



# The Church of Scotland

Weekly Worship  
24<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## **Taking part in today's service are: -**

Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly  
Rev Dr Valerie Allen, Pastoral Advisor Presbytery of Stirling  
Carla Ingram, Arbroath  
Dr Annette McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias  
Anna McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias  
Rev Dr John McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias  
Rev Dr John McPake, Ecumenical Officer, The Church of Scotland

With music from members of Ellon & Craigiebuckler Parish Churches

## **Introduction – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly**

Hi everybody and welcome to worship!

I have to say it's an enormous privilege to be able to collate these services. I mean by that, that as Moderator, I'm getting to invite folks to participate, to contribute different aspects to the service. Do you know, for me, the local congregation is always primary but these services are reminding us that we are part of something more. And so I am bringing together folks from across the breadth of the Church of Scotland - and not least today, our preacher who is John McCulloch. John serves in Jerusalem and Tiberias as the Church of Scotland's minister there, and so we are delighted to have John speaking today - also to have his wife Annette and daughter Anna reading the Scriptures.

So for them and for all the people who have taken part today, I want to say a huge thank you. Remembering too those who are behind-the-scenes – and are very rarely noticed in front of camera, the tech teams who do an invaluable job in bringing everything together. So with gratitude, let us worship God together. ....

## **Hymn - All are Welcome**

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive;  
built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:  
*All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,



and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and a symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

*All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where love is found  
in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground,  
where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space,  
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

*All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

*All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

*All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

### **Prayer of Approach – Rev Dr Valerie Allen, Pastoral Advisor Presbytery of Stirling**

The Psalmist talks in Psalm 133 about how good it is when we can live together in unity, in peace, harmony and right relationship. And about how, when we do, God pours out blessings that anoint



us like oil running over our heads or dew that covers the mountain sides. Living in such a way is at the heart of our faith, at the heart of our Christian calling. So let us come before God in prayer, bringing our longing for such a way of living

God of all, in love you called forth your church and planted us in different contexts. We share a common faith in Christ but express it in diverse ways. Draw us together in our desire to love as Christ loved. To offer healing and hope as Christ offered. To show compassion as Christ showed. May we celebrate the richness of our diversity, respect the integrity of voices that differ from ours and encourage dialogue that deepens faith. Pour out your blessings upon our churches, O God.

God of all, in love you sent your son Jesus to challenge the powers of evil and show us how to live in right relationship. We share a vision for life grounded in Christ's teachings. Draw us together in our work for justice and wholeness. Stimulate our creativity and imaginations in finding new ways to support those who are poor or marginalised. And give us courage to walk step by step with others until conflict ceases and peace reigns. Pour out your blessing upon the work of justice, O God.

God of all, in love you created the beauty of the world around us. We share a common home with many cultures and with species and animals of every shape, size and colour. Our earth is teeming with life yet our selfishness threatens its destruction. Draw us together in our work for climate justice. May our voices unite to call for changes in politics and systems that collude with earth's destruction. May we work with and for those whose lives have already been affected by global warming. Pour out your blessing upon creation, O God.

God of all, in love you formed us into different communities of belonging. We share a desire to reach out to our neighbours especially to those who are vulnerable. Draw us together to support family and friends who are struggling, as we initiate projects that empower others and build up self-esteem, as we reach out in compassion to those who are ill or grieving, especially in this time of Covid. Pour out your blessings upon our communities, O God.

We offer these prayers as a sign of our collective Christian witness.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **All Age Talk – Carla Ingram, Arbroath**

Today we are looking in our Bibles at the book of John. John is writing about the time Jesus prayed for everyone who believes in him. He prayed for unity between all of us. This means that he wanted us to join together in love and kindness.

Jesus knows each of us so well.

He knows that we might live in different places all over the world.

Some of us might live near the sea, some of us might live near the mountains.

Some of us might look different as well.

We might be tall or short.

We might have big feet or little feet.

We might have different skin colours.

We might have different hair colours.



We might have different eye colours.  
Some of us might be old or young.  
And we might wear different clothes too.

We might have or own different things as well.  
We might have a small house or a big house.  
We might have lots of money or not very much.

We might like or do different things.  
We might like cats or dogs.  
We might like sports or books.  
We might like going to bed late or getting up early.

We might even have different churches.  
Some of us might have an old building or a new building.  
Or some of us might meet outside or in someone's house.

Jesus says that none of these differences matter. It is what is in our hearts that is important.  
We should love God and we should love each other.  
This means that we should be kind and caring and be patient to everyone around us.  
Wow, Jesus, you are amazing, because ....

Thank You, Jesus for listening to us. Help us to remember everyday just who you are. Rabbi,  
teacher, Son of God, King and help us to trust you to help us every day. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Thanks for listening, everybody.

## Hymn – Spirit of God

Spirit of God, come dwell within me.  
Open my heart, oh, come set me free.  
Fill me with love for Jesus, my Lord,  
come, fill me with living water.  
*Jesus is living, Jesus is here.  
Jesus, my Lord, come closer to me:  
Jesus, our Saviour, dying for me,  
and rising to save his people.*

Lord, how I thirst, my Lord, I am weak.  
Lord, come to me, you alone do I seek.  
Lord, you are life and love and hope,  
come, fill me with living water.  
*Jesus is living, Jesus is here.  
Jesus, my Lord, come closer to me:  
Jesus, our Saviour, dying for me,  
and rising to save his people.*



Lord, I am blind, my Lord, I can't see.  
Stretch out your hand, bring comfort to me.  
Lead me your way in light and in truth,  
come, fill me with living water.

*Jesus is living, Jesus is here.*

*Jesus, my Lord, come closer to me:*

*Jesus, our Saviour, dying for me,  
and rising to save his people.*

### **Gospel Reading – Dr Annette McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias**

The Gospel reading is taken from John chapter 17 reading from verse 1 to verse 21.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted His eyes up to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was made.

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

“I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and speak these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

This is the word of the Lord.

### **Epistle Reading – Anna McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias**

The epistle reading is taken from 1st Corinthians Chapter 1 reading from verse 10 to 13a.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there will be no divisions among you, but that you will be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this,



that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.”  
Is Christ divided? Amen

### **Sermon – Rev Dr John McCulloch, St. Andrews Jerusalem & Tiberias**

I’m John McCulloch, the minister of St Andrew’s Jerusalem and it is great to be with you today, on this the Sunday when we celebrate Christian unity.

Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you o Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today we are invited to reflect on and celebrate Christian Unity, but many of us may be asking the question, what is there to celebrate?, for do we not live in a divided world? Are Christian churches and denominations not known mostly for divides us?

Living in such a world as ours, we need to ask ourselves, both as individuals and as a church, what is God calling us to embody in our parishes and neighbourhoods?

We live at a time when the Kingdom of God is being challenged by the forces of dehumanisation and injustice like never before. During these past twelve months, the pandemic has reminded us of our common vulnerability as human beings, but also of the profound inequality of our world, where the richer nations have first access to treatment. In the United Kingdom we have seen how children living in poverty have been going hungry at home, receiving paltry amounts of food, a national disgrace, in one of the richest nations. And where I minister in Israel Palestine, the structural sin of military occupation and the physical dividing walls that keep people apart; ensure that there is freedom for one people, and occupation for another.

As I was preparing for this sermon I was reminded of Archbishop Oscar Romero who once said: ‘it is not God’s will for some people to have everything and others to have nothing. This cannot be of God’.

Our epistle reading from 1 Corinthians 1: verse 10- to the beginning of verse 13, deals with the theme of disunity and conflict. In fact, much of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (which incidentally is his longest epistle), has to do with the theme of conflict. You could argue that this is an epistle about conflict resolution.

We read earlier how some were saying ‘I am of Paul’, or ‘I am of Apollos’, or ‘of Cephas (which is Peter)’; and whilst Paul was primarily addressing doctrinal disunity in the early church and our human tendency for tribalism; we have to ask ourselves, why was unity in the church so important, that he should devote so many pages to it?

It is important to note that Paul was not interested in unity for unity’s sake. God is not interested in the church being united simply for its own well-being, important as this may be.

The context in which Paul was writing was one of severe persecution for the early church. The empire of the day was imprisoning and pursuing the Christian community, which was living by a new evangel, a new gospel call, which proclaimed self sacrificial love, non violence, and reaching out to all in love even to those who were considered as enemies. It was in this way that the world was to be changed.

It is no coincidence that in the verses that follow our lectionary reading, Paul contrasts the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of God, which he also refers to as God’s foolishness. He reminds us that at the centre of the gospel is ‘Christ crucified’. Shame.



Weakness, Foolishness for those who don't believe, and yet the very means by which God's Kingdom is established here on earth.

Christian unity is not the end game in and of itself; but is the means by which we model God's love and care for all, regardless of race, background, social status, gender or other. The unity of which Paul speaks is so that we, like the early church, can fully embody the evangel of good news that we and our world so badly need, for the gospel we have is truly transformative. Think about the apostle Paul. He went from one who persecuted the early community of Christians, to one who would be imprisoned and later martyred for his faith. On the road to Damascus he had experienced true conversion. He was never the same again. He went from being a privileged citizen of empire, with power and might at his hands, to being part of the community of the persecuted and the crucified. Remember that the whole of the New Testament was written by the persecuted to the persecuted.

Some years ago, when I was in El Salvador, I remember spending some days with some catholic priests who had invited me to be with them in their community in the capital city of San Salvador. We prayed together, shared food, and they even invited me to partake of communion with them, even though they were Catholic and I was from the Church of Scotland.

I remember speaking with an elderly Spanish priest, who had lived in El Salvador for over 50 years, and who was there during the brutal civil war of the 1980s. This Spanish priest had met Oscar Romero, who had been appointed Archbishop of San Salvador because of his conservative views, and the belief that he wouldn't cause too much trouble by critiquing the military junta. However, after witnessing the suffering of the Salvadoran people at the hands of the right wing paramilitary forces; Oscar Romero began to side with those being oppressed, and used his voice and witness to stand up against the violence and injustice. Some talk of this as being 'Oscar Romero's 'second conversion'....In 1980, Oscar Romero was shot dead whilst celebrating mass.

The gospel, the evangel that we proclaim is transformational, and it is costly. That is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of costly discipleship in 1930s Germany, and there are so many other examples we could cite.

In verse 14 of our gospel reading from John 17 we read these words:

And a little further on

During this season of Epiphany, we are reminded that the light and liberation of Christ's gospel is not be to kept for ourselves, but is for the whole of the world. We, as Christ's church, his body here on earth, and called to build his kingdom of justice, radical forgiveness, love and compassion in our world. Thomas Merton said that 'the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion.(...) it is beyond words'.

'I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.'

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me'.

So let us go forth, in the unity of the Spirit, with the love that breaks down all dividing walls, so that we his church and our world can be changed. Amen.



**Prayer of Intercession - Rev Dr John McPake, Ecumenical Officer, The Church of Scotland**

Lord our God, You are One  
And your Son prays that your people may be one.  
As your Son prays for us,  
May we share in the life of Christ  
And in the hope of the resurrection.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord our God, You are One  
And your Son prays that your people may be one.  
As your Son prays for us,  
May we know that we are members of the body of Christ  
And that we share in the one Spirit.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord our God, You are One  
And your Son prays that your people may be one.  
As your Son prays for us,  
May we know that he is our peace  
And that he has broken down the walls that divide us.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord our God, You are One  
And your Son prays that your people may be one.  
As your Son prays for us,  
May we know that we have been reconciled to God  
And that the task of reconciliation has been entrusted to us.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord our God, You are One  
And your Son prays that your people may be one.  
As your Son prays for us,  
May your people be one  
That the world may believe.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.



## Hymn – The Church's one foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord:  
she is his new creation by water and the word;  
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Called forth from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth.  
One holy name she blesses, and shares one holy food,  
as to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

In toil and tribulation and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation of peace for evermore,  
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union with God the Three in One,  
and mystical communion with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

## Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

May the Holy God, encircle and keep you safe.

May the Mighty God defend you from all dangers.

And may the Loving God keep you in perfect peace.

And now go in that peace and may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with, and remain with you, now and forever more.

Amen.