

## Worship in Lockdown—28 June 2020

### Call to Worship (*from Isaiah 35: 1-4*)

The Lord will display his glory,  
The splendour of our God.  
Even the wilderness and the desert will be glad  
The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with crocuses  
There will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy  
The deserts will be as green as the hills  
With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands  
And encourage those who have weak knees  
Say to those with fearful hearts,  
Be strong and do not fear  
The Lord is coming to save you.  
Let us worship God

The Scripture Readings are  
taken from:

Hebrews 12: 1-3; 12-15

And

Luke 13: 10-17



It is with great sadness that we  
have to intimate the death of  
Simon Wilkie.

Son of Emeritus Elder  
Alan Wilkie in Currie Kirk

Please pray for the family

### Opening Prayer (*from the Iona Community*)

Lord God  
Early in the morning when the world was young  
You made life in all its beauty and terror  
You gave birth to all that we know

Early in the morning, when the world least  
expected it,  
A new-born child crying in a cradle  
Announced that you had come among us,  
That you were one of us

Early in the morning,  
Surrounded by respectable liars, religious  
leaders,  
Anxious statesmen and silent friends  
You accepted the penalty for doing good  
For speaking truth, for being God:  
You shouldered and suffered the cross

Early in the morning  
A voice in a guarded graveyard and footsteps in  
the dew  
Proved that you had risen,  
That you came back to those and for those  
Who had forgotten, denied and destroyed you

Early in the morning  
In the multicoloured company of your Church on  
earth and in heaven  
We celebrate your creation  
Your life, your death and resurrection  
Your love for us

And so to you we pray

LORD, BRING NEW LIFE  
WHERE WE ARE WORN,  
NEW LOVE  
WHERE WE HAVE TURNED HARD-HEARTED  
FORGIVENESS  
WHERE WE FEEL HURT AND WHERE WE HAVE  
WOUNDED  
And, WHERE WE FEEL WE ARE PRISONERS OF  
OURSELVES, OR OUR CIRCUMSTANCES  
GIVE TO US THE JOY AND THE FREEDOM OF  
YOUR HOLY SPIRIT.

AMEN

# Meditation

Today's Gospel story is a lovely reminder that Jesus always cared for people who were hurting or troubled. When he encountered this stooped woman, he was filled with compassion when he saw that her body was hunched. Maybe she had Scoliosis of the spine, or maybe she was born like this. Being cast down, in a lockdown of sorts, her field of vision was narrow. She would only ever be able to see the floor or look at the feet of people in front of her. But, not just her vision was cast down low. Because of her disability, she would have been socially alienated, treated as an outsider, a reject, a second-class citizen. The religious authorities assumed a disability was a punishment for some sin and treated with contempt so she was also cast down in spirit.

But then in this wonderful, uplifting interaction, Jesus straightens her up and heals her. He raises her to a new life in which she can hold her head up high. She can see people's faces, make eye contact, tell if they are smiling. She is free from both physical and social shame, free to feel joy in her newfound liberty.

There were detractors, of course. The focus of the story soon moves to the reactions of the Pharisees. The religious leaders also suffered from limited vision. They also looked down, though not at the ground. They looked down upon people whom they deemed to be beneath them. This was a woman for one thing, and a crippled woman. Jesus detested all their judgemental rules and laws which they used to exclude others and maintain their status. Jesus radical inclusivity, humanity and compassion, threatened their *status quo* and they were infuriated so they chastised Jesus for Healing on the Sabbath. Healing was considered work and so they decreed was unlawful.

These men lacked the one thing that Jesus had in abundance-compassion. Jesus shamed them when he pointed out that they would probably treat their animals better than they would treat this poor woman. In Luke's Gospel there are six occasions when Jesus either teaches or heals on the Sabbath. His worship on the Sabbath, was intended to show us that to worship God, means taking care of those on the periphery, those who are marginalised, hurting or in need, whatever their race, gender, ability or circumstance.

Perhaps this story speaks very much to our time. This week a journalist described the Corona virus epidemic as an amplifier of inequality. The poor, the weak, those with disabilities or from black and other minorities are more likely to suffer. Children of less well-off families are more likely to fall behind with schooling. But prevailing inequalities and prejudices came to light with the shocking death of George Floyd. George Floyd was cast down because he was black, but he was not just cast down, he was held down, by a man who un-ceremonially abused a symbolic gesture and "took the knee" upon his neck for eight minutes. By chance, someone videoed the incident when so many other incidents like this have happened without notice. What would Jesus say about the policeman?

As human beings, as Christians, it is hard to understand at all how racism still exists. After the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust, we progressed with the Declaration of Human Rights and the Declarations of the Rights of Children. A composer Matt Richter has just put the Declaration of Human Rights to music. He described it as a document of hope rather than one of reality. Racially motivated murders, genocides still happen.

This week on the radio Melvin Bragg discussed the writings of Hannah Arendt. I had not heard of her before. She was a German Jew who escaped to America in 1941. She had an interest in what causes humans to dehumanise others. She wanted to understand the murderous totalitarianism that had spread across Europe in her youth. She observed that in most cases, a leader emerged who told people single minded answers to all their problems. That leader would motivate people to adopt his ideology, using fear tactics to intimidate anyone who questioned, disagreed or fell out of line. Under such terror and militarisation, some people begin to lose the ability to think for themselves and become idle to argue.

Arendt was particularly interested Karl Eichmann, a chief organizer of the holocaust, who ordered millions to their deaths. She thought he might be an evil psychopath but when she watched his trial, she realised that he was just a high level bureaucrat, a glorified desk clerk, a thoughtless civil servant. He spoke in clichés and he was vulgar. He seemed to feel he ought to be rewarded for doing a good job following orders. Arendt noted that under the ideology of Nazism, human beings were somehow split from their own humanity. Everyone was regarded as a job holder, everyone's worth judged by their usefulness or function. She wrote that if you can reduce people to a body or a job, if you take away their right to, or sense of their own person, it becomes easy to kill them as if they were a flea.

Isn't that exactly what the slave trade did to African peoples. It reduced people to a function. Black people were regarded as disposable bodies.

We may all be thinking, "wasn't all that a long time ago?"

Sadly Lockdown has been a big reminder that we have a lot of work still to do. In Lockdown we have had more time to think and all around, the news is hard. This generation and the next have been lumbered with the responsibilities of climate change, with the demands of a deathly Pandemic and its consequent recession, the fight against terror, the refugee crisis, and more challenges. There is work to combat inequality and be vigilant against racism, islamophobia, antisemitism, totalitarianism, elitism or patriarchy. (It's uplifting to see how people of Currie have put up black lives matter signs next to rainbows.)

But the truth is, are we not tired? People are news-weary, afflicted with concerns. So many are also disheartened due to cancelled celebrations, loved ones far away who are missed, or having to grieve in isolation. This "lockdown" moment is tiring. The tasks at hand can seem overwhelming, the problems and injustices hard to embrace.

In the reading from Hebrews, Paul is writing to a young church at a time when they are tired. Standing up for what they believed, overcoming class difference and caring under Roman rule was exhausting. Paul, in order to lift their spirits, describes the Christian life as an endurance race, (maybe the end of the race.) In order to encourage them, he reminds the followers that they are not alone. They are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. In the chapter before, he lists some: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Moses, David, Solomon, Esther . . . on and on. He wants them to remember the stories of their fathers and mothers of faith—to see how God worked in their human lives to resolve human problems; to emancipate people from slavery and free people from captivity, to save people from sin, to heal wounds and lift weary heads. They ran their race now it is our turn to run the race with perseverance and to cast aside everything that hinders us including sin, fear or doubt.

In the end, he points to Jesus himself. Who, more than Jesus can understand that life lived with real humanity and compassion comes at a cost. Paul knew, as I am sure many know, that when one works without encouragement for a good cause, one can lose hope. When doing good means we are constantly cast down, underpaid or undervalued, it is hard to have hope. He wanted to remind us all to have hope.

Paul reiterates the same words that the Prophet Isaiah gave to the persecuted people of his time who yearned for freedom from the tyranny of Babylon. He used these great words, "Therefore lift your drooping heads and strengthen your weak knees."

Paul reminds all of us that the problems facing our world may seem enormous but God is with us, as are all the heavenly souls who have fought, lived and died for the good causes. The work doesn't end, it just falls upon us to keep it going. To see a stooped old lady and see her as a lovely human being and not as a body.

Here is a story that sums it all up beautifully.

A group of refugees were fleeing over some rugged terrain when they were approached by a frail old man and a mother carrying an infant. The leaders agreed to allow them to come along with the understanding that the men would take turns carrying the baby, and the mother and the baby had to make it on their own. Several days into the journey, the old man started stumbling. He fell to the ground, saying he was too tired to continue, pleaded to be left behind to die. Facing the harsh reality of the situation, the group decided to do just that. Then the young mother placed her baby in the old man's arms. She told him it was his turn to carry the child and she walked on with the rest. After a few minutes she allowed herself to look back, and when she did, she saw the old man walking along the trail with the child in his arms. Whenever we have hope and we are not alone in our struggles when our purpose is to care for one another, we discover we are not so tired, we find new strength and courage.

Jesus had the ability to free people from locked down thinking. He freed people from all sorts of lockdowns—both the physical and spiritual ones, in unexpected ways.

He is with us. So to whom it may concern, "lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees."

## Pastoral Prayer (adapted but courtesy of Susan Sayers )

Dear God, help us to broaden our vision of your nature and help us respond to your calling.

Whether it suits or not, whether it is convenient or not.

May the whole human community begin to reflect your light and beauty  
In the love for God and neighbour.

Displayed by prayer and worship, and Godly living

May no corruption, cruelty or injustice go unchallenged  
In any place or part of our world, however unpopular challenging may be.

Help us to create a society to protect the vulnerable  
And encourage mutual care and support.

May our care for the very young and the elderly imitate the faithful and very generous love of God.

May we overcome any prejudices, grievances or opinions that hinder us  
So that in God's love we may look at one another face to face  
And practice the liberating work of forgiveness.

May all those whose bodies cause them pain or immobility  
Be affirmed in value by real loving encounters with people who care  
May those who feel spiritually crippled be set free by an encounter with God  
Through the love of those who care

May those who have died live forever in the joy and peace of heaven  
As children of Promise  
And may those who miss their company be protected, comforted and supported.

Amen



*Lift up your tired hands, then, and strengthen your trembling knees!*

*(Hebrews 12: v12) - Good News*

Please get in touch with the Kirk Office (451 5141) if you need anything.

We have friends willing to listen, shop, walk a dog, fix a garden.

Website: <https://www.curriekirk.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/>

Please check the Kirk website for Easter's Sermon: <http://www.curriekirk.org/>