

Welcome

Call to worship

**Hymn CH4 124 - Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of
creation**

Prayer of approach & Lord's prayer

All-age talk

*- need blindfold/scarf, assorted items that make a noise - e.g.
triangle, bag of crisps, recorder, velcro, toys, whisper*

Hymn CH4 194 - This is the day

Bible readings : Psalm 126; Luke 4:14-21

Sermon

Hymn CH4 251 - I, the Lord of sea and sky

Prayer for others

Hymn CH4 182 - Now thank we all our God

Blessing

Welcome

Call to worship (from Isaiah 61:2-3)

In Isaiah 61 we find these words :

The time has come when the Lord will save all people,
bringing comfort to those who mourn,
giving joy and gladness instead of grief,
and a song of praise instead of sorrow.
God will be praised for what he has done.

And we are gathered today to praise and worship God, and so we sing together our opening hymn...

Hymn CH4 124 - Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation

Prayer of approach & Lord's prayer

Father God, whose love endures forever,
whose promises ring out from the prophets,
whose care reaches out to all people;
God of all,
we come before you.

In your love, hear our prayers and accept our worship,
as we gather together as your children.

Jesus, who came to show us living love,
whose words and touch brought healing and hope,
whose life was lived for us all;
Lord and friend,
we come to listen to you.

May we hear your good news, and know your love,
today, in this place.

Holy Spirit, whose power creates and re-creates,
who brings comfort and guidance,
who can inspire and transform all things;
Breath of life,
we come seeking new life.

Open our hearts to your love and power, here and now.

God, you are faithful and loving
- but we struggle to keep loving one another through everything.
You bring us good news
- but we are not always able to hear it.
You call us to freedom

- but we find ourselves stuck in the same bad habits.
God of love and hope, as we confess to you our failings in the silence of our hearts, pour your love into us, and assure us of your forgiveness.

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Faithful God,
whose love is everlasting,
and who gives us a new start, today and every day,
we come to you
with our worship, with our thanks, and with our hopes and fears.
Take our gifts, take our lives, and take all that we are,
and transform them in your power
that they might be used to bring your good news to all people.
And we sum all our prayers in the prayer your Son taught us...

**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.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen**

All age talk

I need a volunteer to help me please, someone who's good at listening...
I have some things for you to hear, and see if you can tell me what they are...
[blindfold/scarf, assorted items]
e.g. triangle, bag of crisps, recorder, velcro, toys, whisper
[Blindfold off, thanks, well done]

Did you have to listen carefully?
Needed to really pay attention to hear what things were.

Today in church, we're going to be reading a story about Jesus, when he went home to Nazareth and went to the synagogue - just like you come to church. And he read some of the Bible, and then said to everyone - if you were listening there, that was coming true, here and now, today in this place.

If they listened carefully, they would realise that they were hearing God speaking to them in Jesus.

If they heard properly, they were hearing God's promises being kept, there and then. Because God loved them, and loves us, so much, he promises to be with people and make things better.

And there's a challenge for us there. That when we hear about God - in the Bible, in church, in Sunday School, from other people - we should always listen carefully, to hear what God is saying to us today. And that can be real and exciting for us, today, here, in real life. It can help us to live and grow closer to God and to each other.

If we listen, God wants to tell us his good news for us all, and tell us just how much he loves us.

Let us pray...

God,

thank you that you love us, and came to tell us good news.

Help us to listen to you, and to each other, that we might learn more, and hear about your promises, and live our lives for you.

We ask this through Jesus, your Son and our friend,

Amen

Hymn CH4 194 - This is the day

Bible readings : Psalm 126
 Luke 4:14-21

SERMON

The reading we've just heard from Luke's gospel is very important. It comes very near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It seems to sum up so much about Jesus, and therefore about God and his love for all people. It is a passage that has passion and urgency. It's a text that shows the faithfulness of God through the ages. And there are probably at least half a dozen sermons waiting to be preached on different aspects of it - but you'll be relieved that today there's only one!

And today we're going to think about how here, right at the start of his ministry, what Jesus makes clear is that he is proclaiming good news. It's what "gospel" means too - good news. It's what one translation of bibles are named after - "Good News Bibles".

Jesus came to tell all people good news.

And the first piece of good news we find here, is that God is with us in all of our lives. God is with us in the everyday and in the extraordinary, in the highs and in the lows, in living and in dying.

On the one hand, Jesus shows us God with us in the everyday.

Jesus was a wee Jewish boy, who grew up in Nazareth, took on his father's joinery business, and went to synagogue every week. He was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist, as many others were. And after hearing God affirm his ministry, after the temptations in

the desert and the acclamation his preaching received across Galilee, he still came home to Nazareth. He came home, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. And he took his turn reading and teaching.

Jesus lived and loved the normal patterns of life, and is with us in those.

But we all know that life doesn't always run smoothly in those patterns. And God also knows that, and understands that, and is there too.

The text Jesus chose to read in the synagogue in Nazareth comes from Isaiah 61. It is a part of Isaiah probably written after the Babylonian exile, when the people of Israel were able to return to Jerusalem. It was a time of great hope, but it was also a very difficult time. They returned to a city in ruins, with tensions between those who'd left and those who'd stayed. There was no easy restoration, no magic bullet, and great losses still to be worked through.

And Psalm 126, which we also read today, probably comes from that same context - a time of return and restoration, but also of pain.

The psalm acknowledges all that God has done already, but still needs to call on God for more help, in order to transform sorrow into joy and prosperity.

So the struggles of life were not new to the people of God, and were not new to God. God has always been with people through the difficult times. And Jesus came to show that in a very tangible way.

Jesus, God with us, read Isaiah 61 - a passage of hope amidst confusion and sorrow. Jesus read it to a people living under Roman occupation, a people whose precarious daily existence he knew and shared. And Jesus had just faced temptations and hunger in the desert. He met and touched those living with illness. He challenged the religious and political powers that oppressed people. And we know that Jesus ultimately faced a terrible, painful death - the very worst humanity could do to him - alongside us.

In Nazareth that day, Jesus proclaimed good news. And that good news begins with his very presence there - that God is with us, in everything. God is with us in the everyday, and in the struggles, and in all that life might bring us.

But the good news is not just of a God who is beside us, but is of hope and transformation. It is good news that encompasses and brings the great joys and excitement of life too.

There is hope and change because God loves every one of us. As Jesus read the words of Isaiah 61, God's promises were being fulfilled; the hope of Isaiah and the psalms, for restoration and transformation, was being lived out amongst us.

And what a promise, what a hope.

There is good news for the poor. Those whose lives were limited could look up to new possibilities. Their voices would be heard. God's special concern for the most vulnerable was to be lived out in action by Jesus.

There is to be liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. Freedom - to live and grow as all God's children deserve to. Choices - not just dictated by political or religious authorities. New vision - of a way forward, shown to us by Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus announces that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. The jubilee has come - the time when all debts are written off, and there is a fresh start for all. This is a promise of forgiveness and new opportunities.

And that same transformation was both promised and affirmed generations before in Psalm 126. A move from disgrace and sorrow to welcome and love and joy. A complete change, as seen when the rains come, and the dry river beds of the desert flow with water, and new growth brings green shoots of hope for the future.

This is such good news. Good news that brings hope. Good news of a fresh start and transformation, through the power of God to recreate and restore his world and its people.

And part of the power of this text, part of the challenge of Jesus' reading it, is the breadth of these transformations.

I hope we can all read these proclamations and hear it, today, in this place, as applicable to ourselves. In our personal lives there are many things that keep us trapped - poverty, abuse or addiction; physical or mental ill-health; fears or responsibilities; the list could go on. There is hope for each of us, on a very personal level - that God loves us, and is with us in those situations, and wants to free us.

But there is also a political dimension. When God is with us in all of life, that includes our life together as communities and as a nation. There is good news for the poor, the prisoners and the oppressed - and it's not hard to find those if we watch even a few minutes of the news just now. There is to be freedom from debt and a new start - pretty relevant in the current economic climate. There should be hope and accessibility for those who are blind - and surely for any who live with any disability?

One powerful illustration of the way the personal and political overlap may be found considering those in our prisons. In thinking about prisoners, we must think personally - about people, their families, the victims of crime, the professionals involved. But we cannot avoid the political too - the criminal justice system and all

that drives it. And it is into all these levels, to all these people and systems, that Jesus proclaims liberty and transformation. And therefore it is into all these situations that we are called to go too.

There is good news, God's good news - that God loves us and is with us, and God promises hope and freedom. In our lives, and in all lives - in the daily and the large scale - in the personal and the political.

And Jesus can make it real today, in our hearing. Just as he did in Nazareth 2000 years ago. This is true, and it is real, and so we can live our lives from this hope. For he is with us, and transforms all we do.

There is a story told of a wee girl, who was desperate to play the piano, and drove her parents daft endlessly playing "Chopsticks". Eventually they decided to find her a piano teacher, and went to visit an eminent musician to discuss lessons. At his house, they found themselves left in a room with an enormous, expensive, grand piano, and the wee girl wandered over, and started playing "Chopsticks" on it too. Her parents were mortified when in walked the maestro himself - but he encouraged her to keep playing, and then sat down beside her. As she continued to play her wee piece, he gradually added in music around it - chords, runs, musical shapes. And her parents were amazed to hear a masterpiece emerge - a beautiful

duet, as the wee girl and the maestro transformed Chopsticks into something new and amazing.

God comes alongside us, and with his love, transforms our efforts into something even more amazing, so that we can live out and share God's good news with others.

We can, and in many cases we already do.

For example, the Guild has been hearing God's voice, building strong personal relationships amongst members, and also engaging in projects and campaigns around some of the very big issues facing our world.

For example, in supporting Christian Aid, we bring good news to the poor around the world and give them a voice to be heard.

In the work done locally with Moray Fresh Start, there is a clear commitment to giving people a new beginning, often bringing freedom from vicious cycles of poverty and abuse and homelessness.

And at a very local and personal level, in helping our neighbours, taking them out, getting the shopping in - in the everyday care we show - we bring people greater freedom, and spread hope and love.

It's not always easy. Loving people can be hard. Change can be painful. And sharing good news with all who need to hear it can take

us into challenging situations. There are always more people to reach out to, and more change to be faced.

But we do not do any of it alone - and that is the good news of God.

Jesus, God, loves us and is with us always - in daily life, in the struggles and in the joys.

Jesus, God with us, promises transformation and freedom - for us, and for all people.

And Jesus, God with us, comes in the power of the Spirit to make this true for us all - today, in this place - and always.

Amen

Hymn CH4 251 - I, the Lord of sea and sky

Prayer for others

Father God,
you love your world and all its people,
so we bring you our hopes and concerns,
and open our ears and hearts to your words for us today.

Jesus, you brought good news to the poor,
and yet they are still with us.
As we remember those across the world, and in our communities,
who do not have access to good food and clean water,
who have not got a secure home to live in,
and whose livelihoods and jobs are lost,
move among us and our leaders to bring hope.

You proclaimed liberty to the captives,
and yet people are trapped and imprisoned in many ways.
May all living with abuse or addiction get support,
may prisoners be given opportunities for change,
and may all who are involved in our criminal justice system work for
transformation.

You offered recovery of sight to the blind,
and yet so many are excluded by impairments.
Be with those disabled by lack of access to facilities and people,
because of their mental or physical conditions.
Be with policy-makers and organisations,
that we would share your vision and love for all.
Be with us, that our hearts and communities would be fully welcomed and truly
open.

You wanted to free the oppressed,
and yet our news shows us so many problems.
May there be true freedom for all throughout the nations,
may voices of minorities and visionaries be heard,
and may we work together to protect your people and planet
from cycles of violence and destruction.

You came to announce a new start for all,
and yet we so often get trapped by our past.
Be with those people and nations who need a new start financially,
be with victims of crime, whose lives have been altered,
and be with all facing loss and bereavement, who must face new patterns of life.

Jesus, you proclaimed your truth as real and alive,
and yet your church doesn't always live up to that.
May your whole church live out your good news,
and may we work together to share it with others.

God our Father, Jesus our Lord, and Spirit of power,

as we bring you these and all our prayers,
hear us, and open our hearts to you and your world,
now and always,
Amen

Hymn CH4 182 - Now thank we all our God

Blessing

May the Spirit of the Lord be upon us,
may the good news of Jesus live in our hearts,
and may the love of God our Father hold us always.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us, and with all those we are called to love, now and forever,...

Sung Amen