



The Church of Scotland

Weekly Worship
17th January 2021

Taking part in today's service is

Rev Derek Hughes, Easterhouse
Holly Thomson, Blantyre Old
Sue Thomson, St. Columba's Aberdeen
Rev Sarah Ross, Moncrieff, East Kilbride

With music from members of Ellon Parish Church, Alison Adam & Iain McLarty and Fischy Music

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

Hi everybody, might I extend to you the very warmest wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. I've invited various people to be involved in a worship service today and I want to thank them for their willingness to do so. Holly who leads our scriptures today. Sue, who leads the old age part of the service. Sarah, who will bring us God's word for today, and Derek who leads us in prayer.

Thank you to those who have contributed music, some of it especially prepared for today. And thank you to those who are behind the scenes handling the technical aspects of the service. So, thank you to all. May the worship be a blessing to you today. Let us worship God together.

Prayer of Approach – Rev Derek Hughes, Easterhouse

Let's join our hearts together in prayer.

Gracious God,
we often speak about coming into Your presence.
But, in reality,
You never leave us.

Of course,
because of our waywardness,
we are not always aware
of how very close You are.

Even when we cannot see Your hand at work,
nor hear Your tender leading,
You watch over us.



When we are at our best,
we don't mind at all
that You see and hear everything.
In our heart of hearts,
we hope that You may even be impressed by our goodness.
And yet, almost in the same moment,
we are reminded of the myriad times we fail You.
And yet still You love us.

What an amazing, faithful, forgiving, gracious God You are.
Your mercy reaches to the heavens
and yet deigns to dwell in the heart of sinners.

Thank You, Heavenly Father;
thank You for Your wise parenting,
Your patience,
Your utter determination
to continue to work in and through us,
despite our worst failings.

God of love, we are sorry
that at times our love for You falters.
that we have wrong priorities,
that we set aside Your guidance,
thinking somehow that we know better.

Ever-present Christ, we are sorry
that we disobey your commandments,
that we fail to love as we should,
that we walk by on the other side,
thinking somehow that we know better.

Holy Spirit of truth, we are sorry
that we disregard Your presence,
that our thoughts and feelings go awry,
that we follow the world's way instead of Yours,
thinking somehow that we know better.

In all of this, You make yourself known to us, and are there again and again to pick us up,
dust us down and give us yet another chance.
How we thank You, Living God
that You do not reject us, nor leave us alone,
but embrace us with an undying parental love.

Working in partnership with You is the joy of our life. It brings dignity to all our days.



Thank You, Lord.
In Jesus' name, thank You.
Amen.

Scripture Reading – Holly Thomson, Blantyre Old

The book of John, chapter 1 verses 43-51 (Good News Bible)

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!" (Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," answered Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, "Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!"

Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you."

"Teacher," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!" And he said to them, "I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man."

Hymn - I the Lord of Sea and Sky performed by members of Ellon Parish Church

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them, They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?



Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart

All Age Talk – Sue Thomson, Aberdeen: St. Columba's

Hi, everybody, my name is Sue. It is so good to be able to chat to you today.

We are going to start with a game. This game is called Who am I? This is how it's going to work. I'm going to think of something in my head and I'm going to give you clues. You have to use the clues to work out what it is I'm thinking about, who I am thinking about. So, I'll give you a clue. Then you can have a think and maybe get an answer. Tell your friends, your family, whoever's around you, and then I'll give you another clue. And we'll see at the end how many clues it took you to guess the right answer.

Are you ready? Here we go. Here's our first clue.

It's an animal. It's an animal. Had a guess. Okay, next clue. It could be big, or it could be little. It could be big, or it could be little. Have another guess.

Here's another clue. It's black. Oh, but it could be brown or white. Or a mix of all those colours. Have another guess. What do you think?

Here's another clue. It usually lives in homes with people. It usually lives in homes with people. Have you got an idea now? Have a guess.

Here's your last clue? It goes, woof woof. You've got it now, haven't you? I bet you have. It's a dog. I was thinking about my dog, Oscar. Here he is.

I wonder how many clues it took you to guess that correctly.



Well, in the Bible, I've got my Bible here, we meet a man called Nathaniel. And I think Nathaniel would have been really great at our game. I think it would just have taken him a few clues to guess what I was thinking about. And that's because when Nathaniel meets Jesus, Jesus gives him just two clues, and Nathaniel knows exactly who Jesus is. With just two clues Nathaniel's got it. He's figured out who Jesus is.

You see, when Nathaniel meets Jesus, the first thing Jesus says to him is, you are an Israelite and a good Israelite. Nathaniel's never met Jesus before. So that's his first clue that Jesus knows all about him, even though he's never met him. Jesus knows all about him. And then the second clue is Jesus says, I saw you at the fig tree with you before you met your friend. And Nathaniel knows Jesus wasn't there. So, he knows that Jesus is saying even when I'm not there, I know where you are, and I know what you're doing. That's the second clue. Well Nathaniel is amazed, but straightaway after just those two clues, he's got the answer. And he's excited about it. He shouts it out, he says, 'Jesus, you are rabbi.' That means teacher. Got a whiteboard, and a marker like a teacher would have. So, he says, 'teacher', he knows Jesus is a teacher. But it doesn't stop there. Because he knows Jesus isn't just a teacher. He says, 'You are the Son of God'.

I've got a cross, and a stone like the stone that was rolled away from Jesus' tomb, to remind us that Jesus is the Son of God. He had the power to die, but then come alive again. Nathaniel knows that Jesus is a teacher, and the son of God, but he doesn't stop there. Then he says, 'You are the king of Israel'. I've got a crown.

With only two clues. Nathaniel knows exactly who Jesus is. He knows he is a teacher, Rabbi, he calls him, he knows he is the Son of God. There's my pebble. And he knows he is a king. And that's what I would like you all to remember today, just who Jesus is that he is a teacher. We can learn from him. He's gonna teach us about God, and the world and how to live. But he's more than just a teacher. He's also the Son of God. He was with God, when God made the world. He's with God and heaven now. He's got God's power, remember, he could do all those miracles, and he came alive again, so that we could be friends with God. And finally, he's a King and we should let him be king of our lives. We should worship Him, and we should listen to Him and obey Him. Jesus, let me see if I can get all these in my hands; is a teacher, the Son of God, and our king. Isn't those great things to remember about who Jesus is?

One of my other favourite things about Jesus, though, is that he listens to us. We can talk to him anytime. So that's what we're going to do now. We're going to pray. We're going to talk to Jesus knowing that he will listen to us and hear us. So, we're going to say, Wow, Jesus, you are Amazing prayers, Okay? Wow, Jesus, you are amazing. So, I'll go first. I'll say, Wow, Jesus, you are amazing because, and I'll finish the sentence. And I'll do that a few times. But then I'll say it. Wow, God, you are amazing because I'll not finish the sentence. I'll leave it to you and to finish the sentence. Okay. Let's do it. Let's talk to Jesus. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for listening to us today. And we want to say wow, Jesus, you are amazing, because you are our teacher.

Wow Jesus, you are amazing, because you are the Son of God.



Wow, Jesus, you are amazing, because you are our king.

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.

Song – Even before I was born, Fischy Music

Even before I was born
You saw me
Even before I was born
You knew me
Even before I was born
You loved me
You loved me, you loved me.

All of the days of my life
You see me
All of the days of my life
You know me
All of the days of my life
You love me
You love me, you love me

Even at the end of my life
You'll see me
Even at the end of my life
You'll know me
Even at the end of my life
You'll love me
You'll love me, you'll love me.

Sermon – Rev Sarah Ross, Moncrieff, East Kilbride

Hello and welcome to my home. An ordinary home in an ordinary street in an ordinary Scottish town. You wouldn't know it was a manse or church house just by looking at it. And within this home lives a very ordinary family - 2 children, 2 adults and a petite Westie. Nothing about us would make us stand out in a crowd and you know what, that is okay! God loves ordinary people. I'm sure he loves extra-ordinary people too but sometimes we think he only loves extra-ordinary people. The ones who have changed the world for the better or taken the good news to the broken places. The ones who when they announce a new book or spear-head a campaign we



are right there signing up to join them. But we keep them on a pedestal and at a bit of a distance. So if you are an extra-ordinary person you are loved by God and revered by us. But today I want to speak to people who feel that they are just ordinary people, people who think that God can't have time for them, that he might not even notice them or that if he did, he would simply judge them.

If you think you are ordinary come closer and hear some fabulous news. I invite you to try and lay down your doubts for a few moments, and perhaps even leave them here! Come and see the God who loves you as you are. And more than that he invites you, as you are, wherever you are, to come and follow him.

Firstly, however, cards on the table - you need to know that God already knows you through and through. There is nothing about you that he doesn't already know. He knows where you have hidden the leftover Christmas goodies even if your children don't! He knows the hurts that you carry, the scars that itch, the sorrows and the joys that shape you, the prejudices that colour, the compassion you share and the love that you give and receive through you. However, a bit like Nathanael are you willing to listen to what he might tell you about yourself? The psalmist writes:

God, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.
I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.
This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!

Familiar words for some - Psalm 139:1-6, the Message version today, also a lectionary reading for this particular Sunday.

Nathanael met the Messiah not realising that the Messiah already knew who he was. But I'm getting ahead of myself again. A bit like Philip I can't wait to share the good news with you. And yet it is such an ordinary story that you almost wonder why John included it in such detail. But it is the ordinary that is so important. It is about ordinary people in an ordinary town in an ordinary country.

Philip is so excited at meeting Jesus. It is like the old joke about a young man who was so nervous about becoming a Christian he asked if it was okay not to tell anybody that he'd done it. 'Of course', said his mentor. So he went home and went upstairs to his bedroom and prayed privately and committed his life to Jesus. Then running down the stairs he burst into the living



room to tell his family in a big voice: I have just become a Christian. He couldn't help but tell other people!

Philip wanted his best mate to know that he had met Jesus. He says 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'. And Nathanael is a little like 'aye right, like the Messiah is going to come from Nazareth'.

Now whether it was small town politics given that Nathanael was from neighbouring Cana or that instinct we have that nothing 'extra-ordinary' happens around here, Nathanael is dismissive. But he is also a good friend and he humours his friend and goes with him to find out who this Jesus is and encounters the Messiah.

There is much speculation about the conversation that follows and of course, we are just onlookers interpreting it. But, it is still a significant conversation as it moves Nathanael from a place of indifference to a place of conversion. And it is Jesus who takes the initiative in the conversation and compliments Nathanael, on being a true Israelite. The way that Philip and Jesus both speak to Nathanael suggests that he is a student of the Scriptures, and someone perhaps who is genuinely looking for the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus' reference to a true Israelite reflects Jacob who was deceitful and then becomes known as Israel, and is a prominent ancestor of the faith. Philip speaks of Jesus fulfilling the law of Moses etc. The reference also to the fig tree - which we don't know the full significance of - speaks to a learning environment as Rabbis often taught under the fig trees, and in the Old Testament they were a place of peace for the prophets. And even St Augustine heard the call of Jesus under a fig tree.

Whatever happens in that conversation, Nathanael is moved from his 'aye right' cynicism to a statement of faith. Why? I think it is because Jesus sees the potential within him. Immediately Jesus speaks to Nathanael in a way that connects with him. It barely makes sense to us. But for Nathanael - Jesus is on the money so to speak. Nathanael is impressed by the supernatural knowledge that Jesus has of him. Jesus has the measure of him straightaway. And so it is with each one of us. He sees through the masks and the filters to who we truly are. The individual within.

But as always there is more. Like Nathanael we look to Jesus, especially at this wonderful time of the year and worship Jesus the king. We know that he is Jesus incarnate, one of us. Or Emmanuel, God with us. But too often we lose the wonder of that as the daily grind takes its toll, especially in the weariness of lockdown. We focus on the daily to do list and we kinda just push God to the fringes. Yet Jesus calls us to experience the deep wonder of faith, to look for the vision, to know that there is a divine element. John writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)



Nathanael is convinced by one encounter, by one conversation, but Jesus knows there is more and paints a vision of heaven and earth connected. Again, it's reminiscent of Jacob and Jacob's ladder with one key difference. Jesus is at the bottom of the ladder with his us, his people. The vision reminds us that the God we worship, and follow isn't just out there somewhere just for extraordinary people of faith, but actually he is with us all. He even promises that we will do even greater things - ordinary people. The Mary's and Joseph's, the Peters and Andrews, the Philips and Nathanaels, the Lydias and the Johns.

Throughout the New Testament, of course, there are extra-ordinary people, but more often than not it is the ordinary people who see the truth first. And some of them run off to invite others to come and see. Some are right there watching and listening, learning and mulling over. Others, they need a little more convincing whether they are cynical Nathanael's, or conflict torn Nicodemus' or dare I say it - even doubting Thomas'. And each time Jesus speaks to the heart of the individual. Even the rich young man who went away sad because he was so rich. Jesus doesn't condemn his wealth but invited him to leave it behind to follow him because the riches of faith, of Jesus, of God are worth so much more than earthly possessions.

I can't promise that following Jesus will be a walk in the park. In fact, generally following Jesus is exciting, frustrating, difficult and exhilarating. I can tell you that the ordinary things of life can take on a whole new glow when you follow Jesus wholeheartedly. And it is no wonder we need the Holy Spirit to help. Remember Jesus promises the vision not just to Nathanael but to all the disciples. So whether you are inviting others to come and see or you are being invited by another - we are all equal in the sight of God. All of us can be met by God, blessed by God. And yes, you can even meet God with your cynicism and your doubts. But be prepared to have a change of perspective. May God bless you richly as you embrace his willingness to use and love the ordinary! Let him speak to the heart of who you are and take you on a wonderful journey with him. Dare you answer the call: Follow me? Amen.

Prayer of Intercession - Rev Derek Hughes, Easterhouse

Let's bring to God our prayers of thanks and for other people.

Loving Lord,
you call us to follow in the way of Christ.
Accompany us as we seek to live out this call.
Give us strength and enthusiasm
to live a life of obedience, trust and service.

Help us to value and to fan into flame the creative spark in all Your people, to bring to fulfilment the gifts You have given.

May we respect one another, recognising that the differences, which exist between us are far from a weakness, but are actually a strength.



The approval this past week in the United Kingdom of a third vaccine against Covid-19 gives huge hope to so many. We are thankful for the dedication and perseverance of researchers, as well as those who stepped forward to trial these potentially life-saving drugs.

At the same time, we remember all those families for whom these advances in science have come just too late. The death or long-term harm done to loved ones weighs heavy on the hearts of so many. In their grief and pain, we pray comfort and healing from Your life-giving Holy Spirit.

Later this week, the United States of America will welcome a new President and Vice President. Amidst the controversy and pain, we pray for unity and peace. We realise that to bring together polarised views is a challenging thing. And so, we ask that You grant Heavenly wisdom and courage to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

In that same vein, we continue to pray for our own governments at Westminster and Holyrood. The weariness and constant pressure under which Prime Minister Boris Johnson and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon work, along with their support teams, will perhaps never be fully appreciated by those in the wider populace.

Equally, we know that the past year has placed enormous burdens on so many in our society. Please God, draw near to all who struggle with heavy loads, and help them.

With grateful hearts, we recognise the mammoth efforts of so many in Your church across the course of this pandemic.

In harnessing technology, in reaching out with food parcels, in speaking a word of encouragement through various means, good work has been done to alleviate the sadness and isolation felt by so many.

May these acts of kindness be like seeds, which bring a harvest of good things to the glory of Your name.
Amen.

Hymn – Will you come and follow me sung by Alison Adam, accompanied by Iain McLarty

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown?
Will you let my name be known?
Will you let my life be grown in you,
and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind



and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare,
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you
and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell that fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound in you,
and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go,
where your love and footsteps show,
thus I'll move and live and grow in you,
and you in me.

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

The Creator who brought order out of chaos, give peace to you today
The Saviour who stilled the raging storm, give peace to you today.
The Spirit who broods over the deep, give peace to you today.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you now,
and remain with you forevermore.
Amen