

## **Worship for Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

### **Call to worship**

*In a brash and restless world, we seek stillness and peace. When much is expected of us, we prepare to receive.*

*In times when there is always talk of what we cannot do or must do cautiously, we remember that our faith in Jesus gives us freedom. And because this is a place and time, not only of worshipping and giving, but of receiving and confirming, we have come gladly.*

*Empty your mind of worries about things you cannot change right now.*

*Fill your minds with kind thoughts about those who trouble you.*

*Set aside any resentments, which only harm you.*

*Then concentrate on God. Open your ears and eyes, your heart and mind, make space for all the love you are given, and be ready, when you leave, to share it with everyone.*

### **Hymn 28: Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens**

1 Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens ;  
thy truth doth reach the clouds :  
thy justice is like mountains great ;  
thy judgements deep as floods :

2 Lord, all creation thou dost keep.  
How precious is thy grace !  
Therefore in shadow of thy wings  
we all our trust shall place.

3 We with the bounty of thy house  
shall be well satisfied ;  
from rivers of thy pleasures thou  
wilt drink to us provide.

4 Because of life the fountain pure  
remains alone with thee ;  
and in that purest light of thine  
we clearly light shall see.

Psalm 36, verses 5-9  
*The Scottish Psalter, 1929*

### **Prayer**

*Almighty God, we are your people, loved and cherished, enfolded in the warmth of your compassion, dealt with by you with wisdom beyond our understanding and kindness beyond measuring. This very goodness of yours brings a slow dawning: we are not all we might be. So, we come to worship, sensing our not-quite-rightness, our incompleteness, perhaps conscious of serious shortcomings. Nevertheless, we are welcome. But because you ask it of us, because the truth in the end always liberates us, we take a moment or two to consider our lives and unburden ourselves of our mistakes, laying them beside Jesus at the foot of his life-giving cross....*

*Suddenly, we feel different. In the freshness of your mercy we are reinvigorated! Now we may worship freely, listening, reflecting, praying, singing, all to your glory. Let it be so!*

*Eternal God, today we look back to the story of Jesus attending a wedding and rescuing the party. As we see him at a celebration in the company of family and friends, we think about our lives, especially as we live them in this place, and we pray that you might give us, too, a spirit of celebration, as we remember the blessings that enrich our lives. Create in our hearts a space for thankfulness: for life itself, for daily activity and stillness, for company, for purpose, for opportunity, for the service to which you call us. In quietness we remember all that we have that is good and gives us joy....*

*Generous God, as we turn our minds again to a story of Jesus, help us to follow him closely, to be willing to go wherever he goes, to do whatever he asks. We are trusted co-workers in every opportunity to enhance the lives of our companions and strangers, by being kind and merciful, by giving time and money, by supporting the least, the last, the lost and the lonely. Receive our worship, and receive us as we are, that, enabled by the love of Christ at work in us, we might work miracles in his name.*  
**Amen.**

### **Reading: John 2 verses 1 – 11**

Additional reading (in church only)

### **Hymn 183: Fill thou our life, O Lord our God**

1 Fill now our life, O Lord our God,  
in every part with praise,  
that our whole being may proclaim  
your being and your ways.

2 Not for the lip of praise alone,  
nor even the praising heart  
we ask, but for a life made up  
of praise in every part :

Horatius N. Bonar (1808–1889)

3 Praise in the common things of life,  
its goings out and in ;  
praise in each duty and each deed,  
though humble and unseen.

4 So, gracious Lord, you shall receive  
from us the glory due ;  
and so we shall begin on earth  
the song for ever new.

### **Sermonette**

**Text: John 2 verse 1: On the third day a wedding took place in Cana in Galilee.**

I wakened on Monday morning and felt reasonably cheery – for a Monday! - about the week ahead. And then I remembered Iain Galbraith....

Over my thirty-eight years in ministry, I've been privileged to meet some simply amazing church women and church men. A few are ministers, but there are among

them many more elders and not all are even elders. Their lives are exemplary, faithful, gracious, humble. Some bring outstanding talents in administration, public speaking, financial management or music to their service of the church, in the church and way beyond its walls. Iain Galbraith was one of those. He was moderator of the Presbytery of Dumbarton and during that year he electrified me every time he conducted worship. He opened meetings with prayer of such depth that the strings of my heart vibrated each time. We agreed on a lot and sometimes disagreed and argued, then laughed. He had a passion for stained glass and made compilations of photographs of windows, and in July of last year I received through the post a book entitled *Scotland's Stained Glass: Quintet*. It featured the work of what he referred to as "a galaxy of Scotland's brilliant and outstanding ladies in stained glass". By October, when we last chatted on the phone, Iain already had intimations that all was not well with his health. On Monday, because attending his funeral seemed unwise in current circumstances, I instead spoke to John Millar, who also had known Iain when he was organist at Kelvinside Hillhead Church.

It grieved me to have to make that decision not to attend. While I am always one to encourage you to attend a funeral service, on Monday I felt the pain of not being able to go along to celebrate the life of a dear man who'd quickly become my friend. But to crowd into a church that might be packed, at the height of this pandemic, seemed unnecessary and unwise, so I watched the service online later, then spent a lot of time during last week thinking about how very important funeral services are.

Sometimes, on an order of service for one, we see the words "A celebration of the life of X Y". Although I think that for any person of faith the word "thanksgiving" should be in there somewhere, "celebration" is also a very important word, because a funeral is indeed a celebration. My dictionary says that to celebrate means "to mark with solemn ceremonies" and perhaps, a little unexpectedly, we realise that a funeral fits that bill as well as any other event. Nowadays, though, some folk make any excuse for a celebration. Besides the usual wedding anniversaries, folk mark any birthday that ends in a zero – why would you? –, a kiddie's "graduation" from nursery, and even comparatively quite modest success in almost any sphere.

Why would you? It's maybe a fair enough question, but here's the answer: according to Jesus, a celebration is always in order. Before he knew anything about it, when he was but eight days old, there was a naming ceremony which included the right of

circumcision (pass over quickly). Then his parents went to perform the purification rite demanded by their faith and so the whole family trooped off to the temple in Jerusalem. Luke tells his readers this was an occasion repeated every year for the festival of Passover. Some things should always be celebrated if we are serious about our faith, so it puzzles me why folk – not a few! - seem to miss our celebrations of Christmas and Easter every year here in the church. And although I sometimes find the demands of them upon me as a minister wearying, I always have to confess afterwards that I thoroughly enjoyed them.

Today we find Jesus at a celebration that's not demanded by his faith tradition, but to which he had been invited, along with his mum and his disciples, doubtless by friends, and so we find him at a wedding in Cana in Galilee. All weddings have disaster potential. How many have been planned, postponed, re-planned, postponed again, before eventually taking place during this pandemic? I have conducted only one during this time – one every two years, that's about my average. Not many folk want a minister spoiling their happy occasion these days with talk of God. But Jill and Domenico, who live in Maxwell Avenue, did want a minister at theirs, and it turned out to be a memorable and wonderful occasion, two delightful families, one Scottish, one Italian, brought together to celebrate love shared by two lawyers.

The wine did not run out, nor the food, nor conversation, nor laughter, nor appropriate seriousness, so it wasn't a repeat of the wedding at Cana when the wine was in short supply and Jesus and his mum had an argument, in which she deferred to him and he did what she suggested anyway. The story is full of questions, and John intended it to be, because why else would he conclude it like this: **What Jesus did at Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory;** with this extra little puzzler: **and his disciples believed in him.** Instead of getting mired down in the questions, allow me to point out what I think this story illustrates, gloriously....

Jesus liked a good celebration. Alright, on this occasion it took a bit of prompting from his mother before he solved the wine problem, but a read of any of the gospels shows him always on the threshold of some celebration or other. If it was not people getting married, then it was folk being healed of an illness or infirmity. On one memorable occasion Jesus summoned a vertically-challenged man, who happened to be a tax collector, down from the tree he had climbed to get a better sighting of Jesus on the

street below. He thereby healed him, not in the obvious sense, but in an entirely real sense, nevertheless. And Jesus knew he had made such an impression on the life of Zacchaeus that he promptly invited himself back to the tax collector's for a meal. It didn't go unnoticed. The crowd – all those who felt left out, maybe – muttered and grumbled and complained. "Oh, look at him! He's gone to eat at the home of a sinner!" It wouldn't be the only time such a complaint was made. But Zacchaeus is in celebration mode and so he tells Jesus he will give half his possessions to the poor, and refund by a factor of four anyone he had cheated. Then Jesus says: **Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.** I bet that little party went on into the small hours.

On another occasion, it was ten men suffering from leprosy. Jesus healed them all, but when only one showed up to say thank you, Jesus was mystified. Nine folk who'd just been given their life back saw no reason to celebrate with the one who'd made the gift.

We couldn't have been one of the nine, surely, nor one of the moaners in the crowd as Jesus and the tax collector set off down the road, laughing. Surely we're always up for a celebration, having learned from Jesus our saviour. I wonder. Sometimes, from the expression on some faces, it's quite a while since we found anything worth giving thanks for or celebrating. How about this thought to take us further on into the year: every time we come to church, let's tell our faces we're here to rejoice. So come on an ordinary Sunday, every ordinary Sunday, and celebrate being given your life back by Jesus. Come at Christmas, at Easter – to one service, at least – and celebrate the birth of the life-changing baby and the death and resurrection of the life-rescuing man on the cross. Come on a communion Sunday and don't sit there, all po-faced, as if you were at a funeral. Even if it were, you'd still be there to give thanks. And remember, the wine never runs out: wherever, whenever the people of God gather, the occasion, even if solemn, is also an occasion of joy. I like this quotation, from Robert M Brearley again: *God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy in.* God does call us to holiness, but the life of Jesus, today doubling as the bartender at a wedding, shows us we can radiate a bit of joy more often than we seem to know.

## Hymn 616: There's a spirit in the air

1 There's a spirit in the air,  
telling Christians everywhere :  
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working in our world !'  
2 Lose your shyness, find your tongue,  
tell the world what God has done :  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today !  
3 When believers break the bread,  
when a hungry child is fed,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.  
4 Still the Spirit gives us light,  
seeing wrong and setting right :  
Brian Wren (b. 1936)

God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today !  
5 When a stranger's not alone,  
where the homeless find a home,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.  
6 May the Spirit fill our praise,  
guide our thoughts and change our ways.  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today !  
7 There's a Spirit in the air,  
calling people everywhere :  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.

## Prayer

*In the turning of water into wine, Lord God, Jesus showed us some things: that celebration is important, that he is generous, that you always provide. We live our lives in a different way. Life rolls on, and for days, weeks, months, we seem to forget that life itself is worthy of a daily celebration: the fact of it, the joy of it, the goodness of it. Help us, especially here in the church, but also in our weekday lives, to find ways to express the thankfulness in our hearts, and to do this by our words, our actions, our demeanour. In our worship and in our ordinary human interactions, help us to live as people who know they are loved, whose mistakes are forgiven, whose lives are full of second chances just waiting to be taken.*

*In the turning of water into wine, abundant God, we are invited to enjoy ourselves, to delight in one another's company, to enter into one another's joy. We give thanks for anniversaries, baptisms, birthdays, weddings, all those life events that mark stages on the way. We pray for all those who mark difficult anniversaries and ask that we might be given the privilege of standing by them in times of grief, sorrow, or lingering dismay. We pray too for those who plan a baptism or a wedding, and all who will help them: family, ministers, friends.*

*In turning water into wine, Jesus showed us that even the most challenging of circumstances may be transformed by his presence. So, we pray that in every place, the love of Jesus may reign through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus' followers. May every home, every hospital, every congregation, every care home, every school, every workplace, come alive as your people live out the selfless joy of the gospel and demonstrate, in every way possible, your life-changing, life-giving, life-restoring love. May your rich, best wine flow in every place!*

**Amen.**

## **Hymn: For the years of praise and praying**

1 For the years of praise and praying  
Thanks be to God.

Through each life your will obeying  
Thanks be to God.

For each sign of faithful growing,  
Every time of truthful knowing,  
Love for those in need outpouring,  
Thanks be to God.

2 In this house of hope and healing  
Our gifts we bring.

To this place of love's revealing  
Our gifts we bring.

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Signs of thankfulness declaring,  
Tools for witness and for sharing,  
Pledge of faith, both deep and daring,  
Our gifts we bring.

3 To the tasks which lie before us,  
Christ, lead us on.

Come now, quicken, nerve, restore us:  
Christ, lead us on.

Freed from bonds that once controlled us,  
To a truer beauty mould us,  
As your arms of love enfold us,  
Christ, lead us on.

## **Benediction**

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you and all those whom you love. Now and always.*

**Amen.**

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