

17th April 2022

Easter Day

“Do not abandon yourselves to despair.

We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song.”

Pope John Paul II, as quoted in ‘Force of Nature’ by Dana Mentink

Between 1973 and 1975, I was probationer minister in St George’s and St Peter’s church in Easterhouse in Glasgow. It was a formative time for me. Fresh from theological college, I had to relearn much of what I thought I knew about ministry, and I had some able and willing teachers among the local people. Easterhouse was a typical peripheral housing scheme of its time, common in every city in Scotland, which had a reputation for violence, and where deprivation, in all its forms, was well known. The Church, however, was vibrant, relevant and challenging, and, as I’ve said, an environment in which a wet-behind-the-ears minister could learn a lot.

My colleague, mentor and friend was the late Rev John Cook, a quite remarkable and inspirational man. In the spring of 1974, John arranged for several guest preachers to come to the church, among whom was Rev Dr George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community, one of the best known and most influential Church of Scotland ministers of the 20th century. John and I knew George well. We expected great things from him, and we were not disappointed. When this craggy, inspiring, dynamic eighty-year-old man took the pulpit, he surveyed the expectant congregation, and with roughness of voice and passion of delivery, began his sermon ...

Friends, this place is called Easterhouse, and with that name on our lips, we have images of trouble, poverty and hopelessness. But today I rename it and call it “The House of Easter”. For this is a place of faith, purpose, hope and new life. The Spirit of God is alive and well, here with us now. Put aside the despair of the image that is Easterhouse, and rise again with Christ today, to make this place, and the world we inhabit, a glorious House of Easter.

I don’t remember anything else about the sermon. But I do recall, nearly fifty years later, the effect the “House of Easter” idea had on me. So in whatever circumstances you find yourself on this day, I pray in the words of Pope John Paul II that you “do not abandon yourselves to despair.” We *are* an Easter people. When we know with George MacLeod that we live in a glorious House of Easter, then “hallelujah” can be our song today too.

A prayer for today

Let my hallelujah matter, as I sing with the saints and angels on this glorious day. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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