is excluded from the people who seek a new beginning under God. And once arrived in the country of their ancestors life will be good. The prophet's tone is downright celebratory: "They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord— the grain, the new wine

and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more". After all they have been through, that sounds like a peaceful paradise, that sounds like a place where they can finally be happy, a place they can finally call home.

Before I talk of our times and our situation, I would like to clarify one thing for the avoidance of doubt: When I speak of God's people, the people of Israel, I never mean the modern state of Israel, when I speak of their wars and skirmishes, I do not refer to the current situation. I am speaking of the ancient people of the Bible, of the people the prophets spoke to and lived among. All the same, the prophets have something to say to us, too, because we share their humanity, we share deep rooted emotions and sometimes we even share their experience. One such experience is the longing for unity, for coming together, as we come together today in bread and wine. And in bread and wine we share more than a moment of togetherness, we share a vital part of our existence, we share our faith, our trust and our hope in Jesus Christ. No disagreement, no challenge, no fear for the future of our church can take it away from us. Yes, we are going through challenging times, but so have Jeremiah's people, so have Jesus' disciples, and they still found time to build their community, and they still found time to rejoice and to celebrate – and so can we.

Our New Testament story is altogether quieter, more intimate, even though the blind man Bartimaeus shouts loud enough, to get Jesus' attention. He makes sure that he is not overheard, or overlooked within the crowd that follows Jesus into Jericho, but there is only one man, who has reason to rejoice, to celebrate: a blind man, who can see again, a man who can start a new life, not a whole people. That does not mean, however, that this man's destiny, this man's chance is less important, a community is after all made up of individuals, strong or vulnerable, high or low. In fact, it is rather typical, that Jesus tends to individuals in his healing; he speaks to the masses, but when a person suffers he or she has all his attention and all his

compassion. And in this attention and in this compassion we see a tiny bit of God's kingdom, not as a sudden all-consuming change, but as a moment, a glimpse of what is to come. Bartimaeus understands that, he knows about the deeper meaning of his healing. This is about more than a restored eyesight, this is a sign, that God's kingdom has already come into this broken world, as a moment, as a glimpse, but undeniably there. Bartimaeus understands that this is something bigger than his own chance and his own destiny, that is why he follows Jesus along the road, becomes his newest disciple.

I think, we too can discover what Bartimaeus has discovered, we too can understand what he understood. God's kingdom does not come with thunderclaps and drumrolls, if we are expecting the heavens to open and angels to come down in floods of light, or if we even expect some apocalyptic catastrophe that will cleanse the earth and set up a new kingdom, we will be disappointed. But if we look closely, if we look for the small, gentle signs like the healing of a single man, like the rescue of a single child, like a kind word at the right time, then we can get a glimpse of God's kingdom, even in our broken and suffering world. And then maybe here on earth are we a step closer to God's kingdom, then maybe here and now are we a step closer to heaven and that is a reason to celebrate. AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God,

You have come into this world as one of us, you have made yourself human and vulnerable, you have died for us on the cross, you have risen again and defeated death itself. This gives us hope for this life and the next, lets us know that we are not alone and we thank you for this precious gift and as we give thanks we lift up to you all those for whom it is hard to find love and hope in this world

We will always continue to pray for the men, women and children affected by war, terror and conflict around the globe, but especially in Ukraine and in Israel, Gaza and Lebanon, we pray for the civilians living in fear, are wounded in body and soul and grieving for their dead. Hear their cries for peace, we pray.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

As we share bread and wine we remember in our prayers all those who do not have enough to eat, who do not have clean water or access to medical care. We pray for the poorest of this world in the global South, in countries like Ethiopia and Sudan, Guatemala and Costa Rica. Listen to their pleas for justice, we pray

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

As we share the Lord's supper we pray for the poor among us, we pray for the unemployed, who try in vain to find work and a purpose in life, for those who do work, but must still choose between heating and eating, for their children who go to school hungry. Grant us open hearts and minds to see their plight and to help where we can.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will always continue to pray for everyone in our congregation and in our community and for their friends and family. We pray for all who have lost someone they love, we pray for all who are ill and frail at home or in care homes, and we pray for all who have lost their way to you. Surround them all with your love and comfort we pray.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

We prepare for the dedication of the offering

Dedication

Loving God,

You come to us today in bread and wine to remind us of the gift you have given to your church, the gift of unity and love, the gift of forgiveness. For this we give you praise and thanks and in gratitude for your loving presence among us we bring some of our treasure to your table and we ask that you may bless these our offerings, so they may be used to spread and to celebrate the good news of our salvation.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Holy Communion

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God who came to us in bread and wine 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

