

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill

Holy Communion Service

7<sup>th</sup> February 2021



The unnamed  
mother-in-law

## The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed  
be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy 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, and  
the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6: 9-13 (NKJV)

## February 2021

February may be the shortest month in the year, but it often feels like the longest and the darkest. Epiphany challenges us to lift up our eyes, even when surrounded by darkness. The Scottish theologian D S Cairns in his book, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, urges us to have the courage to look steadily into the dark. It is in the dark, light will become more evident when it shines. It is out of chaos, creation will come. Or looking at it another way in an Arabic phrase we might see, 'February with wintry weather and cold sad blasts of wind, and the smell of summer in it.' It is in this bleak time, this dark time, God's February and the season of Epiphany will continue to shine, to point the direction, to give us light, and to remember to praise our Maker and Creator and Saviour.

Rev Dr Derek Browning,  
Minister, Morningside Parish Church, Edinburgh,

## A reflective call to worship

Friends, let us rid ourselves of all the clutter, removing the symbols that stand between each of us and the holy. Let us take away those things we prefer to speak to, rather than directly to God.

And may we find faith enough to leave ourselves raw, exposed, fragile, pared, ready before God, as we really are, and find God before us, as God really is. Come to the quiet centre – to the throne of grace, where God Himself is waiting for us.

## Lighting a candle

Come to Christ, the Light of the World.  
Come to a quiet place, where God is waiting

## A Silent prayer...

**Hymn: All people that on earth do dwell**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhUiRonIzaQ>

## Bible Reading 1: Mark 1:29-39 (NIV)

**'Jesus Heals Many' (I prefer to use a different title, 'healing of an unnamed other-in-law')**

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So He went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but He would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was.

## Bible Reading 2: Mark 15:40-41

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were also there.

## Service and gender questions

Why is the healed woman's first response to serve Jesus and his four disciples? When we learn that "serve" translates diakoneo, most likely indicating food service, and means she "waited on" them, it doesn't help. I have heard many preachers say that the service that



immediately followed her healing was intended to show that the woman was fully healed and did not need recuperation! Others argue that Yes, she served the men, but her service was a way of showing respect and gratitude to her healer.

Yes, the explanations continue, in that culture it would have been shameful for a woman in a household to neglect a guest. To feed Jesus would have honoured Him, but it would also have restored the woman's own honour and dignity. Healed, she could do what her society expected her to do and what her fever had prevented her from doing. She was set free!

All of these responses are true, but they still exacerbate the frustration generated by this aspect of Mark 1:31 - that the woman's appropriate response is to serve! Appropriate in whose eyes? Wouldn't true healing and liberation allow her to take on other roles? After all, when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead in John 11, Lazarus doesn't respond with service. He reclines at a dinner table (John 12:2), while his sister Martha "serves" (diakoneo). For many, Jesus' healing of Simon's mother-in-law and the miracle's outcome remain indelibly gendered and gendered in ways that veer too close to the stereotypes we know to be tired and destructive.

And why don't we have a name for this woman? She must have had a name! But she is not alone. There are many other unnamed women in the Bible! For example, we do not know the name of the woman who went to Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfume. Do we? Jump ahead with me to Mark 15:40-41. There, as Jesus' battered and bruised body hang from a Roman cross, Mark finally lets us in on the secret that the crowd of Jesus' regular disciples includes more than twelve men. We learn there about a group of women who watched Jesus' execution "from a distance" while all the rest of Jesus' followers had fled after His arrest (14:50) and Simon was last seen weeping in a courtyard (14:72). Again, not all of these women are named, so we know little about them. Still, we learn that they "provided for [Jesus] when he was in Galilee." Maybe Simon's mother-in-law is among the serving women who observe the crucifixion. If she's among them, then she's more than a cook and waiter. She's also a follower. If she's a follower, and a follower who is willing to serve others in her home, then she's also a disciple. If she's a disciple, then to her "has been given the secret of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11).

Like her, we, named or unnamed, do well to serve God and His people. We do well to serve others in ways that point them to Christ; in ways that model Him in and through all we say and do. We are all Christ's deacons – called to serve others. Apostle Peter reminds us that "every believer has received grace gifts, so use them to serve others as faithful stewards of the many-colored tapestry of God's grace" (1 Peter 4:10). I know that serving others is often not easy and it is rarely convenient. I also know, as one man said, 'we cannot do all the good things the world needs, but the world needs the good we can do'. As Christians we do not serve for praise, recognition or gain. We follow the example of

Jesus Christ, "the Son of Man [who] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). So, it is my prayer that God continues to direct and empower our prayers for others and all the other good things "we do, in word and deed, in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God." (Colossians 3:17). And may we all, through serving others, shine a light that will glorify our God. Finally and as Winkie Pratney reminds us with these beautiful words, "those [servants] that God used in the past were just ordinary people with an extraordinary Master. They were not all champions of great faith, but little people who saw their own need, and put their small faith in a great God. May God Almighty continue to use and bless our life and work and to make us a blessing for many. Amen.

(Part of this reflection is taken from the 'Working Preacher')

## Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession

God of the gift of light,

In Your un-wearying love for us Which brings us once more to see You face-to-face. Help us to live lives of gratitude, grace and service. We are thankful for what we receive and what we are enabled to give. May we be gracious in our thoughts, words and actions, as we bring blessings to the lives around us. Help us to see our place in your kingdom as servants of all. Help us to follow Jesus' example and serve others.

We pray today for our homes, and the people we hold dear. May they know your peace and joy.

Give our leaders grace to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before You in all integrity. May they defend the oppressed, protect the virtuous, and discipline wrongdoers. Give them to wisdom to enact laws and regulations that foster an environment where every citizen can flourish spiritually, socially, and physically.

We pray today for our world, and its changing needs; for health and healing, for nourishment and generosity, for shelter and compassion, for laughter and love, in the life and the work of Your Church, and in every community of faith where love is put in practice. May we not trip over our theological skirts. But get our hands dirty in the doing of good - so that where we can choose to be anything, we choose to be kind. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## The Servant song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdmgpMfnjdU>

## Final blessings

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever, Amen

