



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 65

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Today's reading

This week Abigail and Robin will be reflecting in church on the events of a historic General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This reading relates to the speech of the outgoing Moderator, the Rev Dr Martin Fair, which you will find printed on pages 2 and 3.

Luke 4: 16–30 (“The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth”)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’ He said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Doctor, cure yourself!” And you will say, “Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.”’ And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town. ...’ Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *Father, we praise you, now the night is over* (CH:209)
- 2 *At the name of Jesus* (CH:458)
- 3 *Come down, O Love Divine* (CH:489)
- 4 *My life flows on in endless song* (CH:565)
- 5 *All my hope on God is founded* (CH:192)

In the Name of the Father and of

Speech by the retiring Moderator, the Very Rev Dr Martin Fair, 22nd May 2021:

For as long as I'm a part of the Church of Scotland and have a voice within it, I'll call on it to announce - and to be - "good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind" - to be present with the downtrodden and the marginalised and the oppressed and, as scripture has it, 'the least of these'.

Why? Because that's what Jesus was about and I've no interest in being part of anything which isn't primarily focused on making real today that which Jesus set in motion.

And what will all of that look like in practice? It will be what we call the mission of the Church - and might I say, the much talked about five marks of that mission:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;

To respond to human need by loving service;

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

And so ...

Until the last food bank in Scotland is closed, because there is no longer any need, we've got work to do.

For as long as there are children growing up in Scotland whose life chances are at best 'compromised' and at worse 'ruined' because of their postcode, we've got work to do.

Until we can find more productive and humane and effective ways of dealing with those who break our laws, but who in truth are usually victims themselves, we've got work to do.

And it goes on. For as long as there is planning for the retention of - even the increase in numbers of - nuclear warheads on OUR shores, there is work for us to do.

For as long as many of our impoverished communities continue to be awash with drugs - and we Scots continue to have the worst drugs deaths stats in Europe, there is work for us to do.

For as long as there are despairing people, struggling with poor mental health, having to wait months and years for suitable treatment, there is work for us to do.

And among them for as long as there are any who sense that 'darkness is their only friend', to quote the Psalmist, and who resort to ending their lives, there is work for us to do.

I know that both His Grace, the Lord High Commissioner, and the First Minister, are with me on that.

And for as long as we continue to pollute our rivers, poison our air and fill holes in the ground with our waste, there is work for us to do.

For as long as anti-Catholic, anti-Irish bile is spewed onto our streets by so-called football fans, there is work for us to do.

Until every person in Scotland, and in all those places where the Church of Scotland is present, is treated according to who they are and not by the colour of their skin and not by the place where they worship and not by the language they speak, there is work for us to do.

For as long as people - predominately young women - are trafficked into Scotland to work as sex slaves and in the off-the-books economy, there is work for us to do.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

And for as long as women - of any age and from anywhere - don't feel safe walking home at night, there's work for us to do.

For as long as it's possible for someone seeking asylum - someone like Mercy Baguma - to die while supposedly in our care, there is work for us to do.

For as long as there are lost souls sleeping rough in shop doorways or families in damp, substandard bed-and-breakfast style accommodation, there is work for us to do.

And yes, though it be far-off and 'over there,' for as long as the skies over the Holy Lands are ripped open by another barrage of rockets and mortars and the overwhelming superiority of attacks from the air, in some small way, there is work for us to do.

That's what it will look like - all of that and more - for us to give ourselves to the ways of the Kingdom as set out by Jesus in his 'here's why I'm here' manifesto.

And so it's for us too.

But here's the problem. Unless we get our act together - and rapidly! - there's hardly going to be any church left to do it! I've heard it so many times that, for the Church, it's not about numbers. It absolutely will be about numbers if the numbers are so low that the Church can no longer run Crossreach or local caring services because the local church isn't there any more! So I long for the Church to be about that Kingdom work but, oh boy, how we need the Church to be refreshed, renewed, revitalised, remade and, yes, reformed that it might do it more effectively.

I long for an alive, vibrant church - a Church that has traded in the lukewarm and instead is passionate in its love of Jesus in such a way that others will want a piece of that action. I long for a Church empowered as it worships - a Church shaped by the Word, alive in the Spirit - a Church that knows itself called AND sent - a Church that is confident in the Gospel in the face of both hostility and indifference - a Church that teaches and baptises and nurtures new believers in Christ. In other words, all of the five marks of mission - we better see to 1 and 2 if we're going to be any good at 3, 4 and 5!! It's all got to hang together.

So even as we let go of some of what, sadly, has passed its sell-by date, let's commit ourselves to planting new Christian communities - that are low on maintenance, high on impact. And let's be better at identifying, equipping and commissioning pioneers - ordinary folk working on the margins.

And let's commit to every part of Scotland but at the same time, crack on with well-equipped spaces in the right places and so deal once and for all with an over-dependence on abundance of buildings.

And, yes, mission to the whole of Scotland, as per the Third Article, but maybe in new and creative ways - ecumenically, for sure, and with an emphasis on Christian community and evangelical endeavour in every place rather than, necessarily, all of what we used to mean by the 'ordinances of religion...' and everything that went with that.

And let's get on with the reorganisation that we've started out on - that the sooner we sort the structures, the sooner we can get to what really matters... proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom!

Tomorrow [*Sunday 23rd May*] is Pentecost. A day of fire. I believe the Holy Spirit is still in the business of starting fires; it's time for the Church to start fanning those flames and to put away those fire extinguishers. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not subject to a health and safety committee!

Let the fire burn. That kind of Church - signed up to ALL that is meant by mission. I'm absolutely up for that. Amen.

Praying for others

A message and a prayer from the Rt Hon Lord Wallace of Tankerness QC, Moderator of the General Assmebly of the Church of Scotland:

“It has been much on my mind as to how fortunate I have been to have received my two vaccinations; but had I been living elsewhere in the world, the story would have been quite different. In my year as Moderator, the plan is to visit Lebanon and Malawi. Just taking these two places as examples, the percentage of population vaccinated with only one vaccination is 4% and 0.8% respectively.”

God of Hope, Sustainer of all life,

We give you thanks for the Coronavirus vaccines,
for the skill and wisdom of scientists, NHS staff and key workers.

By the power of your Spirit, may we overflow with hope and joy
as we see our friends, families and neighbours protected.

God of Justice, Protector of the vulnerable,
may we be your well-washed hands and willing feet.

Move us to give and act,
to challenge the injustices that anger you.

May we seek to protect all your children,
particularly those for whom the vaccine is out of reach.

With hope and trust we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers vaccines again:

As I wrote last week, vaccines are clearly the way out of this Covid-19 pandemic. I want to pause and think a little about some of the things that helped us get to a position of having any vaccines at all. And this is true for all vaccines that we develop. The first step in developing the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, for example, was the work of geneticists to sequence the genetic code of the virus. This then allowed the Oxford vaccine team (amongst many others) to use that to design a vaccine, and they did this on a computer. This in turn is based on much clever science and software development work. Then AstraZeneca had to insert this vaccine code into a carrier vehicle and then to grow it into sufficient amounts to vaccinate millions of people. Several firms and a wide range of skills across many countries contributed to this. Firms had to produce vials to store it in, syringes to get it into arms, PPE for vaccination staff to use. I could go on, but you get the picture. Literally thousands – almost certainly hundreds of thousands – of people are busily involved in delivering the vaccines as I type. And many more thousands of scientists, software programmers, production managers, and more are busily involved in developing the thinking and tools that we will need to develop vaccines and other treatments for disease in the future.

Perhaps even more importantly, deployment of the vaccines relied on thousands of volunteers being given them to test their safety. Some even took part in “challenge trials” where they were deliberately injected with the active virus. All these volunteers put themselves at risk for all of us.

It is quite humbling to think of it.