

Morning Worship

27th September 2020

Good morning and welcome to morning worship for the Churches of Scotland of the Upper Tay and Tenandry

Let us begin our worship by singing the Stuart Townend version of "The Lord's My Shepherd".

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

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Let us pray...

*Dear God
We pray this morning for love*

*Love in our bones and in our souls
Love for bird and birdsong
For bark and moss and tree
For the ones we miss and love for the the
ones we see*

*Love this morning dear Jesus
As you did love
Love this morning dear Jesus
For this we pray*

We pray this morning for faith

*Faith in the night and faith like rock
Faith borne of reason
And faith filled with hope
Faith to make us true
And faith to set our way*

Faith, this morning dear Jesus

*As you had faith
Faith, this morning
For this we pray*

We pray this morning for truth

*Truth, deep welled truth
Clear like a spring pouring
Mind teaching
Eye opening
The truth that makes us wise
The truth that makes us brave
The truth that sets us free*

*Truth, this morning dear Jesus
As you are truth
Truth, this morning
For this we pray.*

*In love, we cherish you
In faith, we honour you
In truth, we worship you,*

*Dear God
Forgive us what has not loved,
Have mercy.*

*Dear God,
Forgive us what has not believed
Have mercy.*

*Dear God
Forgive us what not been true
Have mercy.*

*All this in the name of Jesus
All this in the name of Jesus,*

AMEN

Our reading for this morning comes from the book of Exodus, where the Israelites are given the instructions for the Passover.

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt,²“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb^[a] for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.⁸That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made

without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

¹²“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.

Reflection

Passover

Exodus 12:1-14

One of *THE* important rules of the Bible, is to pay attention to what the words do to you,

Not what they you think they are meant to do to you..

What they actually do to you...

And these words here leave me uninspired,
They do not speak to me immediately.
I know that I am meant to get excited about this, the institution of the sacred passover.
But I cannot get excited about this.

There are 16 separate instructions about what to do with the lamb

- how old it is
- What gender it is
- What sort of condition it should be in
- What you should do if you can't afford a whole lamb
- How you should cook it
- What you should do with the leftovers.

There is a hushed, prescriptive, sacred precision about this
I am left unmoved,
And left with the feeling that I lack reverence
One ought to be more passionate than the whole lamb,
The head, the legs, the inner organs is to be roasted
Not just a part.

It is the same feeling that I used to have during a part of our Communion in Flemington,
Where every elder was given a number,
As to how they should serve, and I got that people needed to know what they were doing,
And there was a tradition that when you were served the bread by your neighbour
And this was a huge thing for people,
The old session Clerk
A dear and revered man, Jimmy Simpson, would speak to his successor Flo at the end of the
service and tell her where things weren't quite right, where an elder had moved to the
wrong place, or something hadn't quite been right about the bread.

I couldn't get vexed about detail in the same way as Jimmy
Just like I can't get vexed about the detail of how to serve the lamb in Exodus 15.

But I had an encounter last Saturday that helped me understand the reason for Exodus
specificity
Or Jimmy Simpson's attention to detail.

When Tom, Anna and I were stopped at Ardeonaig there were a group of people getting
ready to go out powerboating, and amongst them was a woman who reminded me in
appearance of many women I had known when I spent a year out in Kerala, South India in
the mid-1990s.

So I asked the woman in question, her name is Khamshala, where she was from, and she
explained that now she is a British citizen, her husband Andy runs a powerboat business,
but she had grown up in Malaysia to a Malayali mother and Tamil father.

We had an interesting conversation about language, and about the Tamil numbers, and the fact that speaking 4-5 languages is not uncommon in Asian countries.

But the conversation reached a new level when I asked Khamshala if she liked Sambar. Sambar is a curry that is common in South India, particularly on special occasions such as weddings.

I asked her if she cooked with Lady's Finger, Okra, all the time she explained.

And then I asked Khamshala about breads such as Dosa, and my favourite Parotta

And she explained her favourite, Idhali, which is made with fermented rice flour,

And our conversation was alive, with memory, with smells, and tastes, and kitchens and meals that we had eaten,

Me in Kerala,

Her in her childhood home in Malaysia.

And this was the memory of home, and of welcome, and of enjoyment of food, and enjoyment of people, and of a time that was no more, but somehow in the memory of food we could go back there,

Of dessert like Paysam

In food, something about time went away and we were there.

Now if you showed me the recipe for Idhali, it would be specific, and it's details about fermenting flour, would not interest me,

But you could not have this dish without such attention to specifics

Indeed this dish here, which is Khamshala's favourite

And also the first dish I ever ate,

Particularly requires these specifics.

It's the memory, of this dish - the first I ever tasted in South India when we were given it for breakfast after we arrived off our flight,

It's the joy and memory of this taste,

To have memory, to have quality, to have richness, to have a framework which is strong enough to hold memory, and faith and hope, and yearning

And timeless participation in the great drama of what it is to be human being liberated by God,

You must also have moments of specificity.

Just as Idali has a recipe which requires some work.

So let us sense in our care with the bread and the wine

Our attention to words

That just as lamb and unleavened bread and herbs,

Took Israel to the moment when she got ready for the end of her slavery,

And the beginning of her freedom.

Jimmy Simpson perhaps was right,

Because in his attention to the details

There was a faith, that this was a continuity with communions in his early life

In which the faithful took bread and wine

And in them were taken to the moment when Jesus Christ had grasped every human being and gripped us across the waters from slavery into freedom.

Let us in our care

With bread and wine
Also participate in that upper room meal
Which is the night before our release from slavery into freedom.

I said to pay attention to the scriptures, to how they make us feel...

And the second discomfort and we have to pay attention to this,
Is this violent, destructive force that God exerts in verse 12
It speaks of indiscriminate death against the children of Egypt,
And against Egypt's animals
And against Egypt's gods.

I like that God destroys the gods, the fixations, the fantasies, the delusions of Egypt,
Her love of power and military muscle
Her pride in buildings constructed with a slave economy.
I struggle with the implication that God slaughters innocent children
I can go as far as to say that this is a verse in which
We learn that a superpower which neglects its oppressed
And repeatedly ignores calls to repentance
Whose leader acts out of stubbornness, hardness of heart
Will discover death visited on the humans and the animals of the next generation
This is about human loss and environmental loss

But in the story in the Upper Room, I see an inversion of this verse
Where rather than visiting death on the first born children of Egypt
And the firstborn animals of Egypt
In the upper room, God takes violence and loss and death
Into the firstborn of God.
God takes the worst of Passover into God,
And this profound,
And the New Testament is a response to the profound discovery that God might do such a
thing.
To marvel at the love within God
To enjoy the new life which God wins for us.

And finally, not so much a disturbance borne of discomfort,
But a disturbance born of a refusal to believe that this can possibly be true
The moment that the blood is placed on the lintels and the doorways.

And in the memory
We come close to this
It is the protection,
The guarding of God.

This is the relentless commitment of God to protect his people
To hold them

And we resist this because it cannot be true,
But this is the testimony of the saints
God is holding you
God is protecting you
The worst will be kept from you
And you will be led from death to life

So gird your loins
And get ready to eat of the feast
When God breaks the prison
Which too long has held his people,

AMEN

Song

We continue our worship by singing George Matheson's much beloved hymn "Oh Love That Wilt not me go".

*O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*

*O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.*

*O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.*

*O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.*

George Matheson (1842-1906)

Let us make our prayers for others, let us pray...

Dear Lord,

We pray for change,
For passing over,
For a night
When all that matters passes over.

We pray for our politics to pass over
From posturing and polling
To shared ideas and the common good.

We pray for our consumption to pass over
From perpetual greed and waste
To enjoying what is enough
And using only that which can be sustained

We pray for our rhythms to pass over
From rush and interruption
To peace and appreciation

We pray for our communities to pass over
From masks and distancing
To hospitality and living

Lift high our hopes
To live and pray for a better day
To be a community of grace
Whose life points to the goodness of
tomorrow.

This we ask, as we say the prayer of Jesus.

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

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory
Forever and ever
AMEN

And now let us sing our closing hymn... Shout for Joy, the Lord has Let us Feast

Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast;
Heaven's own fare has fed the last and least;
Christ's own peace is shared again on earth;
God the Spirit fills us with new worth.

Celebrate with saints who dine on high;
Witnesses that love can never die.
'Hallelujah!' – thus their voices ring:
Nothing less in gratitude we bring.

No more doubting, no more senseless dread;
God's good self has graced our wine and bread;
All the wonder heaven has kept in store
Now is ours to keep for evermore.

Praise the Maker, praise the Maker's Son,
Praise the Spirit – three yet ever one;
Praise the God whose food and friends avow
Heaven starts here! The kingdom beckons now!

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Blessing

May the God of the Passover bless you
With a strong memory of God in your past
To give you a strong hope for God in your future

May God go with you
Father, Son and Spirit
Creator, Redeemer, Friend,

May God bless you
Now and forever,

AMEN