



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

A warm welcome to this week's Sunday Reflection as we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion

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INTIMATIONS

2 Feb: Coffee morning

8 Feb: Rummage Sale

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

Gracious God

As we come together to share the sacrament of Holy Communion today we rejoice in your presence among us, we rejoice in the Holy Spirit you sent to us, we rejoice in the unity of your church and the coming together of your people in bread and wine.

Loving God,

You have made the wheat that grows in our fields and the grapes of the vineyards, you have given us all we need physically and spiritually, you have created the world we live in and you have created us, you have made us in your image and you made us good. For this we thank you.

You have sent your son Jesus Christ to live with us and to die for us, so we are healed by his wounds. As we remember his death and resurrection in bread and wine we give you thanks that you have saved us from our sin through your son.

You have given us your Holy Spirit into our hearts, so we can live in unity with you, with your son and with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Through your Spirit you are with us when we share communion today. For this we offer our thanks.

Forgiving God,

We confess today that we do not always live in unity or seek unity within your church. conflicting interests, fear for our future and personality clashes make it difficult to come together as your church. Help us to reach out to each other and to forgive each other, as you have forgiven us, we pray.

We confess, that there are times when we do not seek you or your son in our lives, we do not listen to your word and try to make our own lives without you. Help us to focus again on you and forgive us, where we left the path that you have chosen for us, we pray

Gracious Lord

We know that we are all sinners here on earth, but we also know that you have forgiven us our sins through the body and blood of your son Jesus Christ and in this trust 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

Nehemiah 8,1-12

By the seventh month the people of Israel were all settled in their towns. On the first day of that month they all assembled in Jerusalem, in the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law which the Lord had given Israel through Moses, to get the book of the Law.² So Ezra brought it to the place where the people had gathered—men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand.³ There in the square by the gate he read the Law to them from dawn until noon, and they all listened attentively.⁴ Ezra was standing on a wooden platform that had been built for the occasion. The following men stood at his right: Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and the following stood at his left: Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.⁵ As Ezra stood there on the platform high above the people, they all kept their eyes fixed on him. As soon as he opened the book, they all stood up.⁶ Ezra said, "Praise the Lord, the great God!" All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, "Amen! Amen!" They knelt in worship, with their faces to the ground.⁷ Then they rose and stood in their places, and the following Levites explained the Law to them: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah.⁸ They gave an oral translation^[a] of God's Law and explained^[b] it so that the people could understand it.⁹ When the people heard what the Law required, they were so moved that they began to cry. So Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law, and the Levites who were explaining the Law told all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God, so you are not to mourn or cry.¹⁰ Now go home and have a feast. Share your food and wine with those who don't have enough. Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the Lord gives you will make you strong."¹¹ The Levites went around calming the people and telling them not to be sad on such a holy day.¹² So all the people went home and ate and drank joyfully and shared what they had with others, because they understood what had been read to them.

Luke 4, 14-22

¹⁴ Then Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all that territory.¹⁵ He taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone.¹⁶ Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures¹⁷ and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed¹⁹ and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people."²⁰ Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him,²¹ as he said to them, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read."²² They were all well impressed with him and marvelled at the eloquent words that he spoke. They said, "Isn't he the son of Joseph?"

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

You have walked with your people from the beginning of time, through the desert of Egypt, through the trials and tribulations of their history, you have given them your word, your law and your spirit, you walked among them and you walk among us, you are with us today in bread and wine, you have given us your spirit of courage and of love, too. For this we give you praise and thanks. And we now ask that you enter our hearts through your Holy Spirit, so we listen and understand your message as we now hear your word

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

This year our presbytery elder and I are commissioned to go to the General Assembly in Edinburgh in May and I for one am excited. It is not only that I like Edinburgh and the assembly hall lies beautifully just beneath the castle, it is not only the opportunity to see old university friends again and have a proper catch up, it is also that it is part of what makes us the Church of Scotland, part of our identity that makes me want to go there. Church laws and resolutions, policies and decisions are discussed and made jointly and every congregation get their turn over time. It is not exactly a democratic process, as we were told when we were probationers, commissioners are nominated, not elected after all, but it is probably as close to democracy as a church can be. Certainly, there are committees and experts that keep the church running over the year, not everything is decided and implemented over the course of a single week by ministers and elders who maybe have not specialised in every field that is voted on, but I feel that it is a vital service to the church all the same. It is a responsibility and a privilege to be sent to

the General Assembly to prayerfully deliberate about the direction the church will take over the year – and yes, I want to be there.

“I want to be there” – that is what I imagine the people of Israel thought, when they came to Jerusalem in their droves to hear Ezra, the eminent priest and scholar of the law, speak in our Old Testament reading today. It was a turning point in their history. It was a time of rebuilding and restoring after decades in exile, not only houses and fields, defence walls and city gates, but a whole society – and so everybody came, everybody had a part in it, everybody took responsibility – men, women and even the children who were old enough to understand. And for the people who came to Jerusalem rebuilding and restoring their society, meant to go back to their roots, to the laws that Moses gave them on Mount Sinai so long ago. It falls to Ezra to read and to interpret God’s commandments and he does: ³“There in the square by the gate he read the Law to them from dawn until noon, and they all listened attentively”. It must have been one of the most unifying experiences, the people of Israel ever had. It was also a spiritual experience: ⁶“Ezra said, “Praise the Lord, the great God!” All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, “Amen! Amen!” They knelt in worship, with their faces to the ground”. Law and worship, religion and politics, faith and society they belonged together for those people in the square, they belonged together for Ezra and his Levites, because God is not an abstract entity up in heaven, who has nothing to do with his people, God cares for his people, he gives them laws, so they can live well together, not as restrictions, but as gifts, he walks among them – here and now. And so the people who come to Jerusalem in today’s reading, the people who take an interest in and take responsibility for the future of their land, are not only united with each other as a country, as a society, they are also united with God. The two are inextricably linked. And now the people of Israel have a chance, a chance to form a society on God’s law and on God’s commandments. That will be hard work, for Ezra, for Nehemia after whom today’s reading is named, for everyone, but it is also a beacon of hope, a new beginning, the chance to form their own destiny and to entrust that

destiny to God. And so the Levites and priest give a message of joy and hope to their people. “This day is holy to the Lord your God, so you are not to mourn or cry. ¹⁰ Now go home and have a feast. Share your food and wine with those who don't have enough. Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the Lord gives you will make you strong.”

It seems a rather obvious link to our communion Sunday today, when we share bread and wine, that the people of Israel, too, share a feast and you could be forgiven for thinking it rather too obvious, were it not for a deeper connection that binds the story of our Old Testament reading to our communion today: It is the sharing not only of food, of bread and wine, but also the sharing of joy and hope, a hope for redemption and hope for a new beginning, because every communion Sunday gives us the chance to reflect on the past and the presence and to change for the future, what has proven to be unhelpful for ourselves and for our relationship with each other and with God – we call it repentance and it is an integral part of communion, because communion also means our renewal in Jesus Christ. Communion means to go back to the basics, to our relationship with God and Jesus through the visible signs of bread and wine. The other parallel between our text and our communion Sunday today is the celebration of unity. In bread and wine we come together as Christ's church, we put aside all differences we may have and concentrate on what unites us: our faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our belief that we are redeemed from our sins. The sacrament helps us – or is intended to help us- to focus on what makes us a church, our connection with each other, with Christ and with God, together, united as one holy and apostolic church and that is a reason for joy and for hope, that is a reason for praise and for worship.

In our New Testament reading we meet Jesus at worship. He comes to his hometown Nazareth and goes to the synagogue on a Sabbath as he is used to, he stands up to read and to interpret the scripture reading of the day. He has already made a name for himself as a

speaker and so the people come out to hear him. They are curious, I should imagine, excited even, they want to see for themselves, what this famous son of the town has to say. And Jesus does not disappoint – not in the sense of being new, fresh and radical. The scripture reading he is handed is from the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed”. And Jesus’ interpretation is indeed jaw dropping. This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.” It is provocative and confident and if we continue reading the passage, we will discover that the people of Nazareth did not particularly like what they hear. But with this passage Jesus takes up the spiritual responsibility that God laid upon him when he began his ministry: responsibility for the poor, for the disabled, for the prisoners. Responsibility for all who are marginalised and regarded with suspicion and as followers of Christ we share this responsibility. As we today share bread and wine with each other, let us remember that Christ died for everyone, rich and poor, healthy, unwell or disabled, neighbour and stranger. And so, we invite everyone to the Lord’s table today.

AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God,

You give us strength and courage through the sacrament of Holy Communion, in which you show your presence visibly and tangibly in bread and wine. We thank you for this gift to us and in giving thanks we remember in prayer all those who do not have much courage left.

We will always continue to pray for the countries and regions that do not live in peace, where people are dying and wounded each day in Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza and elsewhere in the world and today we pray especially that the ceasefire in Gaza may last, that hostages may be freed and that peace will come to all.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

As we look to the inauguration of a new president in the USA we pray for peace and democracy around the globe, we pray for wisdom and restraint, for a responsible and compassionate government for all our sakes.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

As we share bread and wine today we pray for all who go hungry in the world and in our country and in our town, we pray for children who do not have enough to eat and we pray for their parents who cannot heat their homes. May they find hope in you and compassion in us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will never forget to pray for everyone in our congregation and community who suffer, we pray for those who are ill and frail in hospital or at home, we pray for those who feel lonely and forgotten in care homes, but we also pray for the young and strong, for new life and new hope in our church. May we find ways to live together.

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, you make your presence felt to give us hope and courage, you strengthen us for the days and weeks that lay ahead and focus our minds and souls on you. For this we thank you and with thanksgiving we come before you and bring to your table some of what you have given us through the abundance of your love and we ask that you may bless these gifts so they are used for your glory.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Holy Communion

Invitation

Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15,5)

So eat and drink, for all is prepared for you

2) The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all as we share bread and wine

3) unveiling of the elements:

Let us pray as we unveil the elements

Loving God,

You are with us through your Holy Spirit, you are with us in bread and wine, with gratitude we remember the body broken for us and the blood shed for us on the cross of Golgotha, with humility we confess our faith in the resurrection on Easter Day.

Unveiling of bread

As we unveil and share this bread we remember the last supper you share with your disciples, a supper of love and betrayal, a supper of service and sacrifice

Unveiling of wine

As we unveil this wine we remember your agony in the Garden of Gethsemane where you asked that this cup may pass you by. We remember the cross you willingly carried for our salvation.

As we now share the sacrament of bread and wine, let us remember your sacrifice. AMEN

4) INSTITUTION

Hear the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper

As it is narrated by St Paul:

The tradition which I handed on to you

Came to me from the Lord himself:

That on the night of his arrest The Lord Jesus took bread

Hold bread

And giving thanks to the Lord broke it and said:

This is my body, which is for you Do this in memory of me

In the same way he took the cup after supper

And said:

This cup is the new covenant Sealed by my blood

Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me

For every time you eat this bread And drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

5) Preparation

As the Lord Jesus,

The same night in which he was betrayed

Took bread

We set these elements of bread and wine apart

From all common uses

To his holy use and mystery

And as he gave thanks and blessed the bread

So let us now come to God with prayers and thanksgiving

6) Sursum Corda and Sanctus SLIDE

Together we lift our hearts to the Lord

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord

It is right to give our thanks and praise

It is indeed right to give our thanks and praise to the one God, who created the world, redeemed the world with his blood and lives in this world through his holy spirit.

Let us pray

Lord God,

You have made the stars to guide us by night and the sun to warm us by day. You have made the grass under our feet and the sky above us, you have made this world and all that lives in it. We come to you with awe and wonder and gratitude.

You have sent your son to us to walk with us and to carry our burdens, you have sent him to carry the cross of our sin. For us he died in pain and agony, for us he rose again in glory. We come to you with thanksgiving, we come to you in humble adoration.

And in giving thanks together with your people

Of all places and times

And with the whole host of heaven

We praise you and proclaim your greatness saying together as one:

Slide

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Power and Might

Heaven and earth are full of your glory

Hosanna in the highest Blessed is he who comes

In the name of the Lord

**So with all creatures on heaven and earth We acknowledge your
glory And give you thanks for the love you showed to us in sending
your son to be our saviour**

7) sanctification

Let us sanctify bread and wine with prayer and praise

Gracious God,

Today is a day of remembrance, a day of gratitude

**Today we remember the pain and the death of your son Jesus
Christ, who took up his cross for us, who carries our burdens still.**

**And we remember your son's resurrection on Easter day, as the
first to have risen from the dead, who gives us the hope for eternal
life.**

**We remember your love to the world, through which you gave your
own son, so we may live, so we are redeemed from our sin.**

**As we now share the sacrament of holy communion in reverence
and in remembrance, we trust that you are one with us at this
moment through the Holy Spirit which lives in our heart and
through which we are connected to you. In bread and wine you**

have given us the sign and seal of your grace. For this we give you praise and thanks.

And Through Christ, with Christ in Christ all honour and glory are yours forever. AMEN

8) Breaking of Bread

According to the holy institution of this sacrament of communion through our Lord Jesus Christ himself we do this to remember him:

In the night when he was betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ

Took bread

(take bread)

And when he had given thanks he broke it

(break bread)

And said: This is my body, broken for you

Do this in remembrance of me

In the same way he took the cup

(pour wine) and raise cup)

Saying: this is the cup of the new covenant

Sealed by my blood

Whenever you drink it do so in memory of me

9) Kyrie

And together we call to God for his mercy:

Jesus, Lamb of God

Have mercy on us

Jesus bearer of our sins

Have mercy on us

Jesus, redeemer of the world

Grant us your peace

10) Communion

Taking of bread and wine

Draw near with faith: receive the body of Christ

Which was given for you

And his blood which was shed for you

And come to him with prayers of thanksgiving

Take bread

The Body of Christ, broken for us (hold)

Take wine

The Blood of Christ, shed for us (hold)

11) The Peace

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all and I invite you to share the peace with each other.

12) Prayer

Let us Pray:

Gracious and Loving God

As we prepare to go from this place we go with gratitude for the privilege to celebrate this holy sacrament of communion, which draws us close to you and to your son Jesus Christ, which draws us together as your church, as brothers and sisters in Christ. We give you thanks that you give us strength and encouragement in faith through the visible signs of bread and wine, we give you thanks for the presence we feel through the Holy Spirit and we ask that you remain in our hearts through your Spirit, so we will take this experience back into the world.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn

Benediction

And the God who loved us so much he gave his only son 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

