

**Town & Gown Worship at Home—7 February 2021**  
**Heriot Watt Anniversary Service**  
**Dr Alistair Donald, University Chaplain**

**Opening Call To Worship**

Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!  
For great is his steadfast love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures  
forever.

Come, let us praise the Lord...

Let us worship the Living God

**Prayer**

Almighty God, through many and various ways you come to us.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Creator and King of this vast universe and of our small but perfect planet: we gather this morning from the university and church communities to worship you as the Living God. In so doing, we acknowledge that you are the source of life and of love, of goodness and of truth.

In a world of constant change, we bless you that you are the same yesterday, today and forever, faithful and dependable, holy and loving, and merciful to all who seek your face.

We rejoice that you are a personal God, able and willing to draw near us in time of trouble. You are the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble with the comfort that we ourselves have received from you.

We readily acknowledge that we have often strayed from you in sinful and selfish ways, but in confessing our sins before you we thank you for ready forgiveness that is there for the asking, because of what has been achieved for us in Jesus, your Son and our Saviour, who 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 this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.



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

Robert Holmes  
Late of Pilmuir Farm, Balerno

Please pray for the family

## SCRIPTURE: Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory  
above the heavens.  
From the lips of children and infants  
you have ordained praise  
Because of your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have sent in place.  
what is man that your are mindful of him,

the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honour

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under his feet:  
all flocks and herds,  
and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air,  
and the fish of the sea  
all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

## Message from the Chaplain

Many people who would not usually express much interest in science have become much more aware of its importance during the past year. I refer, of course, to the pandemic, with the many restrictions it has brought in its wake. We all cautiously hope that there is now light at the end of the tunnel!

Science has helped in two contrasting ways. It has been a useful tool for governments in trying to minimise the impact of the virus. And more positively, it has led to the development of several vaccines. Perhaps some of you have already had your first jab? The rest of us will have to wait a bit longer.

Science is certainly a wonderful tool in answering many questions. But one question that it cannot answer is this one: What is the meaning of life? We were reminded earlier in the service that tomorrow night sees our Annual Public Lecture given by Professor Alister McGrath. The title is Science, Faith and the Meaning of Life, and the lecture will be an intriguing comparison of the thinking of two well-known scientists: one living (Richard Dawkins), and the other, the incomparable Albert Einstein, who devised among other things the Theory of Relativity.

If, like, me, you would be hard pushed to understand Relativity, far less, explain it, Einstein himself comes to our rescue out with a helpful illustration: 'When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity.' Well, I for one am glad to take his word for it!

The other scientist whose views will be scrutinised in tomorrow's lecture, Richard Dawkins, is famously is a very dogmatic atheist. He is convinced that science disproves God, and that any question that can't be answered by science (such as 'Why are we here?') is not a proper question at all. He writes this: 'The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.'

What's interesting is that Einstein – one of the greatest Scientists there has ever been – would have strongly disagreed with Dawkins. Although not a conventional religious believer, Einstein insisted that he himself was not an atheist, but believed in a God 'who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists'. He also said that the finer speculations of science 'spring from a deep religious feeling' ... Perhaps the kind of feeling that we heard expressed in our Bible reading in Psalm 8: 'When I consider your heavens, the moon and stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?'

Einstein also, unlike Dawkins, did not think that science could tell you how to live, tell you your ethics. He denied emphatically that science would ever supersede religion, saying 'Every attempt to reduce ethics to scientific formulae must fail.'

Well, if you want to hear more on this, you'll need to come to the lecture tomorrow evening! The direct link to join is here:

<https://tinyurl.com/HeriotWattChaplaincyLecture>.

But I hope this taster will have shown that science on its own cannot tell us anything about the meaning of life. For that, we must look elsewhere.

The God that the Psalmist says has given humans responsibility for: flocks and herds, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea – the God who has endowed humans with the cleverness to find a vaccine for the virus – is not a remote God who watches us from afar, aloof from our everyday concerns and struggles. The New Testament describes Jesus in a very striking way: as the image of the invisible God, literally the icon of the invisible God. So we can't see God, but we can 'see' Jesus through the Gospel records, so show us what God is like. And it's a very reassuring picture for us, particularly in the pain and pressure of the pandemic.

In an incident recorded in Luke's Gospel (Luke 8: 42-48), Jesus encounters a woman who is extremely unwell. She had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, but no-one could heal her. A footnote tells us that she had spent all her money on doctors.

Let's think about what life is like for this woman. First of all, she's lonely. We know a bit about social distancing, don't we? Well, she's been social distancing for 12 years! We've only been doing it for one! So why did she have to do social distancing? Well, in the Old Testament, there were various laws for contagious diseases. This kept her well away from polite society. A year ago, we might have thought rules about isolation to prevent contagion a bit primitive and cruel. Now we get it: all those rules about contagion were a matter of public health.

So of course, the woman was very lonely, just like many of us are at the present time: stuck in our rooms, becoming experts on Zoom and Skype calls (although it's not really the same, is it?). No wonder that medical experts are worrying about the long-term effects of social distancing on our mental health. For we were made to be in relationship.

God is also relational: a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we are made in his image. It doesn't feel right if we only have our own company for too long. The woman with the bleeding is also running out of money and has spent all she has on doctors. I don't know how you are managing with money – some have managed to save, but others have found it very tough.

So we can relate to this woman who is lonely and broke. But most importantly: she's sick. She's been bleeding for 12 years. She probably had anaemia, and would have been infertile. If she'd been married, her husband would have now divorced her; her family abandoned her. Because she was deemed to be "unclean", she couldn't go to the Temple to pray for healing. We also have a picture of a woman whose life is gradually draining away. We can relate to this too I think.

In all likelihood, some of you listening today will have actually had the virus, or known someone who has. We've all had to consider our own mortality in a way that we may not have had to do before this. Most of us put off thinking about that, especially if we're young. If we do get ill, then we know there will be a reliable cure! Except this time, it's not that straightforward (although prevention at least now looks feasible). Questions of life and death, of the meaning of life, can't just be filed away any more. That's why huge numbers are now listening to online church services up and down the land.

So this poor woman is sick, she's lonely, and she's broke. But she reaches out to Jesus. At great risk to herself (for she'd risk being stoned by the crowd if caught), she reached out and touched the edge of Jesus' cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. She could feel it in her body! She was cured! And it turns out that it wasn't she who was contagious. It was Jesus who was contagious, in a good way! She doesn't make him dirty; he makes her clean! She doesn't give him her sickness, but he gives her his wholeness.

He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.' We know that this kind of healing doesn't always occur today, but sometimes it does. And it did in this case. But Jesus doesn't just address her sickness, but also her loneliness. The fact that he called out 'Who touched me?' shows he didn't just want her to be well but to be known. The woman no doubt wanted just to slip away, healed in body, and wanting no fuss. But Jesus wants everyone to see that she who was an outcast is an outcast no longer. Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.



He calls her daughter. That's language that is fatherly and caring, language that is relational. And this is so important. We discover God's fatherly concern; that by trusting him we become his sons and daughters; and that we have a new family relationship with fellow believers. For the end game of Jesus is not just to sort our problems for us, but to make us children of the living God!

So whatever our situation: unwell, financially broke or just plain lonely, Jesus is there for us. He's there not just to fix our lives, but to draw our lives into his, so that we truly understand the meaning of life, something that all the scientific study in the world, for all its brilliance, can never do...

## Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father: we thank you that in the uncertainties of life, we have a hope in you that is sure and steadfast, and that can never be shaken.

In our prayers we remember the Queen and members of the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments. Please help them in all the hard decisions they have to take at the present time.

We pray for the minister and the people of this parish, especially any who are affected by illness, grief or loneliness: that you would comfort them in their time of trouble.

We pray for our University, especially for our Principal, our Secretary and our Chair of Court; and all who serve with them in Court and Senate. We pray that they may be given much wisdom and courage to guide the University in these uncertain times. We pray, too, for those students affected by loneliness; and the teaching, research and support staff who are keeping the business of education alive.

We remember the nations of the world – especially those many countries that are represented by staff and students at the University. We pray, too, for those who exercise power in these countries, that they be guided in the ways of wisdom, truth and justice.

Finally, Lord, we remember our own families and friends who are not with us this morning, whether near or far, and whom we so long to see again in person through Jesus Christ Our Lord AMEN.

Sunday Club is taking place on Zoom this term. Fortnightly beginning on Sunday 24th January at 4.30pm. We'll have a Bible story, games and activities together for around 45 minutes. If your child would like to join in then contact Heather at [familyworker\\_jvp@outlook.com](mailto:familyworker_jvp@outlook.com) for details.



## Currie Kirk Guild

We had another successful meeting last Tuesday when Tom Baldwin from “Life and Work” talked to us about the history of the publication with some wonderful pictures from the archives of old magazines. In addition he told us about his role and how he ended up there.

Next week we will be having another informal “Coffee, tea and chat”. One day we will be able to do it in person.

If you wish to join any of our meetings email [elf.lamont@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:elf.lamont@blueyonder.co.uk) It is not necessary to be a Guild member.

I am hoping to get to Wester Hailes foodbank this Tuesday. So far we have collected almost £200 as well as a variety of goodies for lunchboxes. Many thanks to all those who have donated.

Meantime the vaccinations are rolling out so, hopefully, the end is in sight.

Stay well, look after yourselves and each other.

Louise Lamont Guild President

## Kirk Contacts

Minister: Rev Dr Easter Smart—Tel: 449 4719 email: [esmart@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:esmart@churchofscotland.org.uk)

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Dear Friends, please get in touch with Nina at the Kirk Office—451 5141

email [currie\\_kirk@btconnect.com](mailto:currie_kirk@btconnect.com) if you need anything.

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

Website: [//www.curriekirk.org/](http://www.curriekirk.org/) or [//www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/](https://www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/)

All sermons from Currie Kirk can be found on the Kirk's website and on YouTube—search Currie Kirk

## What Matters Most?

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

### Prepare yourself...

O God, we come to you out of the week just gone – with its successes and disappointments, its joys and its struggles. By your Holy Spirit, help us to focus on you now, to listen as you speak to our hearts, so that we may be better prepared to serve you in the week to come. Amen.



### Question...



What things are important to you?  
How do you show that in your life?

### Challenge...

Imagine you are to be stranded on a desert island and can only take 5 things with you.

What would you take and why?



### Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Mark 1:29-39. You can read them in a Bible or find them here.

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage. You might want to read this child friendly version of the story too:

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/21935/epiphany-5-present-the-reading.pdf> Or you could try acting out the story after you've read it.

## Talk together...



- \* How do you identify what's important to you? Does anyone help you make those decisions?
- \* Do you think what's most important will change throughout life?
- \* When you think of Jesus what image or words come to mind?
- \* If you were starting a new job or hobby, what would be your top priority?
- \* How does Jesus spend his time in this Bible passage?
- \* What does that tell us about his priorities?
- \* Why do you think Jesus went to a deserted place to pray?
- \* Jesus spent an ordinary day doing extraordinary things: healing people, praying, and telling others about God. He was teaching the disciples what was most important and from his actions people knew what was important to him.
- \* What do your actions say about what's important to you?

## Play together...

### Hide and seek

Play a game of hide and seek. Time how long it takes for the seeker to find all the hiders.

In today's story the disciples "hunted" for Jesus. Why were they hunting? Was Jesus hiding? Where had he gone?

What the disciples wanted wasn't the same as what Jesus wanted. But by what Jesus said and did, he showed what was most important.

## Pray together...

You'll need a sheet of paper each and a pen. Draw a line down the middle of your paper. On one side write "I want" and list anything you want to bring to God today.

After a couple of minutes, write "God wants" on the other side and think about what God's priorities for you might be. What might God want you to do this week?

Pray: Lord Jesus, go with us into the world next week. Help us to know you more deeply and remain focussed on you. Speak to us about what God wants from us and lead us in your ways. Amen.

## Do something...

Think of one small, achievable yet significant action that you can repeat every day this week – for example to sit quietly for 5 minutes each day, do one chore that you normally would try to ignore, do something kind for another person.

Note how you feel as you make this a priority this week. Did you stick to the action? Was it easy or hard? Did it have any unexpected outcomes?

## Praise together...



[I want to serve the purpose of God](#)  
[You are my vision](#)



Fan Wang  
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