

Prelude: Sicilienne by Malcolm Archer played by John Crombie

Words of welcome

Whenever we come consciously into God's presence we seek to know God at work in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So as we start our service today we listen to or sing the hymn

Hymn: Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire (598)

Prayer:

Inspire our hearts, Lord God. Give us your inspiration, your breath within us, so that we may hear you speak to us and know how best we can respond.

Inspire our hearts Lord God so that we may see you in your glory and worship you in spirit and in truth.

Inspire our hearts and fill us with your Spirit, so that not only this time of worship, but all our days may be holy, and an offering given to you.

Come Holy Spirit, who brings us the life of Christ, and renew our love and our joy, and give us your peace, so that we may serve our God with our whole hearts and minds.

Forgive us when we are less than whole-hearted in living our faith. Forgive us when our words and our lives have not matched up.

And hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father who 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, the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Reading: Psalm 51:1-12 Jo Simpson

Some portions of Scripture have deep and immediate resonance with us, and Psalm 51, with its outpouring of profound repentance is one of these. Many people come back to this Psalm over and over, perhaps because each of us is more aware of our faults and failings than we would like others to know. We may not talk so much about sin as our forebears did, but that does not mean that our inner awareness of failing has gone. Nor should it: how can we know ourselves, and how can we move forward in life if we do not know the truth about ourselves?

The Psalmist is certainly aware of what he has done wrong, and that it is more than just one thing, but a pattern of life which is wrong, and so he comes to God and asks for mercy. Mercy is what you ask for when you know you don't deserve anything. Mercy is something you seek, not as a right, but as a gift, and something that you can never, ever earn.

The Psalm also tells us about God, and the part I want us to focus on today is the verse which says "*You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*" (v:6)

Truthfulness is fundamental to being God's child and God's servant, because truthfulness, integrity, consistency is fundamental to God. God embodies and so God seeks truthfulness of speech and of action. For us mere mortals this includes not promising what you cannot deliver and living by the truth you profess to believe. Putting theory into practice. And truthfulness leads to trustfulness – to people seeing you as trustworthy. Whether the "you" is you personally or you, the church, the gathering of Christians working and worshipping together, we are called to live truthfully and openly before the world.

Truth and transparency go hand in hand.
We are going to sing (or hear) the Psalm now as we sing

Hymn O God be gracious to me in your love (40)

Reading: Mark 2:1-12 (Graham Grant)

When we read the gospels, very often our attention leaps from incident to incident and we ignore the connecting words. But we shouldn't. The Gospel writers did not waste their words, and the connections between the stories show us parts of Jesus' life and thinking that we might otherwise miss. Last week we left Jesus having had to change his intention to go from place to place, because the man he healed from leprosy (or some similar skin disease) could not and would not keep quiet about his cure. So Jesus stayed out in the countryside for a while and people came to him where he was camped. However, that episode came to a close eventually, and because he doesn't think it good to continue the preaching and healing tour that he had first intended, Jesus returns to his own home in Capernaum. Another change of plan. But here, where he is known he can do a different kind of work. Word gets round that he is home and again people come to see him. People come, but, initially at least, this is a gathering for teaching not healing; the people of Capernaum who want to hear him include people trained in the Jewish law, scribes, and so although it may have been the rumour of healings which has intrigued, it is the man himself they want to see and hear.

And then we have the familiar story of friendship that goes beyond convention, beyond what might be expected, and which sets property rights at naught, in order to bring the paralysed man to Jesus. You know the story: it is a favourite in Sunday School. And Jesus uses the healing of the man brought to him as a teaching visual. And his teaching is about truth. "Which is easier?" he asks. Which is easier, to say "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk?" If it is just words, then it is easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" because who will know if it is true or not? Who will know if in the eternal ordering of the world your sins really have been cleansed away? Anyone can say these words. Not just anyone can enforce them. But if it is just words then "Get up and walk" will soon show how powerless the words are. Again anyone could say that, but without power behind the words nothing will happen. But if there is truth behind the words, if there is true strength, if there is the power of God, then things will change indeed.

All of this is a learning experience, not only for the crowd and the scribes, not only for the healed man, but also for the watching disciples. The four ex-fishermen who have been told that they will be taught to fish for people are learning about truth, and the power of truth. There would have been no point in Jesus speaking the words that he did if there had been no truth behind them; if he could not really forgive sins and restore strength to wasted limbs. The truth Jesus taught was fascinating because it was true – people were coming to listen, not just to get a healing, and, as he intended, the healings were a confirmation of the truth behind what he was teaching about the kingdom of God; a kingdom of life and wholeness. They were crowding around to hear, because people then just as people now were looking for wholeness and life and hope. They were looking for forgiveness, which would set them free from the burden of regret. The watching disciples would learn that catching people was not for personal gain, not for Jesus' gain, not for their own gain – again it was different from catching fish. But it was for the gain of those caught.

The watching church should remember that as well. We do not exist as a body to bring people in simply to swell our numbers. We don't want to reach out to people to profit from them. All we want to do is give to them the gift of forgiveness and life that we have

been given by Jesus. And we can only do that if we speak and live the truth with the utmost transparency at all times.

The disciples would also learn about focus that day. Mark tells us that the day of this happening Jesus was at home: it was his home the people come to, his roof that was ripped up. And yet not even the wrecking of his roof made Jesus lose focus! Yet there must have been some disturbance below as the roof was removed! When this story is told to children it is the ripping of the roof that makes it exciting, but in fact the *how* of the story, how the man was brought to Jesus, is far less important than the *what* - what happened when Jesus encountered him. Jesus focussed on the important thing, and the forgiveness was the most important, because a man whose body is healed but whose inner life is still in tatters is not a whole and healed man. The kingdom of God is about making people whole. So, following Jesus is not a thing that only needs a little bit of our attention: if we are to be good followers, and to live the truth that we hear, then we will need to focus on what is really important, not on peripheral things. What is important is Jesus and the life he gives us.

Hymn: Lord, speak to me that I may speak (542)

Before we turn to prayer, I want to take the opportunity to let you know that the Kirk Session of Kingussie has decided to open up the church for prayer services, which are to be held fortnightly on a Wednesday afternoon, at 2.30 p.m. and to begin on September 23rd. We hope that people will find these helpful. Because there is limited capacity when we are observing social distancing, we do need you to be in touch with me or with an elder ahead of time to let us know you are coming.

The Laggan and Newtonmore Session meets this week, and we will be discussing how to open Laggan church. What we decide may also change the pattern of prayer services in St. Brid's, but I will keep you posted!

Prayer is important, so let's come now before God in prayer.

Prayer

Lord God, you desire truth in the inward being. And Jesus your Son is the truth, the living truth about you. We live in a world where truth seems a rare commodity, and so we pray this morning that you would help us to live truthful lives, in word and in action, in the way that we regard others around us, in how we make our priorities: may what we say we believe, and what we say you value really be how we live and speak. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our society, which has become accustomed to hearing people with a certain amount of cynicism. So often we have known promises broken and standards slip, in both public and private life, and we have grown weary of living with half truth or at best with good intentions. May your church shine the light of your truth by the integrity with which we live, to bring confidence to people weary with distrust. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

One of the things you teach us about yourself is that you seek perfection but are infinitely forgiving. So we pray that we too would be your forgiving people, not gloating when someone else falls down, but seeking ways to pick them up. Save us from the partisan thought which permeates our world, and keep us looking for your truth wherever it may be found. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those we know who are grieving or who are ill at this time. We pray for those who are worried – about the ongoing pandemic, or about the other matters of life which do not go away. We pray for those who are suffering the depredations of age and those who

watch them with sorrow. Hold us all in your hands of love and keep us living our lives forwards, always coming closer to you. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We lift to your care our families and our friends, and we give ourselves into your hands for the week that is coming. Hear all our prayers which we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hymn I heard the voice of Jesus say (540)

Benediction

May the truth of Christ shine through your life in all that you do.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you now and always. Amen.

Postlude: Bach Prelude in E minor played by Alan Buchan on the organ of Tombae chapel, Glenlivet.