

Welcome to worship from Boghall Parish Church. A reminder that this afternoon at 2pm there will be a service of remembrance and reflection. Tess and Katie will play for us. We will have a few prayers and readings. A quiet reflection.

Our first meeting regarding the future of the churches has taken place. The Bathgate churches will meet on Tuesday to begin exploring what the churches locally will look like in the future. This will be a major shake up for the churches with a 40% cut in paid ministry posts. We will do all we can to try and keep everyone informed and involved in such far-reaching implications.

Our psalm for today is psalm 48. It is like a travel guide to Jerusalem.

Jesus had an ambivalent relationship with Jerusalem. It was Jerusalem he wept over. The city that kills its prophets. And yet he went there and entered into all of its religious ceremony and mystery. But all the time subverting it. Turning over tables in the temple, making wild predictions of the temple's destruction. An important place to know and be freed from.

There is a little play on words in the Hebrew at the end of the psalm. The psalmist asks his listeners to count the towers in the city and re-count God's works to the next generation. I don't know how that translates to our setting. Count the church spires in a town and re-count God's works.

Count the number of worshipers and re-count the works of God. Maybe all we can do is count the blessings God gives each of us and re-count God's work in our lives. Maybe that is the starting place for our new relationship with God here in Bathgate.

Psalm 48

The Glory and Strength of Zion

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites.

¹ Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God.
His holy mountain, ² beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,

the city of the great King.
³ Within its citadels God
has shown himself a sure defence.
⁴ Then the kings assembled,
they came on together.
⁵ As soon as they saw it, they were astounded;
they were in panic, they took to flight;
⁶ trembling took hold of them there,
pains as of a woman in labour,
⁷ as when an east wind shatters
the ships of Tarshish.
⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen
in the city of the LORD of hosts,
in the city of our God,
which God establishes forever. *Selah*
⁹ We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.
¹⁰ Your name, O God, like your praise,
reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with victory.

¹¹ Let Mount Zion be glad,
let the towns of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments.
¹² Walk about Zion, go all around it,
count its towers,
¹³ consider well its ramparts;
go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
¹⁴ that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will be our guide forever.

Amen

Hymn 547 What a friend we have in Jesus

Prayer and Lord's prayer

God of grace and God of mercy, we
come before you unsure of the future.

We know that you have called us, that we
are yours, but we are not sure what you
call us to do, what the future holds. We
know our building, our church, we value
it, it is precious, but we know that your
church is bigger than us, bigger than a
building.

Call us anew, send us forth, that we may
re-count your work in us to others, that
we can bring healing, that divided souls
can find wholeness. God of healing
speak to us today, show us a new way,
lead us forth in faith, hope and love.

God we come before you knowing that
we have fallen short of your calling,
knowing that our thoughts, our words, our
actions, have caused hurt and division.
We come repenting, longing for a change
in mind, in heart, in life.

Help us to see in a new way, to see the goodness around us, to know and believe that the arc of the universe bends towards justice because of you.

In repentance we come before you, and in forgiveness we rise as new creations. Turned around, made new, healed and whole, divided souls restored.

And hear us as we say the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen

We continue with our story of Samuel and David. David is to be anointed as the king of Israel and Judah. We read that Samuel anointed David King of the southern kingdom Judah a few weeks ago. The divided kingdoms now come together. They needed a capital, a central capital and Jerusalem was chosen.

Let us begin with remembering God's warning to the people relayed through Samuel about a king. A king will take your young men to war, your young women into service. A king will take your land, and the produce of your land.

A king will fill his growing band of advisors with your good things. A king will make you slaves. And still the people want a king. Samuel's words came true.

David, the revered king, the idealised king, was flawed. This divided kingdom was brought together by a divided man, a divided soul. Good and bad, tender and brutal. Power and status eventually turned his head, and his family disintegrated into brutal division. The king who brought together a divided kingdom was a divided king.

2 Samuel 5: 1-5, 9-10

5 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ² For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in.

The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." ³ So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

⁹ David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰ And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

Amen

⁶ The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back”—thinking, “David cannot come in here.” ⁷ Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David. ⁸ David had said on that day, “Whoever would strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those whom David hates.” Therefore it is said, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.”

David is presented as the greatest of all the kings, despite his serious flaws. His reputation goes beyond what is warranted. Why fill scripture with such adoration of a flawed, divided character? Why does God always seem to call flawed, divided people? To show us that God can use us all. Use the broken and the flawed, the divided and the conflicted. Turn the pain we cause into healing, the hurt into joy. God is a God of transformation.

And we can see that the divided king who unites a kingdom is not the same as the one who will come from the line of David, Jesus. The one who comes is not a divided soul but at one with the Father. The one who comes, comes not in military might but riding on a donkey.

The one who comes, comes not excluding the blind and the lame but welcoming them in, and bringing healing. The one who comes looks into the divided souls of each of us, does not demand obedience, does not demand capitulation to an ego hungry kingship, but looks for healing, for divided souls to be whole, for broken people to be well.

This king who comes isn't worried about place, or buildings or towers, but people. Not worried about defending status or privilege or strongholds, but about changing people from the inside out. Divided people divide people, whole people bring wholeness. Jesus would come from the line of David, but Jesus was no David. Jesus is the good shepherd that seeks the lost,

that binds up the broken, that unites the divided. Divided souls, this servant king seeks you. This king will make a new covenant and seal it with his blood. This king, this shepherd, will lay down his life for you to make you whole.

Hymn 550 As the dear pants for the water

Our Gospel reading comes from Mark. Jesus returns home and doesn't get a warm homecoming. The change between the home crowd's initial reaction to his preaching, all very positive, and their final analysis is striking. From amazement at his wisdom and power to taking offence, repulsed by him. Jesus was not hanging around to argue, to try and smooth things out. He was off to somewhere new, to something new.

Mark 6: 1-13

6 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured

them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Amen

Jesus had been doing this amazing stuff with his band of disciples. Captivating teaching, healing, casting out daemons, calming storms, raising the dead. Returning home, he preaches again. Something turns the crowd. We don't know what. They take offence. Is this not the carpenter? Know your place. Maybe today we have a similar way of thinking about Jesus. Is this not church? Know your place. Church on a Sunday. Coffee mornings and hymns. Know your place. Keep it in the church. Keep it respectable.

Why did they take offence when they were initially so full of praise? Mark never tells us what Jesus preached. It is infuriating.

I want to know what he said to cause such admiration that turned into outrage. Jesus always seemed to cause offence. He challenges everything people held dear, everything that gives identity and a sense of belonging: place, family, religion, temple, God, kinship. He shakes it all up until it settled in anew way. He creates divisions so that he could put us back together again whole. Stripped away all the externals and then built up again new.

Jesus didn't stop to argue or pacify his hometown folks. He just moved on. He sent out the disciples in twos and told them to go with nothing for the journey. He stripped them of food, money, belongings, clothes.

Go without anything, without preconceptions, without relying on your own resources, go and proclaim repentance, casting out daemons, and curing the sick.

The changes in the church that are coming are going to cause offence to many. We might want to get angry and turn our back on the church. If we do, we will just turn the church out of our hometown.

We need, like the disciples, to trust that Jesus has a plan for us. We must, like the disciples, shake of the dust. When we cling to things shaking it off is such a non-aggressive, liberating, cleansing description; to shake the dust off our feet. We can move on to something new.

We can, we must, be stripped of what we have clung on to and step out in faith, believing that God will continue to do something new in us.

And what should that be? I think it is what it always was. We are called to proclaim repentance, to cast out daemons, to cure the sick. How do we do that?

Repentance literally means to turn around, to have a change of mind, a change of heart. It creates something new in us. A new way of seeing and a new way of being.

Casting out daemons means engaging in the spiritual battles going on in us and our neighbours. The dark side fighting for supremacy. The daemons of apathy, and contempt,

the daemons of addiction and separation, the daemons of hopelessness and the daemons of division. Jesus, the united king, comes to bring wholeness to divided souls, to bring peace to the broken.

When we talk now of curing the sick it is not in competition with the NHS. It is the spiritual sickness that we need to cure. Spiritual sickness is a lack of meaning, a lack of hope, a lack of wholeness. A divided soul, a sick soul, longs for healing. Jesus calls us to bring that healing to others. To re-count God's work in us to the next generation.

Prayer

God, whose grace is revealed,
In the One who embraces the Cross,
May we know the sufficiency of Your

grace
In the times of our deepest need.
Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God, whose grace is revealed,
In the One who embraces the Cross,
May we walk in the company of those
who suffer
And so share in the grace that You
provide.
Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God, whose grace is revealed,
In the One who embraces the Cross,
May we experience the strength You
provide
In the times of our greatest weakness.
Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God, whose grace is revealed,
In the One who embraces the Cross,
May our lives be renewed as we live out
our response to Your grace
And so share in the community of grace.
Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God, whose grace is revealed,
In the One who embraces the Cross,
May Your grace, sufficient in days past,
Be sufficient in all the days that are to
come.
Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Hymn 512 To God be the glory

Blessing