



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTORDUCTION

A warm welcome to this week's Sunday Reflection as we think about our relationship with God and with each other.

INTIMATIONS:

11 Sept Kirk Session

Call to worship

The psalmist says:

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly. (Ps111.1)

HYMN:

All Ages Talk

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Gracious and Loving God,

You know our hearts and search our souls, you know our lives, our rest and our rising, you love us with all our qualities and with our flaws and so we come before you in joyful gratitude and we ask that you may cleanse us from our sin and make us ready to follow you.

Loving God,

You have taught us your ways through your prophets and apostles, you have given them words of encouragement and warning, through them you have taught us how to follow your path, the path of righteousness. Lord, we thank you

You have justified us from our sin through your son Jesus Christ who lived with us and died for us as a ransom for many. You have sent your son to teach us to love one another as you love us and to love you above all else. We give you thanks and praise.

You have given us your Holy spirit, through which we know your living word in our hearts, through which we know your love, through which we know we are yours and you live in us. For this we give you praise and thanks.

Forgiving Father,

We know it can be hard to keep focussed on you and on your word, we often follow the clamour of this world, listen to the loudest voice and ignore your silent call. Forgive us where we do not follow you and your son, where we do not listen to your word.

We do not always find it easy to love our neighbour as you love us, we can be hurt or angry, we can be absorbed by our own worries and fears. Forgive us where we are careless or hurtful, forgive us where we do not show your love to each other.

Gracious Lord

We know that we are frail and sinful, because we are human, but we also know, that you have redeemed us from our sins through your son Jesus Christ and in this assurance we 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

Psalm 112, 1-8a

Happy is the person who honours the Lord, who takes pleasure in obeying his commands. ²The good man's children will be powerful in the land; his descendants will be blessed. ³His family will be wealthy and rich, and he will be prosperous forever.

⁴Light shines in the darkness for good people, for those who are merciful, kind, and just. ⁵Happy is the person who is generous with his loans, who runs his business honestly. ⁶A good person will never fail; he will always be remembered.

⁷He is not afraid of receiving bad news; his faith is strong, and he trusts in the Lord. ⁸He is not worried or afraid

Luke 14, 1-11

One Sabbath Jesus went to eat a meal at the home of one of the leading Pharisees; and people were watching Jesus closely. ²A man whose legs and arms were swollen came to Jesus, ³and Jesus spoke up and asked the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, "Does our Law allow healing on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴But they would not say a thing. Jesus took the man, healed him, and sent him away. ⁵Then he said to them, "If any one of you had a child or an ox that happened to fall in a well on a Sabbath, would you not pull it out at once on the Sabbath itself?" ⁶But they were not able to answer him about this. ⁷Jesus noticed how some of the guests were choosing the best places, so he told this parable to all of them: ⁸"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place. It could happen that someone more important than you has been invited, ⁹and your host, who invited both of you, would have to come and say to you, 'Let him have this place.' Then you would be embarrassed and have to sit in the lowest place. ¹⁰Instead, when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that your host will come to you and say, 'Come on up, my friend, to a better place.' This will bring you honour in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great."

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

You have given us your word, so we have a good relationship with you and with each other, you have given us your word not to limit us but to free us in love to you and to our neighbour. For this we thank you with all our hearts and in offering thanks and praise to you, we also ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit, so we walk humbly before you and do your will.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

As I am beginning to pack boxes I find things again that I had long forgotten I even possessed: a toy I kept as a keepsake to remind me of days when our daughter was a little girl, a CD with music and poetry from Iona, which must have stemmed from visiting the island with my mother years ago and lots of books that had gathered dust on my shelves. One of the books I barely remembered I had was a small collection of essays by CS Lewis, whom you will remember as the author of the Narnia Chronicles. This book is written for adults. It is called "a grief observed" and was written as his beloved wife died of cancer. It is a raw book, an honest book. Full of rage and anger against God, full of doubt and questions. His greatest fear, Lewis said, was not that he would come to the conclusion that God does not exist, but that God was different from the romanticised version of happier days, that he would come to realize how God really was and that he would not like it. And yet there was a new found humility hidden in the pages of this rather thin book, an acknowledgement that we cannot create God in our image, but that it was the other way round, the realisation that the God of the Bible is potentially completely different to what we made of him in our imagination and

that we would have to accept that. Strangely enough, when all was said and done, this understanding, these reflections seemed to have strengthened Lewis's faith.

Jesus in our New Testament reading, when he was invited into the home of a leading Pharisee (Pharisees were not all bad), teaches the guests a lesson in humility. After yet another healing on the Sabbath, which left everyone speechless, which once again emphasises that God's law are made, so all of us can live well together, that God's law is to interpreted with love and compassion, after Jesus deals with a man who is ill and ill- treated, because of his illness, with a man who is unable to work, poor and marginalised: there is a surprising change of scene: Jesus is invited to a dinner party by one of the leading pharisees, a member of the elite with an income to match. It will have been a civilised, maybe a little pretentious affair. There will have been a strict pecking order as to who is allowed to sit where and the seat nearest the host will have been coveted. And there, maybe under the impression of the man he had healed earlier, Jesus teaches the guests a lesson in humility: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place. It could happen that someone more important than you has been invited,⁹ and your host, who invited both of you, would have to come and say to you, 'Let him have this place.' Then you would be embarrassed and have to sit in the lowest place."¹⁰ Instead, when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that your host will come to you and say, 'Come on up, my friend, to a better place.'" It is not quite the same scene, Jesus stops short of embarrassing and insulting his host and the other guests. But his meaning is clear: This game of thrones of who is more important than the other, of who is more privileged and who has the most favour with the host, is the opposite of honourable, it bears the inherent danger of humiliation and embarrassment. And so Jesus' famous teaching: "For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great." Is the logical consequence of this parable.

But the meaning goes deeper than momentary embarrassment and humiliation at a dinner party or wedding feast. It fundamentally defines our relationship to God and to each other. I must admit, I struggled with the concept of humility and obedience to God in the past. It seemed to me an authoritarian, even sometimes manipulative image of God that I was suspicious of when I was younger. Until I met a lecturer at the university of Glasgow during my studies for the ministry who brought a different perspective to the table. To be humble before God, to be obedient to God also means not to accept other authorities and idols, like a totalitarian regime. To be humble before God, to be obedient to God means to trust in Him alone and to commit to His word. Thus the churches opposing Hitler during the third Reich committed to God in two ways. In their Barmen declaration they defined first the rule of the state and then the role of the church by what it is not. They said: We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well. And: We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State. With this they put the word of God above the words of the state and more importantly: they put the word of God above themselves and their interest. That is humility and that is obedience to God. And seen in this light, I think, it is a good thing.

AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God

You have sent your son into this world to teach us about your forgiving love and to draw us closer to you through his life and his death. For this we bring you our offering of thanks, and yet there is suffering and lovelessness in this world and in giving thanks and praise we also lift up to you all those who are in pain and we ask that you may dry their tears.

We will always continue to pray for those who live in countries and regions savaged by war and violence and bloodshed in Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, in Sudan and wherever there is no peace. We pray for the injured and disabled, we pray for all who lost loved ones, we pray for those who have no choice but to leave their home. May they find new hope through you.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We will always pray for politicians across the world and across the country, for the powerful and mighty and for those on the margin of the world stage. May they all come together in unity and peace and may they acknowledge that we live in the one world, God's creation.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for your church, all over the world and here in Scotland, here in Ayr, we pray for those who are struggling and those who are thriving alike. We pray that they may find the courage to walk forward in difficult times and the faith to continue worshipping you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will never forget to pray for everyone in our congregation and community, who are suffering. For all who are ill and frail at home or in hospital, for all who are bereaved, for all who are lonely in our midst. Grant them your comfort and grant us open eyes and hands, 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 have shown us your love and your mercy in sending your son Jesus Christ into this world, through him you have shown us that we are saved from sin and frailty. Through him we are forgiven. For this we praise and thank you. And in offering our thanks we also bring some of what you have given us to your table and we ask that you may add your blessing, so these offerings may be used to your glory.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God of love 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

