

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021

## Farewell

**“I have a long journey to take,  
and must bid the company farewell.”**

*Sir Walter Raleigh, Reputed to be his final words, 1618*

I've been learning new songs during the lockdown. One of them, *Jamie Raeburn*, a traditional Scottish ballad, tells the story of a man falling foul of the law and sentenced to transportation. In the song, the unfortunate convict takes his leave of people he loves – friends, family, “mither”, “faither”, and his betrothed. In the final verse, he puts his farewells like this.

*Sae fareweel ma honest faither, ye are the best o' men;  
An' likewise ma ain sweetheart, 'tis Catherine is her name.  
Nae mair we'll walk by Clyde's clear stream, nor by the Broomielaw,  
For I maun leave the hills and dales o' Caledonia.*

Recently I said farewell to my friend, John Cook, who had died after a long illness. John's influence on me is beyond words. He was one of the finest people I've known. My farewells for my friend are heartfelt.

John Cook was the minister in St George's and St Peter's Church of Scotland in Easterhouse, Glasgow, where I spent two years in the 1970s as a Probationer Minister after I'd left College. He was my boss, colleague, mentor, role-model, educator, inspiration, enabler, prophet and friend. John was known as “Faither” (father) in the parish. For one thing, when he led prayers, he would regularly address the Almighty as “Faither God”. For another, most of the populace failed to appreciate the distinction between a Presbyterian minister and a Roman Catholic priest, so that anyone in a clerical collar was called “Faither” at one time or another. For John, Faither Cook became the norm. And small in stature though Faither may have been, he was large in personality, influence and a love of his people.

There are too many stories to do justice to John's uniqueness. It's enough for me to say with Jamie Raeburn, “Fareweel, ma honest Faither, ye are the best o' men.” John Cook, you are one of the very best. The world was the better for your time with us. We are all the better for sharing our remembrances of you. Go well, Faither, on your journey beyond time. The Spirit of God is alive and well – and living in memories of the likes of you.

### **A prayer for today**

*Thank you, God, for the life and service of John Cook, “Faither” to so many. Amen*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon* Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>