



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to this week's Sunday Reflection as we reflect on our calling by God

INTIMATIONS:

11 Sept Kirk Session

Call to worship

The apostle Paul says:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13,8)

HYMN:

All Ages Talk

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Gracious and Loving God,

You have given us your living word to guide us through our lives, to live well in your sight and to be a blessing to others, you have given us your Spirit that inscribes your word into our hearts and makes it part of our lives. And so we come before you with an open heart to be led by you.

Loving God,

We thank you for your commandments brought down by Moses from mount Sinai and given to your people when they wandered in the desert, given as a guide and as a lifeline in challenging times, given to us so we can follow your part.

We thank you for your son Jesus Christ, who taught us that there is no greater commandment than to love you and to love our neighbour as you loved us in sending us your only son for our salvation and redemption.

We give thanks for your Holy spirit, which turns the dead stones of your commandment into a living and breathing relationship with you, which shows us that they are your gift, given because you love your people and you walk with them.

Forgiving Father,

We do not always find it easy to keep your commandments and to live by your word. We have to fight off competing values and

treasures of this world and we are tempted by them. Forgive us where we do not focus on you.

We can find it hard to listen to your word and to follow your son. We are distracted by worries and fears, we cannot easily leave our future and the future of our church in your hands. Forgive us where we do not put our trust wholly in you.

Gracious Lord

We know that we have sinned before you and before each other, but we also know, that you have saved us from our sins through your son Jesus Christ and in this assurance we pray as he himself 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 1, 4-10

⁴The Lord said to me, ⁵"I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations." ⁶I answered, "Sovereign Lord, I don't know how to speak; I am too young." ⁷But the Lord said to me, "Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything I command you to say. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken!" ⁹Then the Lord reached out, touched my lips, and said to me, "Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak. ¹⁰Today I give you authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Luke 13, 10-17

¹⁰One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. ¹¹A woman there had an evil spirit that had kept her sick for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, "Woman, you are free from your sickness!" ¹³He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God. ¹⁴The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, "There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!" ¹⁵The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. ¹⁶Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?" ¹⁷His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

You have given us both your word and your spirit and through both you have called us into your service, through both you have made us who we are. You have promised to walk with us as we try to listen to your call, as we try to follow your son. For this we give you thanks and praise. And as we offer our thanks to you we ask that you may send your spirit to us in this hour so we can hear your call, so we can follow you and your son.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

I have learned early on that this is Burns country and Burns nights, Burns culture and of course Burns poetry are held dear in this area and so I have tried to adapt. I have taken friends and family to Alloway, I have bought and been given Burns souvenirs for Christmas and I have read all sorts of Burns poetry from to a moose to Tam O'Shanter. One poem that is known the world over and not just here in Burns country, not even just here in Scotland, one poem that is translated in many European languages and has been early on, because it resonates with people all over the world is "A man's a man for all that"(and I will not even attempt to say it in Scots). It resonates with so many, because it reads as a poem of defiance and a poem of hope. "We dare be poor for all that", "the pith of sense and pride of worth are higher rank than all that" and "a man's a man for all that", those are the sentences of the confidence of an emerging middle and lower class who know their worth, those are sentences spoken against the odds, against what seems to be an unshakeable reality of social class. And "for all that", "despite everything is the key to the poem and the key to Burn's attitude: He

knows what the world is like, he knows how the odds are stacked, but he says what he needs to say anyway, for all that.

And this anyway, this “for all that”, that could be a headline for Jeremiah’s life from the very beginning, from God’s first call, our Old Testament Reading today, to the end. At first the prophet Jeremiah is not too sure if he can do the job God asks him to do, God has called him to do before he was even born. He finds all kinds of excuses not to do God’s will: He is too young, he does not know how to speak and if truth be told he is a little scared of the task ahead of him, of the crowds, of the uncomfortable things he will have to say. And quite objectively being a prophet is more than a little daunting. And so he will need God’s support, symbolised by God touching his lips and giving him the right words, so he knows what to say. It will not be easy for Jeremiah, this calling to be a prophet, it will entail speaking truth to power, it will entail telling God’s people how it is, it will entail being unpopular. Being called by God is never the easy option. But Jeremiah will not have to do it all on his own. God is with him and God promises: Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken! Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak”. Jeremiah may be young, Jeremiah may be inexperienced, Jeremiah may be scared, but he is chosen by God, has been since before he was born and God will not let him down.

I don’t know about you, but this passage speaks to me and I find it easy to apply it to our times. Like Jeremiah we are living in tumultuous and uncertain times – Jeremiah is also called the weeping prophet, as he had much to complain about, much to lament about, when he warned his people about their impending captivity through the superpower Babylon, they threw him into a cistern to let him die of hunger and thirst. They really did not want to hear what he had to say. And despite all this Jeremiah continues to do what God has called him to do. And that chimes with me in today’s times: What we have to say, what we believe, what we hold dear does not seem to matter in the world any more. We are not persecuted, we are not threatened,

we are not punished for what we say as Jeremiah was, and that is something to be grateful for, but at the same time we do not have a voice, our faith does not have a voice, we are not heard. Or at least it can seem that way in our secular world. And that is difficult, that is frustrating. But like Jeremiah we are not alone: Despite the difficulties, despite the uphill struggle we all as a church do face, God is with us, God walks with us. God will not let us down. It still takes courage, it still takes commitment, but with God's help we can do it, we can answer God's call, despite everything, for all that. And there is one more thing we have in common with the prophet: He does not give up. He knows what is coming, he has an inkling of the persecution and ridicule and humiliation he will have to face, he is scared and there are times when he much rather not do what God asks him to do, when he would rather hide from the world, but he still answers God's call. And that is what counts: that we answer God's call, despite everything, for all that.

Jesus in our New Testament reading also acts despite everything, or for all that. He heals a woman, who has been unable to straighten up, to walk tall for eight years. With this, in the opinion of his opponents anyway, he goes against everything tradition has taught him and his fellow citizens. From the ten commandments to the present day it is literally set in stone: do not work on a Sabbath and the official of the synagogue points that out to Jesus – or rather to the woman Jesus heals - rather angrily: “There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!” Jesus heals the woman anyway, despite everything, for all that. And he gives a good reason, a reason that lets the people rejoice and makes his opponents feel ashamed of themselves: “You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. ¹⁶ Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?” That is them told. And as is often the case, Jesus knows God's word and God's commandments actually rather better than they do. He also knows WHY those commandments are given: so God's people live well together. God's word and God's commandments are a liberating, releasing force, they are not made to constrain God's people or to make them suffer and so

it is only right and proper, it is actually in the tradition of God's word to release this woman from her suffering, despite everything Jesus' opponents say, for all that.

As a church we can learn from that. Within the various traditions and customs of the reformed churches, of which the Church of Scotland is a part, formed over decades and centuries, there is one overarching principle, one overarching tradition: the reformed church is always reforming, reforming – and this is important - in accordance with God's living word. And God's living word is no static, unmovable entity, it needs to be read and interpreted afresh in every generation. Because, while God does not change, we humans do and therefore our relationship with God and with each other keeps changing. What was appropriate and right fifty years ago, may no longer be so, both in our relationship with God and with each other. And to keep the church reforming in accordance with the word of God, it takes people like Jeremiah, it takes people who like Jesus question traditions, who answer God's call, no matter what, for all that.

AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God

You have given us your word so we may live well together in a world of justice and peace, in your kingdom, for this we offer our thanks to you. And yet there is suffering and pain in this world and your kingdom has not yet come and so we lift up to you all those who do not see peace or justice in their lives.

We will always remember to pray for all who must live in countries and regions of war and violence, of unrest and bloodshed in Ukraine,

in Israel and Gaza, in Yemen and in Sudan and everywhere where people cannot live in peace. We pray for the wounded in body and soul, we pray for those who lost their possessions, we pray for all who flee their homes. May you surround them with your comfort and dry their tears

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who live under unjust regimes, who are not free, who have no voice in Afghanistan, in Iran, in Russia and elsewhere in the world. We pray for all who are persecuted for their beliefs or opinions, for their gender or their nationality. May they be able to bring their plight before you.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who feel forgotten in this country and in this town, who do not see a perspective in their life, who are angry, depressed or destructive, who hate others because they do not feel loved and valued. May they know you as a God of love, we pray.

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 given us your living word through Moses and the prophets, you have given us the good news of Jesus Christ through your apostles, you have given our lives hope and purpose for this we praise and thank you and in offering our praise and thanks to you we also bring to your table some of our worldly possessions and we ask that you may bless these our gifts so they are used to spread your word

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God who walks with us through our lives 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

