

## Worship at Home—Sunday 22 August 2021



### A MESSAGE FROM EASTER

Dear friends,

The Kirk Session voted to do our best, to open the Kirk for in-person worship on the last Sunday of August. **We aim to open next Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> August for a 10 am worship.**

Many of us have been yearning to get back into the Kirk and whilst we will still need to be observant, it will be a delight to be together. If you plan to come, you need to let Nina know by phoning her between 10 am and 12.30 pm on Thursday—this is for “track and trace”.

Current regulations require:

- ◆ face masks must still be worn.
- ◆ worship still requires that we stick to the one-metre social distance rule.
- ◆ There will be sanitizing stations.

Please feel no pressure if you are still anxious about risks. There will still be an online service provided. But it is exciting that we can open at last after 17 long months! I look forward to seeing as many of you as would like to come.

Easter

## Call to Worship

We gather to worship the Lord.  
With ears ready to listen.  
With hearts ready to receive.  
With faith ready for action.  
We gather to worship the Lord

Amen

## Opening Prayer

As we rise in the morning, beloved God, may we don garments of your truth.  
May we wear the mantle of your protective blessing,  
and shoes that will guide us on your path.

May our every breath be a prayer, so that we might truly and fully proclaim the mystery of the gospel.  
It is through you and with you that we begin each day.  
Open us to the deeper meaning of this time with you  
For we come with our wounds open  
With our defences down  
We bringing our needs as we approach you  
We confess that sometimes we get weary  
Our smiles fade  
Our energy runs low  
Sometimes we despair  
We fail to look after ourselves or to trust  
In your sustaining love

We long for Christ's healing touch  
We are thankful that we can always seek you  
That in you no-one is a lost cause  
We are thankful that you do not condemn,  
You forgive

We thank you that you can heal our sorrow  
Untangle us from our difficulties and  
Recreate us in Your own beautiful likeness

Your Spirit continues to comfort us in our search for meaning and truth  
Encourage us to understand your truth  
Guide us to live the truth we find  
We are, ever grateful for the gift of your sustaining love,  
The great bond of love that unites us with you  
That unites us all whether we are together or apart  
That unites us with our family in heaven as well as earth.

Bless us now as we offer to your love the prayer Christ Jesus has taught us to say

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 and ever. Amen

## The Scriptures

### Psalm 89: 8-18

Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?

You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

You rule over the surging sea;

when its waves mount up, you still them.

You crushed Rahab like one of the slain;

with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.

The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth;

you founded the world and all that is in it.

You created the north and the south;

Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.

Your arm is endowed with power;

your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;

love and faithfulness go before you.

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,

who walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

They rejoice in your name all day long;

they celebrate your righteousness.

For you are their glory and strength,

and by your favour you exalt our horn.

Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD,

our king to the Holy One of Israel.

### Ephesians 6: 10-20—The Armour of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the

shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.



## Sermon

Over the past months journalists have described our battle with Covid-19 as a form of 'war'. It has been tough on everyone. But in recent days, there have been news stories which have put the Pandemic in perspective. There are nations where the Pandemic is the least of their problems. We see the suffering in Haiti after a fatal earthquake which destroyed hospitals and infrastructure—followed by a tropical storm. There seems to be no help or medical attention. People in Haiti say they feel forgotten.

But most striking has been the sudden, swift, shambolic takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. We've heard the pleas of displaced, desperate people trying to flee, throwing children over fences to get them out. It has been heart-wrenching to hear young women expressing that they feel terrified; they could be denied education, coerced into marriage, trafficked into sex slavery. We can only imagine the physical and mental distress of the people ruled by a brutal group known for its massacre of civilians, beheadings of foreigners, and teaching children to blow people up with suicide bombs.

Journalists are speaking against the short-sightedness of politicians. Why did the troops not weaken the Taliban strongholds before pulling out? One British commander was lamenting his fallen comrades who gave their lives for the sake of Afghanistan, and for what? He was also distressed for the men, women and children whom we have left to a terrible fate. I was reading this week about the complicated history of Afghanistan since the time of the Russian invasion, through the involvement of Pakistan and the USA.

When I was Chaplain at Aberdeen University, we were blessed to invite distinguished people to address our students. In 2009 I welcomed Martin Bell who preached the sermon on Remembrance Sunday. I don't know if you remember him as the war correspondent who covered the wars in Bosnia and Croatia as well as Afghanistan. He always wore a white suit. Martin Bell wore the white suit because he felt that it somehow provided some form of protection from the flying bullets. Perhaps it was a superstition, but when he traded in an army career for journalism, he decided never to take it off. He even wore it when he served as an independent MP for a while.

Well, he came to Aberdeen, and it was fascinating to hear him preach to our army, navy and air force cadets. He also gave a talk to our Politics students. Martin Bell says what he thinks, and is not afraid to speak the truth to power.



The students asked him about the Afghanistan war, and I will always remember the comments he made. He said that politicians making military decisions often have no actual military combat experience and do not listen enough to the expertise of the military personnel on the ground.

Last week we saw that image of President Biden looking shocked as he spoke to his Generals whilst Kabul fell. (I recently saw a cartoon with some military generals looking at a screen with a missile flying through the air. The Commander-in-chief shouts, “Alexa I said LUNCH, not launch!” Alexa, “oh. . .sorry.”)

Interestingly, Martin Bell said that he believed that, no matter how many nations tried to intervene and better the country of Afghanistan, it would eventually return to some form of primitive tribal warfare.

It is important to note that while the Taliban is a religious extremist group, their primitive belief in violence bears no resemblance to the real Islamic faith nor any monotheistic religion descended from Abraham.

In this sermon, perhaps our own immediate concern is to work through the Christian response to the problem of violence that has plagued every generation since the ancient biblical story of Cain and Abel. Violence has taken so many horrible forms from dictatorships to the slave trade, genocides to ghastly shootings—like the victims of the deranged Jake Davidson in Plymouth last week.

We are left wondering what kind of human being can perpetrate such acts of vicious torture upon another? Perhaps we can never fully understand how some human beings are so inhumane. What kind of person can brutally commit a mass murder, or a beheading, or can beat or shoot an innocent child? We know that life mattered to Jesus but especially the life of a helpless innocent child.

Jesus was a peace maker and he taught that those who make peace are blessed by God. But all too often we paint Jesus as a timid personality. We sing of our Saviour, “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” While Jesus stood for peace, he was far from passive in the face of injustice and violence. He condemned all human harm. Jesus especially condemned anyone who would cause a child harm. In Mathew 18 verse 6 Jesus controversially said, “*if anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for him to have a mill-stone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the sea.*” (Matthew 18:6)

Jesus grew infuriated with the Pharisees and Scribes and lawyers who oppressed people with religious control and hypocrisy and so he called them out for it. He said, “*Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you serpents, you brood of vipers.*” (Matthew 23:29) Perhaps it is no surprise these same religious leaders plotted to have him killed.

When the crowd were threatening to stone a woman caught in adultery, he paused to ease the aggression and tension but he slyly turned the finger on them and challenged them with cautions like—*Before you see the speck in someone’s eye, look at the giant log in your own eye . . . if you are without lust or sin then go ahead and cast the first stone.* They could not answer. This was not mild or weak, this was constant and brave: Peaceful but incredibly courageous too.

Saint Paul and the early Christian Churches themselves were no strangers to persecution and violence under the rule of the Roman Empire. Like all empires, Rome had spread its power and influence by pillaging and waging war, exploiting and taking slaves. Even for sport Romans loved watching bloodthirsty animals or gladiators tear strips of each other to the death. Any dissident who would not swear allegiance to the Emperor could be sentenced to death. This was the fate of many new Christian converts.

Saint Paul therefore encouraged them to resist any form of violence or retaliation. Instead he wanted them to stand strong, not with human armour or human strength, but with God's strength. He wrote to the Ephesian church, *"Find your strength in the Lord, in His mighty power. Put on all the armour that God provides so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes . . . but against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens."*

In Psalm 89, we heard that King David too, trusted God to be his strength and shield in the face of all the difficulties and conflicts he had to face. God was going to give him the armour of the Spirit to sustain him as a leader.

I think that it is interesting that Martin Bell wore the white suit because he felt it offered some form of safety and protection. He had worn it in so many dangerous situations in Bosnia and Croatia, so even if it was only in his head, he felt wearing the suit meant he was less likely to be shot or harmed. He liked that it was white, a sign of purity and goodness. That reminded me a lot of Saint Paul's encouraging words. *When we are in harm's way or if we are afraid or anxious in any circumstance we can imagine wearing God's Holy Spirit as a cloak of protection.* Asking God for the spiritual armour we need.

Paul says, *"Take up God's armour and you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst . . . fasten on the belt of truth . . . let your shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace . . . take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the arrows of the evil one and pray on every occasion by the power of the Spirit."*

This is practical psychology as well as spiritual psychology. I have occasionally met women who were trapped in abusive situations. I might say, *"no matter how controlling or abusive, no matter what that person says to you, imagine you are wearing the protective armour of the Spirit, like a covering keeping you in God's care and holding you fast, protecting you no matter what arrows or punches get thrown at you."*

It is interesting that, like the Taliban, violent bullies are often quickest to pick on the weak, the innocent, women and children to inflict their cruelty. That was a surprising theme last week. Whilst all the Afghan people were afraid, the women were most afraid of their fate.

The murderer in Plymouth had created his own perverted thoughts around a hatred of women too.

It is a strange thing that human beings so often love to tie labels around people's necks. We characterise people by their ability or disability, their religion or race, their gender. I love that image of the earth from Space. We wonder when will Muslims, Christians, humanitarians recognise that God does not label people in such ways. This demonic temptation to punish or persecute or judge those who are from a different belief or background is precisely the work of the devil that Jesus talked about. Christ's story about the Good Samaritan was chosen because it was believed no man of Samaria could amount to much or be loved by God. By my reading of scripture, every person, man, woman or child from every race, religion or background should have a God-given right to fullness of life.

So when we confront violence as Christians, we are called to stand for peace. But never to be weak. The causes of violence are many. We are never guaranteed to come through it all unharmed. But we are secure in the faith and we are held strong, not matter what befalls us, if we are armed with God's truth, grace, and abundant love.

## Prayer of Intercession

Loving God

We thank you that you can give us your strength  
Through the belt of truth, the shield of faith  
And that you offer us first and foremost  
Against all our problems, temptations and adversities  
The Sword of your Spirit and the Name and claim of Christ upon our lives  
Let us then never doubt that though evil does prevail  
You are still the victor in life and death  
Help us to speak as you would have us speak  
To act as you would have us act  
To pray as you would have us pray

Today we pray for our brothers and sisters across the world  
For the people of Haiti caught up in the earthquake which has ravaged their country  
We pray for the nations of Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, Myanmar—all  
engulfed by conflict and cruelty,  
Who long for the freedoms we take for granted  
Aggression and oppression  
where young and old, people of faith  
may live suffering, hungry and afraid.  
Bring Your comfort, courage and protection to those  
At risk of injury, torture or death  
We pray for a world where justice and humanity prevail  
For a world that can affirm difference, in which all human beings uphold the gift of life.

We pray for those who have returned to school this week  
And ask that you bless all pupils and teachers, and school employees  
Bless all those in office who continue to lead us as we  
Emerge out of lockdowns and adapt to a new life  
Bless our church lord God especially as we look to reopen  
Bless us as we navigate through the Presbytery Plan with our neighbours  
Help us to pray deeply and faithfully that our churches serve your purposes  
And the needs of your people, above any mere human devised plan

We pray for those who feel isolated by personal circumstances,  
Illness or chronic pain or the heavy ache of grief  
May they know that they are accompanied by prayer  
Surround them with such love  
That they may know they are precious to you

Thank you God  
That you do make yourself known to us  
Not just in scripture but in prayer and daily life  
Help us to see your blessings unfolding  
To be open to your gifts of sustenance and grace  
We offer these prayers to you in Jesus name, Amen

## The Blessing

May God bless us  
Deepening our trust  
Encouraging our hope  
Amplifying our love  
God guard our hearts  
And guide our thoughts  
Today and forever more, Amen



## Currie Guild

I hope that this finds you all well and you have been able to enjoy the sporadic summer weather and even managed to have some short breaks away from home.

As restrictions ease, we are looking forward to restarting Guild meetings in the Gibson Craig Halls on **Tuesday 7th September at 10 am**. There are still one or two hoops through which we have to jump, but, fingers crossed, we will be up and running then. Obviously social distancing and mask wearing will still be in place, but I will update you all as I receive further information.

We have a number of speakers booked already and it is shaping up to be a good mixture. I look forward to seeing as many of you in person as is possible. The light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter and nearer. Our strategy for the next three years is “Look Forward in Faith” and our theme for this coming session is “Lights and Bushels”.

Louise Lamont      Guild President



**A Very Happy Birthday to  
Dorothy Curr who will celebrate her special birthday on  
26th August.**

**From all your friends in The Guild and Currie Kirk.**

## Kirk Reopening

Looking ahead to the Kirk reopening, I'm mindful that once again there will be duties to be carried out. It has been such a long time and so many things have changed that I thought I ought to ask those on the duty list if you are still willing to carry out Sunday duties. So please, let me know whether or not you wish to remain on the duty list and I will amend it accordingly. As always, I am most grateful to all those who have helped in this respect and hope that most of you will feel able to continue.

Krys Hume—449 4036

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