**ORDER OF JOINT SERVICE**

**CURRIE KIRK WITH BALERNO PARISH CHURCH**

**18TH OCTOBER 2020**

Good morning and welcome to our on-line worship wherever you may be joining us from, whether that be Balerno, Currie or somewhere in Edinburgh, Scotland or further afield. This is a joint Service involving Balerno Parish Church and Currie Kirk. I am Grant Gordon, an elder in Currie Kirk and I am joined by Kay Coull, Pastoral Care Co-ordinator and an elder inBalerno Church who reads the Scriptures. While our worship focuses on an account of an attempt to trap Jesus in a no-win situation, let us first come together in our Call to Worship.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God of wonder and awe, God of dreams and visions, God of hope and forgiveness, here we are. We come. We dream. We hope. This is the time for worship. This is the time for praise. This is a time for You God – this is Your time. We are ready. Let us worship God.

**AND NOW WORDS from PSALM 96 verses 1 – 4** read by Kay Coull (Words on separate sheet)

**HYMN – SING TO GOD NEW SONGS OF WORSHIP**found as Hymn No 173 in CH4(Words on separate sheet)

**PRAYER of APPROACH, CONFESSION and THANKSGIVING**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as the dawn glints over the hilltops slowly, steadily changing the world from half grey light, developing colours gently, steadily from watercolour gentleness to primary coloured sharpness we emerge into the day, emerging from sleep, preparing for worship and entering into this time of worship.

Living God many distractions and activities fight for our attention, from technology to smart phones and computer screens to the rush of day to day chores and business. Yet none of this can compare to the melodies, art and miracles of Your creation.

Lord God, You have done so much for us, more than we deserve; more than we can list; more than we can comprehend. For the times when we have fallen short, forgive us. For the times when we have failed to acknowledge just how blessed we are, forgive us. For the times when we have taken advantage of your unfailing grace, forgive us. For the times we have shown little care to those who are struggling, forgive us. Lord, Jesus Christ, we are sorry for the words we use, or actions we commit that harm others and cause tension.

Loving God, we come now to re-calibrate our tired engines, to recover our lost perspective, and renew our sense of purpose. We open our hearts to Your love, our minds to Your wisdom and our souls to Your presence. We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

**READING from MATTHEW 22: 15-22**read by Kay Coull(Words on separate sheet)

**WHOSE IMAGE IS STAMPED ON YOUR HEART?**

Let us Pray: Breathe on us, O God, that we may be filled with your Spirit and led by your living word. Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts. We ask this in your name. Amen.

The Bible is full of thrilling stories of high adventure; it contains poetry that touches and lifts the heart; it has disturbing and challenging prophecies; it has letters of encouragement and exhortation; it has strange and wonderful visions and above all it tells us of Jesus, the Word made flesh. And today what we have here is one of the most spiritually and politically charged moments in the entire Gospel story.  Jesus was literally a hunted man, with his adversaries looking for a way to get rid of this trouble making Nazarene, dogging his every step and seeking to create a situation where he would be exposed before the Roman authorities and arrested.  Listen again to their words because this is more than insincere flattery. *“Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.”*

It is a moment of high drama, a moment like those television news conferences in which reporters seem as keen on tripping someone up as they are to discover truth. Itis a setup, a deliberate trapping strategy in which his adversaries sought to get Jesus to commit himself in a politically loaded situation that had completely polarised the nation of Israel. Do we pay taxes to the Roman Empire or not?No matter how Jesus answered this question, he was going to lose. If he said don’t pay the taxes, the authorities could arrest and imprison him. If he said do pay, many of the people and some of his own followers would turn away believing that the famous teacher had failed to address a critical issue before his people.  *“So teacher, you are wise, tell us what we should do because we know you are a straight talker and always tell it like it is.”*  Interesting little detail: Jesus had no denarius. He had to ask for one.  And then that coin becomes the dramatic centre of the story.  Whose image is this and whose inscription? They answered *“Caesar’s.”* The coin bore the head of the Roman Emperor and the caption: Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus. And then Jesus takes the question put to him and turns it around and places it back on his adversaries. *“So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”* And they were astounded.

The questions Jesus asked were, *“Whose picture is this?”* and *“Whose title?”*Of course the answer was obvious, *“the Emperor’s.”* What Jesus did not ask, but what I believe he implied, was *“whose image is stamped on you?”*

In an era when product marketing is all important, image is paramount. What kind of an image a person presents or a product or an organisation promotes becomes crucial. Images are carefully controlled or manipulated in order to create the right impression or to keep up-to-date with the latest trends in society.

When we say that we are made in the image of God, we mean something quite different from that associated with products and organisations. This type of image has nothing to do with the visual or with physical resemblance, but rather with the strength of our relationship with God. Will our first allegiance be to consumerism, the economy, the mass media, status-driven values and wealth? Or will we live out our allegiance to the living God, the God of upside-down kingdom values by giving God the things that belong to God?

When we look at each other, or even observe ourselves in the mirror, we tend to see the marks of the world upon us. We are what we look like, what we have, what we wear, what we do, the friends we have. But what we need to see is that underneath all those things is a much deeper mark: the image of the cross engrained upon our hearts and our lives, a special shimmer in our eyes, the light of Jesus shining through us. This is the image that God sees among his people, and it is that image which God desires us to reflect to the world.

But what is our reputation? What are we known for? Do we sing Onward Christian Soldiers on Sunday and go absent without leave on Monday? Do we worship the sophisticated modern day idols? Some people are eaten up with selfish ambition, ambition for money, power or fame. Others, are obsessed with their work, or with sport or television, or infatuated with a person or addicted to food, drugs, alcohol, or even text messaging, while others may be hooked upon Instagram or snapchat. And for some the very thought of breaking away from these idols, fills modern man and woman with alarm as they fear what will happen without them for they don’t feel they can go on without them.

So where are we today on life’s journey? I’m sure like me you have sometimes watched in admiration the flight of a butterfly and there have been many of them around this summer. Butterflies fly! That’s the way the maker made them. That’s their role, their function; to dance on the wings of the air; to play tig with dandelions seeds; to soar; to dart; to float; to light on a single blade of grass to the delight of all who see; to inspire awe and wonder; to fascinate; to add a note of grace to this world’s dreary song. Can you imagine us, you and me to be the butterflies of this world, to delight others with our faith, to inspire awe and wonder, to fascinate, to add a note of grace to this world’s dreary song? Can we be that new creation in Christ, that royal priesthood, the chosen people? Can we remain faithful in Christ?

If we are serious about living out Christian lives, imitating Jesus every time we get ready to do something, say something, go somewhere, or buy something, do we ask ourselves these questions: What would Jesus do? Would Jesus do that? Would Jesus say that? Would Jesus go there? To render to God is sometimes as simple as seeking to be a giving person rather than an acquiring person. Having nice things is not wrong, but when that becomes what is most important, we have lost our focus. When success is more important than sharing, we have also lost our focus.

But when we build our lives on relationship with God, when we anchor ourselves by faith to the power of His Word and the inspiration of His Spirit, then we can't help but become strong, even in the face of persecution, we can't help but shine even when it is dark, we can't help but be the salt that preserves the world, a people who proclaim the mighty acts of God and lead others to life in Him.

That’s what it means to be made in the image of God and each one of us is made in that image. Each one of us "belongs to God." And God - if we allow it - belongs to us. Not as a fixed possession that we can box up and use as we see fit, but as a partner, a friend, a lover, a companion, who fits us perfectly, one who challenges us to change our ways when we are going astray and who loves us and seeks us out when we have wandered away. One who encourages us when we are down and lifts us up when we fall; one who works with us - not against us - even when we let Him down; one who forgives before we even ask, whose love is unconditional and whose generosity and grace knows no bounds. So, the question we need to ask ourselves and answer honestly is, whose image is stamped on our heart? So be it. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Loving God, as we lay our prayers for others at Your feet grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Today we pray:

For all those whose lives are not as they had planned whose hopes and dreams lie shattered. For those who wonder what tomorrow will hold. For those who don’t want to know what tomorrow will bring. Lord, we pray, asking for the surprises that you have already brought into this world to continue; how you brought love into the most surprising of places; that those surprises will keep coming, bringing hope and promise once more.

Lord God You give us so many gifts. You give us a world of people who are all different and You give us the desire to see life work out well for all. We pray today for all who work in the care sector and in the medical professions. Be with them, give them strength and stamina to continue their vital work caring for the sick, the infirm and the elderly.

We pray for those who lead in our nation both at Westminster and Holyrood, asking that You will give them the wisdom they need to look ahead and make wise decisions especially at this time of Covid-19. May they be guided by sound advice and judgment, and compassion as they try to keep us all safe. We pray for those who are analysing the Covid-19 virus, for a vaccine and for a cure, asking that you grant them insight and success and that they would not succumb to any pressure to work faster than is safe.

Lord, we pray about the impact that the tightening Covid restrictions can have on people; jobs, livelihoods and businesses are at risk, bringing stress, strain and tensions within families. But we pray that we would be accepting of the guidelines and not put our own selfish interpretation on what we can and cannot do. We give thanks for foodbanks and soup kitchens that help feed those who struggle to cope financially. We bring before You those suffering domestic violence and abuse and those who turn to alcohol or drugs for comfort. We remember too those who are ill, anxious, depressed or bereaved, may the peace of the risen Christ be in their lives.

We pray for our Schools as they embark upon the Autumn half term holiday. Despite the Covid restrictions may this be a period of refreshment, relaxation and rest for the teachers and enjoyment for the pupils. We bring before You too the impact Covid has had on students and universities and pray that the best available form of teaching is available in these circumstances.

Lord, Your Church faces many challenges from both Covid-19 and its own historic decline. We pray that the Church will be outwardly mission focused rather than inwardly maintenance focused and that it will continue to explore new ways of being church and build on its lockdown learnings. We pray Your blessing on the Ministers, Kirk Sessions and congregations within Balerno and Currie. In particular we bring before You Easter Smart, Minister of the Currie Parish and her family as they grieve for the tragic loss of her mother in a motor accident in America.We remember also Easter’s father, sister and family in the States and pray that all may know Your comforting arms and love surrounding them at this most difficult time.

Gracious and loving God we all have people and situations that are a concern to usand ask that You take the inner most groans of our hearts and make them prayers.In the silence we bring before you now all our concerns ………………..

Into Your loving hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your abundant grace and mercy; we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

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.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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

**HYMN - TAKE MY LIFE, LORD, LET IT BE** found as Hymn No 502 in CH4 (Words on separate sheet)

**BLESSING**

Our help comes from God, the creator of heaven and earth. He will not let you stumble or fall.The One who watches over you never tires and never sleeps.In all the paths that you will walk may God hold you steady and close, may Christ Jesus bless you and every place you enter, and may the Spirit give you length of days and fulness of life. Amen