

Pershore Abbey Iona Service 26th February 2023 5pm Theme: Poverty

Gathering Song: 🎵 God welcomes all, strangers and friends, God's love is strong and it never ends. (X3)

Welcome and Introduction

Opening Responses:

Leader: Holy Trinity, you give dignity to all

All: **Remind us that we all are treasured by you**

Leader: Loving God, you lift up the lowly

All: **Remind us of people whose value is not seen**

Leader: Jesus Christ, you bring good news to the poor

All: **Remind us to reach out for justice for all**

Leader: Holy Spirit, you free the captives, you challenge and inspire us

All: **Empower us to build a society where everyone belongs**

Song:

- 1. God beyond knowledge, yet close to us here, our touchstone, our lodestar in faith and in fear; your presence we know in the dark before dawn as courage is kindled and hope is reborn.**
- 2. God without limits, yet sharing our flesh, you speak for the silenced, release the oppressed and call us to follow, in all things to prove the tools of your spirit, the signs of your love.**
- 3. Lord, to your purpose our living we pledge: to go beyond comfort and stand at life's edge, to love and to live without safety, and so, to shape and inhabit your Kingdom of hope.**

Bible reading 1: (Luke 1 v46 - 55)

Reader: Mary is the first to tell the Good News about Jesus, and its special relevance to poor people. Her Magnificat would have been perceived as revolutionary by its audience, a promise of a world turned upside down and reset by God. Throughout the centuries the Magnificat has continued to be radical, inspiring marginalised people around the world who have responded to its message and at times leading to its banning from public use by authorities afraid of its power.

Listen now for the word of God

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

Reader: For the word of the Lord

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Reading 2: *(Kath Carter and Maureen Hagan's story from Church Action on Poverty)*

Kath Carter and Maureen Hagan from Stockton-on-Tees saw themselves as 'ordinary' mothers and grandmothers. But they found they could make real change by speaking out and telling their stories.

They got involved with Thrive, an organisation set up by Church Action on Poverty to work with local people in Stockton to tackle poverty in the area.

Kath, Maureen and other local people had shared their anger at being exploited and ripped off by high-cost lenders. Unable to get credit elsewhere, they were forced to pay astronomical rates of interest. And one particular company provided televisions with a coin meter attached. If you didn't regularly make payments towards your debt, you couldn't watch TV.

Jesus wasn't afraid to take direct action. The story of how he turned over the money-lenders' tables and threw them out of the temple is a powerful challenge to modern Christians. Do we get angry about injustice, or do we prefer to keep things polite and respectful? Are we prepared to challenge the powerful structures that trap people in poverty?

With that in mind, the 'Rip-off TV' campaign was born, aiming to challenge not just the extortionate interest rates charged to people on low incomes, but also the intrusive, stigmatising use of devices like the coin meter.

Kath, Maureen and the other local campaigners tried to get the company's CEO to meet them but they were ignored. So they made a comedy YouTube video satirising the high-cost lenders, and used it to mobilise Church Action on Poverty's campaigners across the UK.

When hundreds of people emailed the CEO and pressed him to listen to his customers' concerns, he promised to meet with them ... but then pulled out at the last minute. But the campaigners persisted. When people started ringing his office, asking to talk about the issue, he realised that he would have to really do something.

The CEO met with his customers – and when they met face to face as human beings, he began to understand the impact of his company's practices. He became an ally.

Since other companies needed to be challenged too, he helped the activists to set up a roundtable event in Westminster, chaired by a bishop and attended by many of the high-cost lending companies, as well as the local people who had started the whole process. It led to a new code that regulated some of the worst practices in the industry.

Maureen said: "People were listening to me. A nana, a mother, a normal everyday person. It was electrifying."

It was one key step in a struggle that eventually led to proper regulation, and many of the worst-offending high-cost lenders went out of business.

It came about because the real experts – people like Maureen and Kath, affected by the issues – stood up and challenged the people in power. As we face new forms of oppressive debt and other injustices, that approach remains vital. How can our churches take a lead from marginalised people, listen to them, and work with them for change?

Song:

**Do not offer me your money if that is all you have to give
though my clothes may be in tatters and my flesh too frail to live.
For my dignity will clothe me, it does not depend on you.
God intended, God revealing, it will let my spirit through.**

**Do not offer me your pity, if that is all you have to spare,
though I am spat upon and taunted, and nobody seems to care.
For the light that shines within me, reflects the glory that is God,
and although I walk in darkness, it cannot extinguish God.**

**Do not offer me your answers if that is all that you can do,
though you see me as a problem in the unemployment queue.
I am a person, not a statistic, my life is pleasing to the Lord
by that grace I am of value, holy, human, is the word.**

**Do not offer me your comfort, if you will not give your love,
though I'm bleeding, broken, helpless, caught whichever way I move.
Oh, awake your heart to courage, do not soothe it into sleep,
for to live in faith is costly, but indifference is cheap.**

Pause for reflection and sharing: During the music take time to reflect. If you wish you could use some paper to:

- *Jot down words that come to you related to poverty.*
- *Write an acrostic poem with the letters P O V E R T Y down the side.*
- *Write a prayer.*
- *Put into words a thought or question about poverty or the way churches respond to poverty.*

Chant: ♪ **Listen Lord, listen Lord, not to our words but to our prayer.
You alone, you alone understand and care.**

Prayers: *Time of silent prayer using the words and pictures on the table.
Time of prayer rounded off by chant.*

Chant: ♪ **Listen Lord, listen Lord, not to our words but to our prayer.
You alone, you alone understand and care.**

Affirmation: *(Christian Aid)*

1. We believe that God hopes and works for a world where all shall be included in the feast of life, and that in Christ we see how costly it is to bring that world about.
2. We believe that God's strategy for a new world is to put the poorest first, and that nothing is more important for God's people than to bring the poor good news.
3. We believe that rich and poor alike can be generous, wise and creative because all are made in God's image, and that all are made poorer when they are left out.
4. We confess that we use our strength to protect ourselves and order the world to benefit the rich and not the poor, and that none of us can be trusted with too much power over others.
5. We believe that loving our neighbours means working for justice, so that all can have a say in what happens to them.
6. We believe that God made the good earth to sustain and delight us, and that we are called to take care of it and enjoy it.
7. We believe that the God of all the earth is at work beyond the churches as well as within them, making common cause with all who want the poor to be included.
8. We long for the time when the meek shall inherit the earth and all who hunger and thirst after justice shall be satisfied, and we believe that, despite the persistence of evil,

All: now is always the time when more good can be done, and we can make a difference.

Song: 🎵

CHORUS: The God of heaven is present on earth, in word and silence and sharing,
in face of doubt, in depth of faith, in signs of love and caring.

1. Gentler than air, wilder than wind, settling yet also deranging,
the Spirit thrives in human lives, both changeless and yet changing. *CHORUS*
2. Far from the church, outside the fold, where prayer turns feeble and nervous,
the Spirit wills society's ills, be healed through humble service. *CHORUS*
3. Truth after tears, trust after fears, God making everyone wiser:
the Spirit springs through hopeless things, transforming what defies her. *CHORUS*

Closing responses:

- Leader:** Christ has come to turn the world upside down:
All: **To humble the powerful and to lift up the lowly.**
Leader: Christ has come to turn the tables:
All: **to topple vain idols and to stand with the poor.**
Leader: Christ has come to proclaim God's kingdom: to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind,
All: **to strengthen the weary, to set the prisoners free.**
Leader: Christ has come to turn the world upside down:
All: **to overthrow the present order with a revolution of love.**

Blessing:

- Leader:** May the God who shakes heaven and earth, whom death could not contain,
All: **who lives to disturb and heal us,
bless us with power to go forth and proclaim the Gospel. Amen**

The Grace:

- All:** **May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all,
evermore. Amen**

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Dignity, Agency, Power Stories, prayers and reflections from 40 years of Church Action on Poverty © Niall Cooper, Chris Howson and Liam Purcell

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THE NEXT PERSHORE ABBEY IONA SERVICE WILL BE AT
5PM ON SUNDAY 26TH MARCH