



Resources for Parish Worship

May our worship capture and transform our hearts, so that we become true reflections of Christ in the world.

INTRODUCTIONS

These may be included in the Parish Magazine, in the weekly service sheet, or by the lector as an introduction to the readings.



The First Reading

God has told the prophet Isaiah to “Shout out, do not hold back!”, and Isaiah speaks accordingly, drawing out the hypocrisy of God’s people in their devotional practices. This continues the call for a renewal of heart and behavior that we heard in Micah last week.

[Isaiah 58:1–9a, 9b–12](#)

The Psalm

Psalm 112 continues Isaiah’s theme and elaborates on what the life of the truly righteous person will be like.

[Psalm 112: 1–9,10](#)

The Second Reading

Paul was writing to a congregation he had built himself a few years before, located in the diverse port city of Corinth. Today's passage comes in the midst of a longer cry for unity in a divided congregation.

[1 Corinthians 2: 1–12,13–16](#)

The Gospel Reading

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus gives us another angle on the righteous life. The people of God must be bright—a bright flavour, a bright open light—shining before others “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

[Matthew 5:13–20](#)

[View readings](#)

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Lord,
we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church
in continual godliness;
that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities,
and devoutly given to serve thee in good works,
to the glory of thy name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
who alone can bring order
to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:
Give your people grace
so to love what you command
and to desire what you promise;
that, among the many changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Call to prayer

Our Lord Jesus constantly prayed to his heavenly Father, even for his enemies. Let us pray to the Father for all people.

The regular response, OR:

Listen to our prayer, O Lord,
and have mercy on all.

Suggested intercessions

- * for the church, that it may be a sign of forgiveness in the world
- * that Christians may not seek retaliation, but love their enemies
- * for peace and reconciliation between nations and among groups within our own country
- * for those divided by enmity and hatred, that by love and forgiveness broken relationships might be restored
- * for families that are divided or alienated from one another

Concluding prayer

Heavenly Father, teach us to love and to forgive as we have been forgiven. Make us perfect, as you are perfect. Hear our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Call to prayer

Jesus says to his followers: 'You are light for the world. Let your light shine before others.' So let us bring to our heavenly Father the needs of all people.

Response

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Suggested intercessions

- * for the church, that we may obey your laws from the heart
- * that Christians may shine before others with your light
- * that people may recognise their need for your forgiveness, and turn to you and be saved
- * for all in government, that they may promote righteousness and peace

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- * for all who harbour anger, and all who are victims of anger, that they may set free and know your peace
- * that married couples may be faithful to each other, and that all people may live pure and decent lives
- * for all in need, that they may trust in your fatherly care and know your love

Concluding prayer

Lord, when we cry for help, you listen to us. Hear our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

Merciful Father,
you gave Jesus Christ to be for us the bread of life,
that those who come to him should never hunger.
Draw us to our Lord in faith and love,
that we may eat and drink with him at his table in the kingdom,
where he is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Almighty and merciful God,
you have taught us through your Son,
that to love is to fulfil the law.
As we have received his love in this sacrament,
help us to love you with our whole heart,
and our neighbours as ourselves.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Most loving Father,
you have shown how much you care for us
by feeding us with the body and blood
of your dear Son, Jesus Christ.
Keep us from faithless fears
and worldly anxieties,
that no cloud may hide from us

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the light of your love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
For he lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

PRAYERS

Holy God of compassion, you invite us into your way of forgiveness and peace. Lead us to love our enemies, and transform our words and deeds to be like his through whom we pray, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Almighty and merciful God,
you have taught us through your Son
that to love is to fulfil the law.
Help us to love you with our whole heart,
and our neighbours as ourselves.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Loving heavenly Father,
thank you that your Son loved us
even when we were enemies,
and that he prayed for those who killed him.
Teach us to be merciful like you,
and do good to all people,
even to those who do us harm.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,

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enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.
God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.
Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Saviour.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

O God most holy,
in Jesus Christ you have laid a foundation
upon which to build our lives.
Help us to follow your perfect law of love,
that we may fulfill it
and observe it to the end. Amen.

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Lord, in your kindness
listen to the prayers of your people.
Have mercy on us
who are justly punished for our sins,
and save us,
for the glory of your name.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Most loving Father,
it is your will
that we should leave all our worries with you.
Keep us from faithless fears
and worldly anxieties,
that no cloud may hide from us
the light of your love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
For he lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Thank you, Jesus our Saviour,
for keeping God's law perfectly for us.
Teach us through your Spirit
to follow you
and fulfil the law by a life of love.
For you live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,

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To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
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God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
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Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.
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Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
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Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Savior.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that
by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: grant to
us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry
us through all temptations; through 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.

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Lord of the hosts of heaven, our salvation and our strength, without you we are lost: guard us from all that harms or hurts and raise us when we fall; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, give us reverence for all creation and respect for every person, that we may mirror your likeness in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the broken hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

God of dawning light, hear our prayers today and give us the strength to put aside all cares and to chose to follow you in your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Christ the Son of Righteousness shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

Divine Gardener,
you give growth to our seeds
and to the towering forest trees;
you raise to abundant life that which seems dead.
Teach us to choose blessing
and life rather than death,
so that we may walk blamelessly,
seeking you
through reconciliation with all of your children. Amen.

'Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live....' (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God, Creator,
for your glory shining forth in sky and sea,
in the changing light on the hills,
in the flight of birds,
in the plants of the field
for the gift of life in all its fullness,
we thank you.

Jesus, Redeemer,
for blessing children,
healing the sick,

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raising up the lowly
suffering the brokenness of the world in your own body
that we might have fullness of life,
we thank you.

Holy Spirit, Comforter,
for breathing new hope and strength into our lives
breaking down barriers
drawing human beings together in love
resisting all that diminishes fullness of life,
we thank you.

Holy Trinity,
in all that we do and say and are,
may we always choose life,
for ourselves, and for our neighbours.
Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES

[RCL: Isaiah 58:1-9a, \[9b-12\]; Psalm 112:1-9, \(10\); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12, \[13-16\];
Matthew 5:13-20](#)

Isaiah 58:1-9a, [9b-12]

God has told the prophet Isaiah to “Shout out, do not hold back!”, and Isaiah speaks accordingly, drawing out the hypocrisy of God’s people in their devotional practices. This continues the call for a renewal of heart and behavior that we heard in Micah last week. Isaiah says that the people of God ask, “Why do we fast, but you do not see?” He follows it up immediately with the answer: “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, / and oppress all your workers.” Fasting (for Isaiah’s community and for ours) is an expression of repentance, but here it is only a cover for more selfish behavior. Isaiah says that in order to be attended to by God, the people must repent in their hearts and behavior: “Is not this the fast that I choose: / to loose the bonds of injustice . . . to let the oppressed go free.” Only then will God answer the people’s cry and say “Here I am.”

- What can you think of in our common life in Ireland that is a “yoke” to be lifted, or “the bonds of injustice” that must be loosed?
- In your town or city, what is “the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil” that should stop?
- Where else in the Bible do we find this emphasis on God’s requirement of honest and un hypocritical devotion?

Psalm 112: 1-9 [10]

Psalm 112 continues Isaiah's theme and elaborates on what the life of the truly righteous person will be like. They are "merciful and full of compassion," and are "generous in lending," "manag[ing] their affairs with justice." The result of living in true righteousness is a life that is happy, fearless, honorable, and trusting: "their heart is right." The Psalmist's words are a description, an exhortation—but also a gesture of hope, a trusting prayer that right behavior will have practical results in the speaker's heart and mind, and in the world.

- Which of these descriptions of a righteous person rang most true for you? Did it remind you of anyone?
- What quality in this description was most immediately appealing to you for your own life?
- In what ways does this Psalm specifically encourage us to grow in righteousness?
- Did any of these images or phrases remind you of other parts of Scripture?

1 Corinthians 2:1-12, [13-16]

Paul was writing to a congregation he had built himself a few years before, located in the diverse port city of Corinth. Today's passage comes in the midst of a longer cry for unity in a divided congregation. Picking up on the idea of divine foolishness we heard last week, Paul admits—boasts!—that he didn't come to the Corinthians with "plausible words of wisdom." Instead, the power of his testimony, and of the whole community's, is in "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The power and wisdom of God—secret, inexplicable to human rulers—is where our faith should rest. Paul describes this power and wisdom coming to us "through the Spirit," who helps us understand and speak what God has given us.

- In your Christian communities, what signs of the Spirit have you seen that are not about "plausible" arguments? (Like extreme generosity, unexpected kindness, etc.)
- Have you known someone in your lifetime who has made Christ known to you, like Paul, not in "lofty words" but "in weakness and in fear"?
- How might this metric (humanity's "plausible words" vs. God's foolishness) change the way we normally think about justice? or peace?

Matthew 5:13-20

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus gives us another angle on the righteous life. The people of God must be bright—a bright flavour, a bright open light—shining before others “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew’s Jesus also makes explicit here something that runs through the whole Gospel—that he has come as fulfillment of the law, not as its destroyer. The call to righteousness seems to have changed in his new witness, but it has not at all removed it. Those who are “great in the kingdom of heaven” will be following and teaching the words of the law and the prophets.

- Where else in the Bible do we find images like the flavorful salt or a bright lamp?
- How might these particular words of Jesus shape the way we think of his relationship to the law?
- How might our actions in a largely secular society be like a lamp lit in the darkness?

SERMON

Salt, Light and Stardust

Where are we? Who are we? Why are we here? What are we meant to be doing? How are we to go about this thing we call life? These are the elemental questions that humans have been pondering for thousands of years. These, says Huston Smith in his classic book, *The World’s Religions*, are the basic questions that form the basis of all human religious yearnings.

There are many voices surrounding us on all sides claiming to answer these questions for us – in effect telling us what to do. Yet, we pray: “Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.” We seek freedom and abundance, yet most of us remain enslaved, bonded, to three verbs, as Evelyn Underhill explains in *The Spiritual Life*: “to Want, to Have, and to Do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual – even on the religious – plane, we are kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in, the fundamental verb, to Be: and that Being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of a spiritual life” (p. 20).

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We seek to know the essence of our Being – what it means to be truly human. Jesus offers what we mistakenly believe to be metaphors: we are salt and light – and as such, we are capable of fulfilling all that God requires of us as laid out in commandments and reminders from prophets. Prophets, who were and are poets.

Like Isaiah, who helps us to imagine what it really means to observe a fast: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly... Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.”

Some five hundred years, later Matthew’s Jesus confirms, our light, the light of Christ, the light of God’s purpose, shines brightest when we do just these things (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). This is the essence of our Being. This is why we are here in a world in desperate need of more light. This is how to fulfill our Being light: by reconciliation. By striving for justice and peace and dignity for all people – not some people, not most or a lot of people.

This is what it means to be the salt of the earth. Salt. Another poet of our age, May Sarton writes in her 1958 poem, *In Time Like Air*:

Consider the mysterious salt:
In water it must disappear.
It has no self. It knows no fault.
Not even sight may apprehend it.
No one may gather it or spend it.
It is dissolved and everywhere.

But, out of water into air,
It must resolve into a presence,
Precise and tangible and here.
Faultlessly pure, faultlessly white,
It crystallizes in our sight
And has defined itself to essence.

She goes on to say that Love is just as mysterious. Jesus is calling us to be Love like salt. Love is to make up the very essence of who we are and why we are here. We come from Love, we return to Love, and Love is all around. Should we forget this elemental essence of our existence, we are made up of a mixture of saltwater and stardust – a very mixture of light and salt. Funny

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how the ancient wisdom of Isaiah and Jesus suddenly coalesces with the discovery of our origins in science!

The Apostle Paul calls us to consider what it means to be “truly human” in his Corinthian correspondence: “We speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”

Yet, the “rulers of this age” continue to keep us busy Wanting, Having, and Doing; craving, clutching and fussing “on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual – even on the religious – plane,” kept in perpetual unrest. The secret and hidden wisdom of God calls us to recall the essence of life, the essence of our being made of salt and stardust, is to remind us where we come from, where we are going, and what we are meant to be doing – if anything at all – which all revolve around Love – restoring justice, peace and dignity for all people in a world that too often wants us to believe it is every man, woman, and child for themselves. This is why Underhill calls us to stop all else and take time to simply Be – for it is in taking time to recollect the essence of being truly human that we are set free to be who we are meant to be and remember what we are meant to be doing.

The elements of creation, like salt, water, light, and stardust - acts of kindness and love for all creatures great and small - define the very essence of who we are and whose we are, which Jesus sums up in just a few words about salt and light. When we live lives of justice, peace, and dignity for all people and all of creation, says the poet Isaiah, “Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.”

There is healing from all that seeks to keep us in a state of perpetual unrest. The prophet imagines what that looks like. The apostle calls us to remember what it means to be truly human. Jesus reminds us what it means to be the salt of the earth, and the light that shines upon others so that they might join us in giving all glory to the God – God, whose property is always to have mercy, who sets us free and gives us the liberty of that abundant life made known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

["All Righteousness, All the Time,"](#) Scott Hozzee, *Day 1*

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Epiphany 5, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown, 2014. [2011](#).

["Storypath Lectionary Links: Connecting Children's Literature with our Faith Story."](#) 2017, Union Presbyterian Seminary.

[Dollar Store Children Sermons](#), John Stevens, 2017.

["Your Gloom Be Like the Noonday,"](#) Fran Woodruff, *On The Chancel Steps*,

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

1st Reading Isaiah 58: 1–9a (9b–12)

647* Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

125* Hail to the Lord's anointed

535* Judge eternal, throned in splendour

712* Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

497 The Church of Christ in every age

510 We pray for peace

Psalm 112: 1–9 (10)

591* O happy day that fixed my choice

2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 2: 1–12 (13–16)

11* Can we by searching find out God

567* Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go

220* [Glory be to Jesus]

232 Nature with open volume stands

594* O Lord of creation, to you be all praise

248* We sing the praise of him who died

247* [When I survey the wondrous cross]

The Gospel Matthew 5: 13–20

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86 Christ is the King! O friends, rejoice
381* God has spoken – by his prophets
324* God, whose almighty word
382* Help us, O Lord, to learn
589 Lord, speak to me that I may speak
503* Make me a channel of your peace
526 Risen Lord, whose name we cherish

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title