

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words, are for our thinking this morning: “Bless the Lord, my soul and bless his holy name. Bless the Lord my soul God leads us into life.”

Hymn CH4 120 – God we praise you.

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

We worship you, Father God, as the source of all life, before all things and beyond all things, Yet wonderfully sustaining our universe. Your creative Spirit enables all our discoveries, familiar as they are to you. Your creative Word enables all our discourse, whether or not we give you credit.

For you are our Maker, by your thought we live and move and have our being. We worship you, God, as the re-newer of life. You make the empty places burst into song, You make the desert blossom as the rose. You visit hearts that are dull and weary and fill them with hope. You do what you have promised to do in Jesus Christ our redeemer.

And so, we worship in his name, That marvelous name, the name which is sung by children and aged, The name which is venerated in a thousand tongues, The name which is truly your own name, The name in which we were baptized. Jesus, we love you, we honour you, we seek you afresh today.

Triune God, we come just as we are, Weary and stained from life’s journey, We come with our frail human nature which you graciously took on in the person of Christ, We come to grasp your mercy and acceptance, Because Christ lived and died and rose again for us.

We love because you first loved us.

May our worship bring you delight, as your Spirit leads us. May our worship bring us healing, as your Son works among us. May our worship be an unseen force for good in the world.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

All Age Talk

Hymn CH4 641 – Seek ye first the kingdom of God,

Readings: 2 Corinthians 8: 15 – 24

¹⁵As the scripture says, “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

Titus and his Companions

¹⁶How we thank God for making Titus as eager as we are to help you! ¹⁷Not only did he welcome our request; he was so eager to help that of his own free will he decided to go to you. ¹⁸With him we are sending the brother who is highly respected in all the churches for his work in preaching the gospel. ¹⁹And besides that, he has been chosen and appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this service of love for the sake of the Lord's glory, and in order to show that we want to help.

²⁰We are taking care not to stir up any complaints about the way we handle this generous gift. ²¹Our purpose is to do what is right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of others.

²²So we are sending our brother with them; we have tested him many times and found him always very eager to help. And now that he has so much confidence in you, he is all the more eager to help. ²³As for Titus, he is my partner and works with me to help you; as for the other brothers who are going with him, they

represent the churches and bring glory to Christ. ²⁴Show your love to them, so that all the churches will be sure of it and know that we are right in boasting about you.

Luke 16: 1 – 13

The Shrewd Manager

¹Jesus said to his disciples, “There was once a rich man who had a servant who managed his property. The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his master's money, ²so he called him in and said, ‘What is this I hear about you? Hand in a complete account of your handling of my property, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³The servant said to himself, ‘My master is going to dismiss me from my job. What shall I do? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴Now I know what I will do! Then when my job is gone, I shall have friends who will welcome me in their homes.’

⁵“So he called in all the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶‘100 barrels of olive oil,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘sit down and write fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another one, ‘And you — how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand sacks of wheat,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘write 800.’ ⁸“As a result the master of this dishonest manager praised him for doing such a shrewd thing; because the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light.”

⁹And Jesus went on to say, “And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. ¹⁰Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. ¹¹If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?

¹³“No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a servant will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Hymn CH4 237 – Look forward in faith

Sermon – ‘Administering Grace’

I want to begin this part of today’s service by asking you all to participate in a multiple-choice question. Which of the following did Jesus talk the most about when He walked on the earth? Was it ... prayer? Money? Or faith? The answer is money. Yet, money was not anywhere near as important as it is today.

For there were other means of exchange – the tithe of the actual harvest was just as important as any financial offering as it ensure that the Levites – the Jewish clergy – had sufficient to eat. In our reading from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is hunting to the fact that you cannot worship both God and money. Money can make a wonderful servant, but it can also be a terrible master.

When money is our servant, we can use it to feed the poor, it enables our church buildings to be open for worship and other activities. It can pay, house and train those in ministry and support their needs. It can help people far away and people far closer to home.

Yet, when money becomes our master, it can have us continually worried because it can force us into debt. It can imprison us in work because we always need to earn more. It can have us obsessed with how our savings perform. Even as a Church we can become obsessed with money. Either there is never enough, or we have reserves that we feel we must be spent or guarded carefully for the proverbial ‘rainy day’.

So, how do we ensure that money is a servant for the Kingdom of God rather than an obstacle to it? Or worse still, a false God, both in our lives and in the life of our church?

Our reading from the Apostle Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians gives us some advice. Paul says that as a church and as Christians, we are to be beyond reproach. He is concerned that the way the church administers its finances is scrupulous – completely beyond criticism and that those in positions of authority have integrity, authority, and the confidence of others in the churches.

There needs to be transparency about money, about arrangements for the collection and its delivery to the fellow church in Jerusalem. Here in the United Kingdom, we have a curious ambivalent attitude towards money. There are times when we want our finances to be completely private whilst demanding full accountability from others – especially those in positions of power and of influence.

Yet, what does that mean for a Church of Scotland congregation? Well, I want to suggest four areas in which we must have credibility. The first is that the church is, of course, subject to Scottish Law. We must prepare annual financial accounts that comply with the Laws of The Church of Scotland and with the regulations of OSCR, or to give its proper name – The Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator. We are also subject to moral law that follows good practice, for example, more than one individual counting collections and there are checks and balances to ensure probity.

Secondly, we are also subject to an ethical law that Paul talks about, for we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of humanity. We want to honour God in all we do, therefore we try to ensure that all our dealings and decisions are beyond reproach. We have Elders who are responsible to our Kirk Session and to the congregation for our finances and in turn our charitable status makes us accountable to the community which surrounds us. Anyone could get in touch with OSCR about our accounts or view them on OSCR's website.

So, my first two areas cover the Church, and my final two areas are about us as individuals. Do we, as Christians, always comply with the law? I hope so because tax evasion is a serious offence. Do we, as individuals, comply with our moral and ethical code based on what the Bible teaches us about money? This is trickier. What advice is there on how we handle our finances that is contextually appropriate?

Well, from the very beginning of Biblical times, if you open a Bible at Chapter 4 of Genesis, there is teaching on the need to worship and offer thanks to God through the presentation of a proportion of your wealth. The very first

reference to the morality of wealth is about giving, with Cain and Abel giving the first of their crops and lambs to God in thanksgiving.

The fourth area that I want to suggest is that we are advised to seek justice and to do mercy. This leads us to fair-trade and careful purchasing and investing, petitioning our governments for debt relief and adequate aid programmes. God has given us stewardship of the earth and all that is in it to take care of. So, surely that leads us to consider how we care for the environment.

We will look more at the environment and our part of caring for it, during our Climate Sunday Service, next week, but for now I want to say that we are called to be good stewards, but we are also warned against getting into debt and careless consumption is a good way of doing just that. Our first commitment should be to God and not to credit card companies.

For God gives us all we have, whether we earn a salary, receive a pension or a benefit. We will be accountable for how we have used it here on earth, for worship, for sharing and for our own use. There are four Biblical uses for money; to show our love for God, to show our love for our neighbour, to show our love for those God has blessed us with, and finally for ourselves. If we take the two greatest commandments as a guide to how we use our money, then we will not go far wrong.

However, note the priority: God first, neighbour second and then us. If we want to honour God in our giving, then we need to assess how much we give based on how much we receive and not on how much we have left over is our giving proportional to our income or to what is left over at the end of the week or the month?

It is often said that people give elsewhere than simply to the church. This may be true and honourable if it is, but it begs the question as to why the local church is so far down the league table of charitable commitments as to receive so little. Giving should form part of our worship, the first slice of what we have given to God, not our patronage.

The Apostle Paul is clear in his writings, that one of the tests of faith is measured by our financial commitment. I often wonder if we have ever made that connection. So, this week, Paul sets for you and me, two challenges. One is to ask if we are aware of the financial needs of the church. Second, who could you talk to about your giving? For Paul was not frightened to send people to advocate the collection, so why should we be.

Yes, there is a difference between something personal, which money is, and being private. A wedding is a deeply intimate and personal business, but it can hardly be private. As we see clearly in the Bible, money is an issue of intense concern as it's fraught with danger. Yet, may we, when dealing with our money, administer it with Grace. Let us make money our servant for good and not our master for less.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn CH4 551 – In heavenly love abiding,

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Faithful God, accept our humble thanks for all You have blessed us with. You have given us fullness of life. You guide and inspire us. You cover us with Your grace day after day. You offer comfort in times of sorrow and a peace that passes all understanding, even in times of trial and uncertainty.

Forgive us Lord, when we take these things for granted. Remind us of the abundance You have poured out on us. Help us listen for Your voice leading us, prompting us to answer Your call, encouraging us to give back, to respond in generous humility to Your grace, goodness and mercy. Compel us to reflect something of Your love for us as we give to enable Your work in our communities, our nation and our world.

Living God, we need Your presence here on planet earth. In these strange days throughout the world, we call on Your Spirit to fill us with love. Help us to wash the feet of our communities, going the second mile, giving the cup of cold water.

Help our churches to be loving, reaching out to all we meet. Holy Spirit, guide us in our finances, to wisely use the resources You have given us, to plant fruitful seeds for Your kingdom. Where there is division between us heal us with Your uniting presence.

Help our churches to be communities where we live in peace, not the peace of differences hidden from sight, but the peace of discussion and dialogue and mutual respect.

Creator God, shape us into a people of prayer, whose first thought in the morning is praise, whose watchword is kindness, and whose last thought of the day is peace, the deep peace of God.

Nationally and locally, let Your Spirit rule, so that our church may be joined in love and service. We ask all of this, in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who through His lifelong journey of love showed us God's kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, when we want to praise and thank You, we can use lots of big words or we can simply tell You what we appreciate in our lives. We celebrate Your people. We thank You for the young and the not so young. We thank You for the able and less able.

We thank You for people from other lands and cultures who have broadened our life and horizons. Lord, we celebrate the many talents and abilities of our local, national, and worldwide church.

Thank You for the people we have interacted with personally; we bring them before You in our prayers; and for the people unknown to us who have made an impact in our church life and our life of faith.

Thank You for those who serve others in their daily lives.

On this National Giving Day, we pray that our time, talents and money can be used to further Your mission. Help us to use our faith to sow the seeds of change and hope wherever there is poverty, injustice, abuse, violence, or racism. Help us to embrace our gifts, to be courageous and generous with them, sharing and helping others through them. AMEN

Hymn CH4 182 – Now thank we all our God,

Benediction

For the life you have given us and all the good things it contains, we praise You, Creator God. For all those You have made, sisters and brothers of every kind, we praise You Creator God. For the way You hold us all in Your love, gifting us even Your own Son, we praise You Creator God. Send us out to share that love with open hearts and hands. And praise be to You Loving, Creator God – and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit now, this moment, and forever more. Amen.

Recessional Song – May God’s blessing surround you each day