

30th October 2021

Stones

“If Christ’s disciples keep silent, these stones will shout aloud.”

The Iona Community, from the opening responses in Iona Abbey’s morning worship

A short distance from the jetty on the Island of Iona, on the journey to the restored Abbey, sits the ruins of a Nunnery, a 13th century Augustinian Convent. The Nunnery was founded after the establishment of the Benedictine monastery in 1203, and its ruins form the most complete remains of a medieval nunnery in Britain. Though there has been talk from time to time of restoring the Nunnery, the only restoration work has been to ensure it’s safe to visit, and it now offers a tranquil garden-like setting for Iona’s pilgrims and visitors. And there’s a striking contrast between these ruins and the restored medieval Abbey and its precincts.

A short distance away is the magnificence of the Iona Abbey, rebuilt by the Duke of Argyll in the early 20th century, and the cloisters and living accommodation beside it, restored and utilised by the Iona Community, founded by George Macleod over seventy years ago. “If Christ’s disciples keep silent, these stones will shout aloud.” Here stones and people shout aloud together – radical hospitality; daily worship; building community among residents and guests; the Iona Community witnessing to its concerns for justice and peace, the renewal of the spiritual life, commitment the environment and a passion for inclusiveness.

But do the Nunnery ruins not shout loudly too? Do they not speak of the importance of the role of women from the 13th century to the present day, and the imperative for us to work towards a more equitable gender balance? Do they not draw us into a garden of beauty and tranquillity, and offer a time to pause and be still? Do they not connect us to the past, to give thanks for hospitality offered, service given, lives renewed? Do they not remind us of the Communion of Saints, and the inseverable tie between the “blessed departed” and today’s disciples?

“If Christ’s disciples keep silent, these stones will shout aloud.” The residents of a 13th century Nunnery on Iona will, in humility, have remained silent about their work and witness. So let stones and people, of then and of now, in ruins and in restoration, shout aloud together with them of the value and faithfulness of service, goodness, hope and purpose.

A prayer for today

Today, ruins become living stones again, and God speaks of his love once more. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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