

THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

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Today's Bible reading

Psalm 22:21-31 ("Plea for Deliverance")

Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.
Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

Jesus loves me (CH564)

My life flows on in endless song (CH565)

Give thanks with a grateful heart (CH180)

On this warm summer Sunday we are starting out on a journey together. It's a journey which will take us through a very slim and very fine little book entitled *The Word's Out*, written by David Male and Paul Weston. Over the next few Sundays we will be thinking about the Church being "out" in our world:

- ✦ out in our world, actively sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
- ✦ out in our world, with Christian care and concern for those around us;
- ✦ out in our world, working our patch, while others set about working theirs.

So, the congregations of Gladsmuir linked with Longniddry will be looking closely at Male and Weston's book and considering some of its ideas. These are ideas which will certainly test us. But they might also be ideas which serve to fire our imaginations, making us ask: "Why on earth have we never thought of that before?"

Where should we start? Let's step out on our journey of discovery first in the company of an Old Testament author - the psalmist, whose role in the Jewish faith was to pen songs of worship (and of praise and lament and love and anger) to God. Our Bible reading today is taken from the end of Psalm 22. Yet, had we gone for the start of this Psalm we would have found a different and very disturbing message, so often associated with the New Testament, and Christ's Crucifixion:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

But throughout the course of this song we see the writer's mood turning through a full 180 degrees, until we are able to identify an uplifting message of rejoicing:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Once you have headed home today, open up Psalm 22. As you read it you will see how dramatically dismay turns to joy; how the shadow of doubt is swept away by the light of God's presence in the writer's life. And what a great message it is too, coming, as it certainly does, out of the Hebrew religion which at that time was so deeply rooted in one tiny region of the world and one comparatively small community. Instead of saying, "The Jewish people are yours and we will worship you," the psalmist is bold to declare a message with a much, much wider impact. Once again, those same words, this time with very necessary added emphasis:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Are we getting a sense of a God who cares not just for some ... but for all?

Now a big and dramatic jump forward in time and space, beyond the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, beyond the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, beyond Good Friday and Easter and Pentecost, beyond the early Church and Mediaeval times and the Reformation. Let's go to a very specific time and a very specific (and quite familiar) place. The date is the 14th of June 1910. The place: The United Free Church Assembly Hall on The Mound in Edinburgh. Because on that day and in that place something big was about to happen: the start of the World Missionary Conference. This was to be a huge global gathering of the big denominations, each one intent on

finding new ways of working together to spread the Gospel far round the world. The Conference would be a historic springboard for what was to become the ecumenical movement, with churches starting to work together as never before.

The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 was described by its chairman as the “most notable gathering in the interest of the worldwide expansion of Christianity ever held”. It was most definitely a ground-breaking step forward for different Churches as they came together not just to talk about mission but to work at it in new ways.

But hang on a mo. As David Male notes in his book, just how global was “global”? “Around 1200 delegates attended the conference, of whom over 1000 came from either Britain or the USA. There were 18 delegates from Asia, none at all from Latin America and only one from Africa, and he was not a full delegate. How things [had] changed by the end of the century! ... ‘Over the past century,’ Philip Jenkins writes, ‘the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa and Latin America ... Whatever Europeans and North Americans may believe, Christianity is doing very well indeed in the global south - not just surviving but expanding.’” [Emphasis added]

Let’s go back to the psalmist once again and his striking message about “all the ends of the earth” turning to the Lord. He had a vision which went far beyond his hearth and home. He looked out over his own domestic threshold and allowed his mind to consider all people coming to know God as their Rock and their Salvation. This would not happen in his own lifetime, but nevertheless he understood that the very nature of God is to reach out not as part of some all-conquering crusade or military campaign, but to reach out in a mission of peace to all “the families of the nations”.

By contrast, the mighty vision of that 1910 Edinburgh Conference was based on a top-down model in which the Church of the north would hand down its model of Christianity to the lands of the south. Yet in the 20th century there would be an enormous growth in Christianity across Latin America, Africa and Asia, largely as a result of evangelising by local people. While Victorian Europeans like David Livingstone had laid down strong foundations, the scale and the liveliness of the southern Church has been brought about principally by the work of home-grown Christians in lands like Kenya, Brazil and India (and, in the main, not by foreigners).

Be honest, now: what is your own view of Christian mission and outreach today?

- ♦ Is it based more or less on families nurturing their children in the faith so that they will join the church, get married, have kids of their own and carry on the process across future generations? (If so, I think you can see for yourself that this old way has failed in almost every corner of the United Kingdom and wider Europe.)
- ♦ Or is your view of mission an opening of doors each Sunday, being ready with a smile and a welcome for strangers who drop by? (If so, I think you can see for yourself that this is a passive form of “church” more geared towards maintaining exactly who we are and what we have, rather than owning any active intension positively to reach out with a message of faith for our neighbours.)

Christianity at its finest has always been a missional faith, ever since Jesus himself sent his followers out two by two into the world of the 1st century to spread the Good News far and wide. We, the followers of Jesus in this 21st century, need to get things straight, going back to basics, learning what evangelism means for our time and in our locality. After all, as the title of the book says: *The Word’s Out!* Amen.

Praying for others

God of all the world,
we pray for your Church, both here in East Lothian and far around the world.
May followers of Jesus across all the globe
live to spread his Good News both in word and action.

Inspire your Church, we pray, to look beyond the ways of the past
and see your hand at work in mission and outreach in our time.

Show us how to be a passionate Church,
inspired by Christ's message of the Gospel and
by the hosts of saints who have gone before us.

May Christians the world over view their faith as a holy beacon,
shining forth true and clear beams of glory to enlighten the world
in the joy and the care of your great Love.

In these challenging times give us hope,
granting us a vision of how your people can play their part with you
in finding ways to share your love - ways which speak to our time and our place,
so transforming a world of pain and sorrow
into the Kingdom of God here on Earth,
today, tomorrow and for all time to come.

All this we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

Postcard challenge: Members of our churches are being invited to send in postcards and/or digital photographs showing where they have been in the balmy, sunny days of summer. This year's themes are "Gateways" and "Doorways", offering all sorts of photographic, artistic, geographical and theological possibilities. Watch out for the right pictures and send them on to Derek Easton at 74 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry EH32 0TA or derekeaston@btinternet.com .

Gladsmuir Coffee and Craft Group: Fortnightly on a Wednesday from 10-11.30am in Gladsmuir Church. Come along on 26th June for the next friendly gathering. All welcome!

Longniddry Gardens Open Day: Sunday 23rd June, 1-5pm. Eight gardens in the village - three managed by church members - will be open to enjoy. Entry to all eight is £8 and proceeds will be shared between National Gardens Scotland, Blood Bikes Scotland and Parkinson's UK. Buy tickets at "The Cottage", Gosford Road, "Greyfriars", Kings Road or "Roma", Links Road.

New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church.

Wednesday Club: From 2.30-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along and enjoy a variety of activities and tea/coffee. (Contact Janet: 07766 574123).

Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from 10.30am - 12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church.