

27th October 2024

Beginnings

“What one needs to do at every moment of one’s life is to put an end to the old world and to begin a new world.”

Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End* (1947)

“Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery; but today is a gift, which is why it’s called the present.” These words are attributed both to Bil Keane, the American cartoonist, and to Master Oogway from *Kung Foo Panda* – though others may claim to be their originator. The present isn’t *all* we have, of course, for we value our history and take into the future what the past has taught us. And the future isn’t entirely a *mystery*, not when we plan and organise, to give the next stage our best shot. But nonetheless, every “present” is a transition from the past to the future, a letting go of an old world and grasping a new beginning, pregnant with possibilities.

Today, in a special act of worship, the Church in our village has a new beginning, as two congregations are united to form Cockenzie and Port Seton Parish Church of Scotland. It’s an exciting day, the gift of a fresh start for the local Church, as we stand between history and mystery, and give ourselves to what God wishes for us in the coming days.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll tells us that The King has convened a Court, and evidence is to be called, from Alice, of course, and from the White Rabbit. He has a piece of paper, which is to be read to the Court. Here’s how the author describes the scene.

The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. “Where shall I begin, please your majesty?” he asked. “Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

No matter how many pairs of spectacles we put on, or how many documents we are prepared to read, or how many plans a Presbytery or congregation might have, we cannot see what the future might hold. So we have to begin ... at the beginning. We have no choice. And we keep going till we come to the end. And then stop? Well, who knows? But that’s not for now. Celebrating the gift that is the present, and rejoicing as we begin at the beginning, is enough to be going on with.

With God’s grace, we *will* go on going on. With trust in our God, we *will* step from the old world to a new one, in faith, commitment and love.

A prayer for today

Thank you, God, for the gift of this new beginning. Help me to use it well. Amen