

Sunday 29 January 2023

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany



Monklands Canal
Scotland

Sermon © Pete Haslam.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 The Church's one foundation (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'

And the second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

By the mercies of God,

let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to him,
which is our spiritual worship:

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

God our creator,
who in the beginning
commanded the light to shine out of darkness:
we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ
may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief,
shine into the hearts of all your people,
and reveal the knowledge of your glory
in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of the First Book of Kings

The word of the Lord came to [Elijah the Tishbite], saying, 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' She went and

did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah. *1 Kings 17:8-16*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

1 Corinthians 1:18-END

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Amazing love

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All **Glory to you O Lord.**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. *John 2:1-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All **Praise to you O Christ.**

Sermon

It was a sunny morning on the Sea of Galilee. The team of fishermen were about their usual business. Some were throwing their nets out into the lake to try to catch a few more fish before the day got too hot. A couple of others were sitting in their boats carrying out the daily chore of painstakingly going over their nets knot by knot to check there were no holes, and when they found one, mending it with fresh twine. Most of the night's catch had already been sent off in baskets to the market, and they were enjoying the quiet of the morning. Life was pretty good for these fishermen. They had a sure source of income. They enjoyed their work and they were good at it. They should have been, I guess, because fishing ran in their blood. Their father was a fisherman, as was his father before him. So they knew their trade and were happy doing it.

But things were about to change. The quiet of their morning was about to be interrupted as a figure appeared in the distance walking along the edge of the lake. He looked somehow familiar, though they couldn't quite work out why. But as he got closer they realised who he was. He was the preacher who'd recently begun

telling people that the kingdom of God was near. He'd caused quite a stir around Galilee. There were plenty of people around there who were sick and tired of the Romans throwing their weight around, so the idea that God might have finally sent the promised one, the one who'd restore the kingdom to Israel, got people pretty excited. And the way this guy spoke had a certain ring to it. It had an authority about it that they hadn't heard before in all their experience. Even the Chief Priests and the teachers of the law didn't speak like that.

But what was he doing here on his own by the Sea of Galilee? They watched as he drew closer, his feet crunching on the gravel and shell grit at the edge of the lake. First he came to Peter and Andrew as they were casting their nets into the water. He stopped beside them and they looked up, wondering what he might want. 'Follow me,' he said to them 'and I will make you fish for people.' He went on a bit further to where James and John were mending their nets and said the same thing: 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' 'What, us? Why would you want us to come with you? We're just honest fishermen. Besides which, how could we leave our safe secure jobs and go off into the never-never with you? We'd be mad to even think about it.'

'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' It doesn't sound like a very wise thing to do does it? Just give up everything you've learnt and go off with Jesus to whatever he has in store for you? It sounds a bit foolish in fact. Or is it?

Well, what would you have done? Jesus is standing there in front of you saying 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' What would you do? Do you know what these fishermen did? We're told immediately they left their nets and followed him.

These four men obviously didn't think it was foolish to follow Jesus. Rather, they thought this was the wisest thing in the world. What better thing could you do, in fact than to follow someone who spoke with the authority that Jesus seemed to have, someone who was able to perform miracles of healing the way Jesus did, someone who even had authority over evil spirits, No, this wasn't foolishness but wisdom. They were the first of many, in fact, who chose to follow Jesus and who later realised just how wise a decision that had been.

But there were others who thought about following Jesus, but for the wrong reason. They foolishly thought that following Jesus would be fun, would be an easy path to fame perhaps. And some thought of following Jesus for the right reason but in the end weren't wise enough to go through with it.

It happened a couple of years later. Jesus was on the road, teaching and healing people, when someone came up to him and said 'I will follow you wherever you go.' He thought Jesus was pretty cool. He thought it'd be fun to be one of Jesus'

followers. But he was actually being foolish, because he hadn't thought out what following Jesus might mean. So Jesus turned to him and said 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man (that's Jesus) has nowhere to lay his head.' It wasn't going to be a picnic being one of Jesus' followers. It'd require courage and commitment. It might mean giving up some of the creature comforts he took for granted. A bit later, Jesus spoke to another one of the crowd who were following behind him and said, 'Follow me.' But this man said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' This man wanted to follow Jesus some time later, after his father had died and he didn't have any other responsibilities. But to be a follower of Jesus requires total commitment right now. You can't claim to be a follower of Jesus and then go home to your normal life as if nothing had happened. It's no use putting it off until a better time. That'd be a foolish thing to do when you have the opportunity now to follow God's only Son. But that man wasn't the only one who gave that sort of excuse. Another man said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' He saw that following Jesus was the wise thing to do in the long run, but he wasn't quite ready to commit himself, just yet. So Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' God doesn't want us to turn from one direction to another like a leaf blown in the wind. He wants us to be single minded in our focus and direction in following him.

It isn't always easy to see which is the wise and which is the foolish way to go is it? What seems wise may not be so when you look at the results. What seems foolish may in fact be the wisest decision in the world in the end. David Frost put out a book some years ago, called David Frost's Book of the World's Worst Decisions. I remember being amazed at how stupid some very clever people could be when their decisions were looked at with hindsight. Like the executives of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler who were offered the design of the Volkswagen Beetle after the second world war and all turned it down because, they said, it would never sell! That pales into insignificance compared to the executive of a small recording company in Memphis who in 1955 sold the contract he had with Elvis Presley to RCA records for \$35,000. Not very wise!

It might not seem wise to follow Jesus when he says something like this: 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.' It could seem foolish to follow someone who offers you the cross at the end of your journey. But then he adds: 'Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will

find it.' To follow Jesus might seem dangerous, or foolhardy, but at the end, after the suffering is over, he promises we'll save our lives through his death on the cross. At the end he promises that we'll enjoy eternal life just like he does now.

The message of the cross might seem to be foolishness at first sight. To think that Jesus should waste his life by allowing himself to be crucified! That's one of the messages of the musical Jesus Christ Superstar isn't it? At the end his life was wasted. But in fact it wasn't wasted. Through Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection Jesus prepares the way for us to enter into the Father's presence, without fear, without guilt, without shame. In the end it's only through the foolishness of Jesus' death & resurrection that we can come to know God. All the wisdom in the world, you see, has been unable to find out what God is really like, as much as people have tried, as much as people have come up with theories on what God might be like. But Jesus has revealed him to us. In Jesus we discover the amazing love and mercy of God; His graciousness towards fallen human beings; His eternal plan to bring people back to himself; His great wisdom, in showing the way back to him through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

I want to challenge you to make the wisest decision in the world. You might even have made this decision years ago, but if so why not make it again today. That is, to be a follower of Jesus Christ for the rest of your life. To depend on his death and resurrection to give your life, when this life is over. To take the risk of trusting him to look after you even when life is hard, even when life with Jesus involves the suffering of a cross. Remember, the message of the cross sounds like foolishness to those who don't know Jesus Christ, but to those who come to know him and to trust in him it's the power of God for salvation.

Foolishness or wisdom? Some people choose to ignore God. Others make the wisest decision anyone could make. That is, to follow Jesus Christ to the end of their lives.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

These prayers are inspired by Jesus' 'Manifesto statement' in Luke 4.

We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
You sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to the captives
and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.
Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.
Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.
Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.
Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to proclaim that the time is here
for you to save your people.

Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Father, use us, unworthy as we are,
to bring in your kingdom of mercy, justice, love and peace.
Empower us by your Spirit and unite us in your Son,
that all our joy and delight may be to serve you,
now and for ever.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The peace

Christ is our peace.

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Bread of heaven on thee we feed ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory
and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 All I once held dear ([please click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Generous Lord,
in word and eucharist we have proclaimed the mystery of your love:
help us so to live out our days
that we may be signs of your wonders in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.