



The Free North Church Inverness

a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland

A GUIDE TO SUNDAY WORSHIP

11 am – Sunday 24th January 2021

*Sunday services today at 11 am and at 6 pm are **ONLINE ONLY** conducted by our minister Rev Angus MacRae. Tel: (01463) 832616.*

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carrie.marlow@freenorthchurch.org or 07583 498782.

We have suspended all in-person worship at the Free North Church for the whole of January and February in response to Government public health regulations to limit the spread of a new more easily transmitted variant of the Covid-19 virus. For the present all our services are ONLINE. We will advise you of any changes as the situation develops. You will find our Morning and Evening services on our YouTube channel at 11 am and 6 pm. (Available afterwards for catchup. Subscribe to the channel at: www.youtube.com/c/FreeNorthChurchInverness).

WELCOME & CALL TO WORSHIP (PSALM 95:6-7)

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Amen.*

PRAISE: PSALMS 100(1):1-5

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the LORD with cheerful voice.
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell,
Come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the LORD is God indeed;
Without our aid he did us make:
We are his flock, he doth us feed,
And for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise,
Approach with joy his courts unto:
Praise, laud, and bless his name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

For why? the LORD our God is good,
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.

The Scottish Psalter of 1650. Tune: Old 100th. Recorded at the Free North Church, 2020.

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PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER

This week we pray for our sister churches in **DORNOCH** and **BISHOPBRIGGS**.

BIBLE READING: JONAH 1:17 - 2:10

¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. ^{2:1} From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ² He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. ³ You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ⁴ I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' ⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed

was wrapped around my head. ⁶To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. ⁷“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. ⁸“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. ⁹But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’” ¹⁰And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

HYMN: ANCIENT OF DAYS

Though the nations rage,
Kingdoms rise and fall,
There is still one King,
Reigning over all.

So, I will not fear, for this truth remains:
That my God is the Ancient of Days.

*None above Him, none before Him,
All of time in His hands,
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand.
All the power, all the glory,
I will trust in His name,
For my God is the Ancient of Days.*

Though the dread of night
Overwhelms my soul,

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Reeves, Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, Rich

He is here with me,
I am not alone.

O, His love is sure, and He knows my name
For my God is the Ancient of Days.
None above Him...

Though I may not see
What the future brings,
I will watch and wait,
For the Saviour King.

Then, my joy complete, standing face to face
In the presence of the Ancient of Days.
None above Him...

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SERMON: JONAH 2 – THE MYSTERY OF MERCY

The little Book of Jonah has one great purpose: to unfold the mystery of God’s mercy for undeserving sinners. One of those offenders, the runaway prophet Jonah, came to understand God’s mercy as he lay half-drowned in the belly of a great fish. Jonah could sing, “salvation comes from the Lord”. **1). TESTIMONIES FROM THE GREAT STORM & THE GREAT FISH.** If we could ask the pagan sailors what they saw in the storm, and what their spiritual testimony was, it looks like they came to fear and worship the one true God. They could see Jonah was guilty and deserved punishment for running away from the Lord. It prompted the pagan crew and their captain to repent and turn towards God with vows and sacrifice, much as the pagan city of Nineveh and its leader did in chapters 3 and 4. The true God welcomes unworthy sinners who turn to him from their pathetic idols. If we could ask the fish to speak, what could it tell us? It could testify that all creation belongs to the Sovereign Lord and must obey the Lord and that God appointed the fish to rescue Jonah from drowning. In a similar way we read in chapter 4 how God appointed a vine and a worm to do God’s will, and in the process challenge Jonah about his lack of love and mercy. The fish could also report to us that Jonah came to his senses and began to return to God and pray. **2). THE PROBLEM WITH JONAH’S OWN TESTIMONY.** Jonah’s Psalm or Prayer of Thanks has good theology and rich biblical language. But the prayer has a serious defect. God intended for Jonah to go through a punishment as close as could be to dying without actual death. God’s purpose was to humble Jonah, and to expose his pride and self-righteous attitude. While he was thankful to be alive, his prayer is still full of the selfish pronouns “I” and “my”. There is not a word of concern for the sailors, for lost people, or for foreigners in general. Jonah is wrong to contrast the others (“those who cling to worthless idols”) with himself (“but I... will sacrifice to you...”). In truth, the pagans had started vowing, sacrificing and fearing God long before proud Jonah did! The prodigal prophet

resembles the two sons in Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal in Luke 15. Jonah sins and runs away, just like the younger son in the parable. But he also looks down on others and lacks any compassion for the lost, just like the pharisaic older brother in the parable. The book of Jonah teaches us that both pagan sailors and pharisaic runaway prophets are equally undeserving of God's mercy. The mystery of mercy is God's unmerited kindness to sinners, his welcome for all kinds of people who cry to him. Are you "drowning" like Jonah? Drowning in pride? In guilt? In unbelief? Whoever you are, you can and must pray to the God of mercy, for salvation really does come from the Lord.

HYMN: GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unsearchable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

*Words: William Cowper (1774). Performed by Crossroads Music, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.
Listen again at <https://youtu.be/51Bx1UwLc0U>. CCL License 616262. CCL Streaming 324811.*

BENEDICTION

After morning service on YouTube why not log onto Zoom for a 15-minute informal "coffee and chat" catch up. A virtual Prayer Room will be available for those who would value that. Use the usual Zoom log-in details.

SUNDAY AT SIX – on our YOUTUBE CHANNEL at 6 PM tonight.
Gospel 2021 - The Gospel is: Our Treasure, Our Passion and Our Vision.

DIARY, NEWS & PRAYER

We are sorry in-person services are suspended for at least two months due to the public health regulations. Please get in touch if you need help or are aware of pastoral and practical needs in the church family. We thank God for technology that enables us to stay in touch and maintain worship and contact with each other. Try to maintain regular routines that keep you close to the Lord and his people.

Sympathy: We extend our sympathy and prayers to Stewart and Joan Vant, following the death of Stewart's mother late last Sunday evening. We also send sympathy to the family of Alastair Morrison, who passed away last Tuesday at the Isobel Fraser Care Home where he lived with his wife Barbara. Mr Morrison's funeral can be seen on John Fraser and Sons website at 12.30 pm on Friday 29th January. Burial is at Kilvean.

Today: Services on YouTube at 11 am and 6 pm. After morning service on YouTube please join us on Zoom for a 15-minute “coffee-time” informal catch up at around 12 noon. There is no after-church fellowship tonight. **Youth Alpha** is at 10 am on Sunday mornings. Youth Alpha explores the big questions of life with Secondary age young people. Details from Fiona Cameron (fionamarion@yahoo.co.uk) or Martin at the church office (office@freenorthchurch.org). Alpha is an enjoyable and age appropriate course for teens. The plan is to watch a short video (around 20 minutes) and have a short discussion. The session can run fine with cameras off - no pressure to appear on screen!

Monday: Presbytery meets at 7 pm.

Wednesday 27th - Join us online for Prayer and Bible Study on Wednesday at 7.30 pm. Usual Zoom details.

Thursday 28th - Ladies’ Bible Study at 10:30 am and 7:45 pm. We’ll be studying 1 Peter 1:3-12. All welcome to join, get in touch with Carrie for the Zoom details. Remaining dates for the term are: 11th and 25th Feb, 11th and 25th March.

Friday 29th - We meet online on Zoom on Friday at 11 am for 30 minutes of prayer and Bible reading, conducted by an office-bearer. Use the usual log on details.

Next Sunday 31st January: Services are online only at 11 am and 6 pm.

Mental Health Awareness, a training event run by Presbytery on anxiety and suicide open to all on Zoom on **Saturday 6 February** (10 am to 1 pm). Particularly useful for all involved in pastoral care and support. Places can be booked at bit.ly/mentalhealthILR.

Book of the month - *Before You open Your Bible*, by Matt Smethurst. We plan to highlight a different Christian book each month to encourage us all to get reading more this year. This month’s great little book looks at how we approach the Bible so we can get the most out of our time in God’s word. If you would like a copy popped through your letterbox then get in touch with Carrie.

Prayer: Sadly the 2021 Youth Camps have been cancelled. Pray that God would work in the hearts of young people all around Scotland despite the problems of Covid. Pray for all who have been unwell, the recently bereaved and all who facing difficulties or anxiety in lockdown. Pray for parents in our Church family, for patience and wisdom in home-schooling, and in raising children who will grow as disciples with lives shaped by the gospel. Ask the Lord to help parents prioritise Sundays and prayer with and for their children, even when worship is online. In January, Free Church congregations are praying for Dunfermline, Carloway, Lochbroom, Edinburgh - Buccleuch, the Inverness - Merkinch Church Plant, Arran, Dornoch, Bishopbriggs, Grace Church Montrose, Leverburgh in South Harris, and Inverness - Free North.

The Record magazine for January is available online (freechurch.org/news/the-record-january-2021). Printed copies have been ordered. The Deacons’ Court will not to charge existing subscribers for their *Record* in 2021. Please advise Martin McLean at the Church Office if you wish to set up a new subscription.

Explore Daily Reading notes: Copies for January to March are now available to help with daily Bible reading. Suggested donation £3. Contact Angus or Effie if you would like a copy posted through your letterbox.

If you need help of any sort, we would love to hear from you. Contact the minister (07 506 006 459; angusmacrae1967@gmail.com), any elder or deacon, or the church office (office@freenorthchurch.org).

Support the Free North: Donate through our website (PayPal logo) or via our treasurer, Mrs Barbara Macphail, 31 Towerhill Avenue, IV2 5FX. (01463 794622, treasurer@freenorthchurch.org).