

# **The Constant Voice**



**Canonbie United & Liddesdale 25th May 2014**

# Order of Service

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**Call to worship**      The Voice Of God

The voice of God sings in Creation  
Let us lift our voices in song to our creator  
The voice of God has shaped our lives  
Let us bring our lives to God in prayer  
The voice of God rings in our hearts  
And calls us to this place at this time  
Come, gather in worship  
Lift up your voices and praise the Lord

## Hymn

## CH4 606 Lord You Sometimes Speak In Wonders

Lord, You sometimes speak in wonders,  
Unmistakable and clear;  
Mighty signs to prove your presence,  
Overcoming doubt and fear.

Lord, You sometimes speak in whispers,  
Still and small and scarcely heard;  
Only those who want to listen  
Catch the all-important word.

Lord, You sometimes speak in silence,  
Through our loud and noisy day;  
We can know and trust you better  
When we quietly wait and pray.

Lord, You sometimes speak in scripture,  
Words that summon from the page,  
Shown and taught us by Your Spirit  
With fresh light fo every age

Lord, You always speak in JESUS,  
Always new, yet still the same;  
Teach us now more of the Saviour;  
Make our lives display His name.

## Approach

## Song Of Love

Soaring upon the gentlest breeze;  
echoing off the canopy of space  
A song too still to hear but too loud to ignore fills creation  
It is the song of love of a father for all his children  
Pulsing down the centuries  
and beating in the hearts of humanity  
The song fills all of time; all of space;  
no wall, no noise can keep it out  
It is the song of love of a father for his children.  
It is your song, Lord  
Sung for a mankind broken into factions  
Sung for all your children  
Sung for all, for the rich and the poor;  
the black and the white; the young and the old  
So rich is your love that we cannot describe it  
So deep is your love that we cannot measure it  
So all-encompassing is your love that we cannot imitate it  
Only listen to the song and let it echo in our hearts  
Too often, though, we don't listen  
We take pride in the factions we create  
We hide from fear  
by throwing up walls against those who are different  
Rather than turning to you in faith  
We define ourselves  
by the people who are outside our circle  
Rather than defining ourselves as your children  
We nurture grievances and cherish age-old hatreds  
Rather than washing in the renewing waters poured out by your Holy Spirit  
Forgive us Lord  
Sing to us Lord, and let your song fill our hearts  
Until we see in every person's face the face of a neighbour  
Until we reach out to the stranger in need easily and open-heartedly  
Until we live the words with which your son our Lord Jesus Christ began his  
great prayer

## Address

## Call On Hold

Hello and welcome to Purgatory Banking Group

Your call will be recorded for training purposes.

You are in a queue and you call will be answered as soon as possible

Thank you for holding

Your call is important to us

Tutting loudly will not accelerate the process

Thank you for holding

Your call is important to us

We hope you like Vivaldi

Thank you for holding

Your call is important to us

If you think this is slow you should see our complaints line

Thank you for holding

Your call is important to us

You are important to us

Honestly.

I saw a poster the other day. It featured somebody praying and the phrase “The oldest form of wireless communication. Never a dropped line”. Never put on hold either.

## **Address**

## **Keeping In Touch**

Talk about the many ways we have to keep in touch with people across the world these days. But we have to dial numbers or fire up Skype or whatever. We can talk to God without any of that. Sometimes, though, he wants to talk to us. Part of being Christian is listening in prayer rather than just talking

## Hymn

## CH4 191 Do Not Be Afraid

*Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.*

*I have called you by your name; you are mine.*

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you,  
you will never sink beneath the waves.

When the fire is burning all around you,  
you will never be consumed by the flames.

When the fear of loneliness is looming,  
then remember I am at your side.

When you dwell in the exile of the stranger,  
remember you are precious in my eyes.

You are mine, O my child; I am your Father,  
and I love you with a perfect love.

**Reading(s):**

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

John 14:15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Christ's is the world in which we move;  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,  
and Christ is the one who meets us there.

*To the lost Christ shows his face,  
to the unloved he gives his embrace,  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace,  
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.*

Feel for the people we most avoid—  
strange or bereaved or never employed.  
Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who fear that their living is all in vain

Feel for the parents who've lost their child,  
feel for the women whom men have defiled,  
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,  
and feel for the weary who find no rest

Feel for the lives by life confused,  
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

## **Intercession**

## **Let Your Voice Be Heard**

### **Lord let your voice be heard**

*Lord let your word be proclaimed*

Father God we have heard your voice  
We have heard your song of love for all your children  
We, your church gather as your servants  
To be your hands and your voice in the world

### **Lord let your voice be heard**

There are folk who are lonely  
Some of them are bereaved. Some have been left by people they loved  
Some of them are deemed weird by our society  
They're all your children and you love them  
We know you don't want them to be lonely

### **Lord let your voice be heard**

There are folk who are suffering  
Some of them are sick and frustrated. Some are broken by stress or overwork  
Some feel that they're failures  
They're all your children  
We know we want them all to find strength

### **Lord let your voice be heard**

In this world there are so many folk who need to experience justice  
While people in the affluent West get fat and throw food away, people are starving  
But the crops grow by your will  
In developing parts of the world people cower because there's a fighting chance  
that tomorrow they'll be caught up in war  
While our society sells arms to both sides  
But your son is known as the Prince of Peace  
Across the world people are imprisoned and tortured for what they believe  
But you gave us free will

All those who suffer injustice are your children  
We know you want them to thrive

**Lord let your voice be heard**

We are your church

Give us strength to be your witness in the world

And let our neighbours know that they're your children

**Lord let your voice be heard**

Give us confidence to proclaim your justice

Until all the world is fed

Until all the world is at peace

Until all are free

**Lord let your voice be heard**

Let us be ready to be your voice in the world

As we bind ourselves to your perfect voice in the world

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we pray

**Lord let your voice be heard**

## Offering

## Father Of Humanity

Father...

You are father to all humanity

And we thank you for the love you have shown us

Especially we thank you for the love you showed in Jesus

That you are with us in all our hard times

Because that's the way a parent loves their child

You are father to all humanity

And that rubs off in us at our best

So we thank you for all the times we have found love

When we've been hurting and someone has cared

When we've been in need and someone has helped

You are the father to all humanity

And we have been blessed, at your hands, with everything we need

Food, shelter, warmth, fellowship

We have been blessed, at your hands, with wonderful things

Music, science, a sense of beauty and of justice

We bring these offerings in thanksiving

Father to all humanity

May they be used to your glory

## Hymn

## CH4 75 I Love The Lord Because He Heard

I love the Lord, because he heard  
my voice and earnest plea;  
and while I live I'll call on him  
who turned his ear to me.

The snares of death encompassed me,  
hell had me in its grasp;  
by grief and sorrow I was held,  
no comfort could I clasp.

I called upon the name of God,  
I called, and called again,  
'Deliver now my soul, O Lord,  
deliver me from pain.'

The Lord is gracious. God is good  
and shows unfailing care.  
God saves the meek: I was brought low;  
he raised me from despair.

Be still, my soul, be calm again,  
resume your quiet rest;  
for God has kindly dealt with you,  
his generous love expressed.

**For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ (Acts 17:23)**

On Friday I was in St Andrews for a conference of chemistry teachers. It ended about 3:30 and I had a walk into the town and visited the ruins of the cathedral. I don't know if you ever experience this when you visit places like that: even though there is almost nothing left of the building there is still a kind of sense of spirituality about the place - as if the prayers of countless pilgrims, monks and lay worshippers and seeped into the stone; as if a voice still echoed softly - just below the threshold of human hearing. There's a word for such experiences - they are said to be numinous. I found myself wondering - as I have done on other occasions - whether the place felt spiritually charged because all those people had prayed there, or whether the place was built there because people felt a spiritual charge there.

That sense of the spiritual; that sense of the something other - something beyond ourselves, beyond matter and time; that sense of a voice just softer than the threshold of human hearing has been part and parcel of human beings for as long as there have been human beings. In the caves at Niaux in southern France our long-forgotten ancestors walked a mile deep into the heart of a mountain because there is a cave there that clearly had sacred meaning for them - where, perhaps, that voice just too soft for human hearing, seemed that little bit louder.

It is easy to be sniffy about ancient religions - to scoff at their cave paintings and lurid myths of the all-too-human actions of their deities; to think primitive the dumpy rotund statuettes of their goddesses and the masks and robes of their rituals. But if our civilisation were wiped out tomorrow and generations to come were to look at our coloured glass and special buildings without understanding the hearth of what goes on in places like this, would they think of us any differently?

Paul knew better than to sniff or to scoff. On the Areopagus, in the heart of the most civilised society of his time - a society that had given birth to logic and to philosophy and mathematics - he found dozens of statues to Greek gods - and probably others too. What does he see in this? He sees a people reaching - groping - for that something beyond themselves, beyond time and matter; that sense of a voice softer than human hearing, tugging at them, calling to them. In referring to the statue of the unknown god, and attributing to the one we call God, Paul is recognising that that constant voice has been calling to them - they just haven't understood it.

And why should they be able to understand it? This constant voice is the voice of God - it is the Spirit of God whispering in the hearts of humanity - it is God himself; God who is more vast than we can possibly conceive; timeless and eternal in a way that we cannot possibly imagine. We gather here, this morning, in the presence of that selfsame God who is simultaneously everywhere so that beings half a planet away - half a universe away, perhaps - can also be in his presence right now.

On a starry night you can look out into space, look out into the vastness of God's creation. Look at a star and you're seeing it not as it is now, but as it was when the light you see left it thousands - maybe millions - of years ago. Such vastness of space and time. Yet in all that vastness there is not one corner in which the constant voice that tugs at the hearts of humanity does not sound. It's hard to get your head around that - scarcely surprising folk tried to limit their concepts of God in statuettes and cities on mountaintops.

How are we to understand that voice that has beguiled humanity for as long as we have existed? When Jesus was preparing to go to the Cross he said that he would not leave his followers orphaned, that the Holy Spirit would come to them and that they would see him again. We are followers of that Jesus and successors of those disciples Jesus spoke to. God had entered into his creation in the life of this Jesus, teaching us in human-sized terms, what he was all about. Teaching us that what this constant voice - the voice that has niggled at humanity just below the level of our hearing - has been doing for the millions of years of our evolution has been singing; singing a love song - the love song of a father for his children.

We are not orphaned because our father is always with us - aye and our mother too if it comes to that. In all the changes we go through whether it be in our lives as human beings, in our nations or cultures or across the vast sweep of human history, a constant voice sings in our hearts. It is the voice of our father, ready to guide and to console, to encourage and inspire.

This is my last sermon as your Interim Moderator. Next week a new human voice will speak from this place. They will come from a man whose experiences and insights are different from mine. His theology will probably be different from mine - be it slightly or more so - as my theology is different from Steve's and Steve's was different from Alan's. That is inevitable - we each of us hear the constant voice of God that is his holy spirit in subtly different ways.

And that's, perhaps, the point. When God came into this world he came not as an abstract concept that could be defined and pinned down or engraved on tablets of stone. He did not come in words of specific and precise meaning or a mathematical formula that could be proved by syllogism or deduction. He came in a human being - a human being whose insights, and teachings were shaped by his experiences and times; in whom the constant voice was given a human voice.

I find comfort in that. On Friday I was in St Andrews and I visited the cathedral. There isn't much of it left, but more than that. The society that created buildings like that, the theological understandings that gave them shape and form and substance have gone too. The mediaeval minds that gave word to the constant voice in that place has been stilled and none of us - certainly not I - can fully understand it any more.

But the constant voice is exactly that: constant. However society changes, however the Church changes, however our understanding of scripture changes, however our traditions change, our place and our purpose, our joy and our blessing, our privilege as Christians is to sing out the song. It is to sing out the love of a father for his children - it is to show folk what the love of God is.

And so I leave you with this thought. Another hat I wear is Convener of Parish Reappraisal. The committee that decides on the closure of churches. People get very worried when we call. But here's the truth. Every church closes. Every building falls into ruin. Every hymn book goes out of date. Denominations of the

Church are born and they live and they fade away. One voice preaching the Kingdom of God gives way to another. Because every generation needs to hear the constant voice - they need to hear it in terms that make sense to them. They need to hear the insight we have as Christians that the voice they hear tugging at their hearts is the love song of their father. If church buildings become cyberspace, that voice will still be heard. If doctrines decreed by august bodies of the church become discussion groups on the internet, that voice will still be heard. It is the constant voice - the voice that has sung in the hearts of humanity from the very beginning. And it's not going to stop any time soon.

*Lord may we give sound to your constant voice by singing your love for your children. May we give form to your constant voice by living it; embodying it as it was embodied in your Son*

The voice of God goes out to all the world;  
his glory speaks across the universe.  
The great King's herald cries from star to star:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The Lord has said: 'Receive my messenger,  
my promise to the world, my pledge made flesh,  
a lamp to every nation, light from light':  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The broken reed he will not trample down,  
nor set his heel upon the dying flame.  
He binds the wounds, and health is in his hand:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way.

Anointed with the Spirit and with power,  
he comes to crown with comfort all the weak,  
to show the face of justice to the poor:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way.

His touch will bless the eyes that darkness held,  
the lame shall run, the halting tongue shall sing  
and prisoners laugh in light and liberty:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way.

## **Benediction**

## **God's Welcome**

You are God's welcome

A smile in the world is a welcome

An offered hand is a welcome

A word of love is a welcome

These God has given you

Go now to be God's welcome to his glory