

Encouraging YOU to know JESUS

Love is patient and kind

Please note that our Interim Moderator and Locum, Rev. Rona Young, will be on holiday from Monday 18th May until Monday 25th May (inclusive). We wish Rona and Tom a well-earned, relaxing lockdown break. If in need of urgent pastoral care during this time, please contact Gary McCleary by telephone on 07931 952497.

The Minister's Message

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning and a very warm welcome from NWC to everyone joining in this act of worship this morning. As I was not here conducting worship last week, I realised it gave me a warm feeling at 11am last Sunday morning, because I knew that so many people were gathered for worship, at the same time in their own homes. We were apart physically, but united spiritually.

Once again, this service will be available online from 12 noon, and everyone is invited to join in our prayer time at 12.30pm. We begin with the Lord's Prayer and you continue with your own personal prayers.

Last Sunday was the beginning of Christian Aid Week and the Appeal for 2020. Kay Bell invited you to collect for Christian Aid, by collecting money at home, putting it in a jar labelled "love" and bringing it when the church is open again.

However, I discovered, that it is easy to make a donation online through the Christian Aid website. There is a Coronavirus Emergency Appeal to support the world's poorest countries, where the coronavirus is putting the people who live in poverty at greatest risk. You may have seen appeals on Facebook as well.

Kay encouraged me to tell you about the possibility of donating online, when the money is desperately needed. If you can do that instead of collecting money, she would be delighted. A quotation from Christian Aid, "Coronavirus affects us all, but love unites us all".

From tomorrow, Monday 18th May until Monday 25th May, I am taking a week's holiday. Obviously, I will be unable to go away, but I am looking forward to a good rest at home – and hopefully the sun will shine!

Those who wish to donate to the Salvation Army Foodbank should please come to the Church drive between 2.00 and 3.30pm today.

Sadly, since last Sunday, we have lost one more church member. Margaret Stewart, who recently moved to Belhaven Care Home in Troon, from Orchard House, sadly died on Tuesday 12th May. Her funeral service, conducted by Gary, will be on Tuesday 26th May at Masonhill. Our prayers are also with her daughter Margaret, son John and all the family at this sad time. It is also difficult that, as a church, we are unable to send flowers to bereaved families during this pandemic.

Gary will also conduct the funeral of Nan Henderson, Creggan Bahn Care Home, this Tuesday 19th May at Masonhill. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends and we will be remembering them in our prayers later in the service.

Our Call to worship this morning is from the prophet Isaiah,

*“The Lord is faithful to all his promises,
and loving towards all he has made.”*

Let us worship God,
let us sing **Hymn M. P. 809** “Blessed be the name of the Lord”

Prayer

Let us pray,

O God our Heavenly Father, you are powerful and just, you are all that the best of fathers ought to be. This morning, we want to say to you that we are not wise enough or strong enough to live without your help.

We do not claim to understand everything about you, Lord God, or how we can prove to others that you are here and everywhere. We do not claim that we never have any doubts, but, loving Father, we believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, is to be trusted above all others. He calls us to love you, to serve you, and to believe that your power will meet all our needs.

But Loving God, before we continue to worship you, we have to ask you to forgive our sins. There are times, especially in these difficult days, when we lose sight of your great love. We can just go through our new routines, instead of welcoming each day as your gift.

We have failed to count our blessings, or to appreciate how fortunate we really are. In a few moments of silence, let us confess our own personal sins.... Loving Father, forgive our sins, and restore us to our relationship with you. Despite living through this time of lockdown, help us, we pray, to be strong and to follow your will for our lives.

This we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Bible reading (1) Hosea 11: 1 – 8

1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

5 Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?

6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.

7 My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.

8 “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.”

Bible reading (2) Luke 15: 11 – 24

The Parable of the Lost Son

11 Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Hymn M.P. 454 “Majesty, worship his majesty”

Sermon “Hosea”

Two weeks ago, the sermon was about the prophet, Habakkuk, and this morning we are going to be thinking about the prophet Hosea.

Let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

In the Bible, Hosea comes before Amos, but chronologically, Hosea’s prophecies come 20 years after Amos. Amos’ message is against the injustice, exploitation and oppression of the people in his day. His conviction was, that the northern kingdom of Israel will be judged by God, and it will be over-run by the Assyrians, if the people do not repent.

Hosea, however, proclaimed that judgment was not God’s last word, and it is his insight into the mercy of God, that makes him a greater prophet than Amos.

The northern kingdom of Israel is now 20 years nearer its end. The prosperity that God’s people have enjoyed, from the time of Moses, is now passed. Like the prophet Amos, Hosea had a strong feeling of right and wrong, and the consequences of making wrong choices.

Hosea tells us about a nation in moral decay – there are courts where unfair sentences were passed, there are dishonest priests, there is perjury and there is theft, murder and adultery.

There is also corruption in the political world, puppet kings and rival factions. Hosea can see that the northern kingdom of Israel will collapse, and the people will be taken into exile.

Hosea, however, has a sympathy and a tenderness that Amos lacked, and it was this that led him to see that the ultimate truth about God, is not his sense of justice, but his infinite love.

Hosea himself belonged to the northern kingdom, Israel. The first three chapters of the book of Hosea tells the story of his own personal tragedy – the heartbreak of an unfaithful wife – but it was through his own experience that Hosea was led to see the nature of God in a new way.

The text of Hosea is both complicated and difficult but, after the birth of their first child, it appears that Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to him. She bore two more children, of whom Hosea was not the father. Eventually, she had left him to become a temple prostitute and finally drifted into slavery.

So, it was out of his grief that Hosea's message was born. He could see that his broken marriage was similar to the relationship between God and his faithless people. The people of God had stopped worshipping the God of the Covenant. Instead, they had turned to the Canaanite religion and their worship of idols.

But as Hosea still loved his wife, God did not give Israel up. At verse 8 of chapter 11, are these words.

"How can I give you up, Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, Israel?"

The future of the nation will be restored. There will be a testing time, but after repentance comes forgiveness, and the union between God and his people will be restored.

At the beginning of chapter 11, we heard these words:

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son."*

Our New Testament reading this morning, was the well-known parable of the *"lost son"* – or, as we are probably more familiar with the words, the *"prodigal son."* This parable tells us more about a Father's love, than it does about the son's sins. It tells us that God does not love in what we would say was a fair and reasonable way, but his love is generous and undeserved.

The prodigal son, knows he has sinned and is not worthy to be loved by his father, but the father's love, reflecting God's love, never changes, and he loves his son so much, that as, he wants to celebrate as soon as his son comes home.

The author, Henri Nouwen, in his book entitled, *"The Return of the Prodigal Son,"* says, and I quote *"Here is a God I want to believe in: a Father who, from the beginning of creation, has stretched out his arms in merciful blessing, never forcing himself on anyone, but always waiting, never letting his arms drop in despair, but always hoping that his children will return so that he can speak words of love to them. His only desire is to bless."*

To see God as a father, is one image we have of God, but if someone has a father who is distant, a very strict disciplinarian or cruel in some way, then they will have great difficulty in seeing God as a Loving Father.

And there are those who have a Santa Claus image of God – a benevolent figure – who enters our lives occasionally to give us presents. He may be nice to have around, as long as everything is going well, but when disaster strikes, when one of the storms of life hits us, then we give up believing in him.

Or, we may have a distorted image of God, whose predominant interest is in our faults, or we may see God as disapproving of all the things we like. There was a time, when children in the church were to be seen and not heard. They were not to smile, or laugh, or clap, and if such ideas were given to us as children, they can continue into adult life.

There is a very real sense in which God is mystery. With our finite minds, we can never adequately grasp who God is. Before this sermon we heard and sang, *"Majesty, worship his Majesty."* These words refer to Jesus, we are to lift up the name of Jesus, but the word majesty also refers to God.

There is both the mystery and majesty of God. Majesty means remoteness from the people, exclusiveness, pomp, ceremony and pride. Sadly, there are times, when some people who want to be great, use the humble as stepping-stones to power.

But in Jesus, God revealed true greatness – a new kind of greatness without pomp, pride and tyranny – and this is the greatness of humility. Such greatness wins others over, it does not hurt or trample on them.

The funeral of Louis XIV (14th) was held in Notre Dame Cathedral, in Paris. The cathedral was decorated with the utmost lavishness. In attendance was as distinguished a gathering of nobility ever assembled there. The body of the king was set out, as if death itself could not rob that figure of its majestic splendour.

The preacher climbed into the pulpit. The sophisticated men of nobility and power, who had come from far and wide, awaited the great eulogy that such an occasion demanded. But instead, they heard something else, something that must have shocked and started them. For the preacher spoke only four words, he said, **"Only God is great."**

God is great. God is mystery and God is majesty, yet we are constantly tempted to make God in our own image and likeness. We give him a place of honour in our hearts, homes and country, but we remain in control.

Possibly, for many people, and perhaps for the first time in their lives, they have realised, it is the virus, Covid -19, which in many ways, has been in control. However, it is only God who is completely in control, beyond anything we can think or imagine, including Covid -19 and/or any other virus.

There is a book entitled, *"God of Surprises"* by Gerard Hughes, and I have found this to be true in my own experience, and I am sure many of you would agree.

If I am honest, I know that I am the kind of person who likes to be in control, to have a plan to do this and that, but in the ministry, and still now as a locum, one phone call can change many plans – and I am reminded that **God** is in control. In the words of the new Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, "We make all our plans but God has the last word." GNB Proverbs 16:1. Rt. Rev. Dr. Martin Fair replaced Rt. Rev. Colin Sinclair as the Moderator yesterday morning.

There are times, when we are tempted to make God in our own image, but God is mystery, and he calls us beyond our narrowness. Our security is in God, and not in our understanding of what God is like.

The Lord says in Hosea 11: 8, and in the words of the GNB, *"How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? My heart will not let me do it. My love for you is too strong."*

The Bible tells us that God is love, but God's love is not the same as human love. If we love someone, it is usually because they are lovable, there is something about them that appeals to us or attracts us to them.

However, the love of God is completely different. God loves us, not because we are lovable, but because he is love. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were sinners, Christ died for us."*

God's love is not given because of who we are, but because of his own nature. God does not love us, because of any goodness of our own, but because he is love.

In the time of Hosea, the people had turned away from God, and we too, are free to reject him.

Jesus' death on the cross was the attempt of human beings to defeat the will of God. Love seemed powerless to prevent Jesus' death, it appeared that love was weak and helpless. And yet, the love

shown on the cross, is unquestionably the most powerful, enduring and unconquerable love in the world.

Hosea does not urge his hearers to change their ways, but to return to God, and put right their relationship with him.

Amos sees no future for Israel but utter extinction, but Hosea believes that love cannot be defeated. Hosea sees that God loves us with a love that will never let us go, and his love for us will never come to an end.

God continues to love us, despite our many faults and failings, despite the fact that we are sinners. Perhaps there is someone watching this morning, who has never really felt loved by God, that there is something in you that feels you are not good enough to be loved by God.

God loves everyone, and it is up to us to receive that love or we can reject it. Whoever we are, whatever we may have done in the past, God says to each and every one of us,

How can I abandon you?

How can I give you up?

*My heart will not let me do it,
my love for you is too strong.*

Amen.

Hymn M.P. 411 “Let there be love shared among us”

Prayer

Let us pray,

Almighty God, we thank you for loving us, before we ever loved you, and for continuing to love us even when we fail to love you in return. Deepen our love for you and for one another. Help us, Loving Father, to be faithful and true in our relationship with you - you have opened your heart to us, help us to open our hearts to you.

Living God, we bring before you now our world, and ask for your blessing. Once again, this morning, we pray for the work of Christian Aid. Be with all those still working during the pandemic to bring resources and hope to the poorest people in our world. We pray that as many people as possible will respond to the Coronavirus Emergency Appeal.

Bless all those living in poverty throughout the world, where they do not have enough water, food or healthcare.

This morning, we give thanks and praise for the very successful year that Rt. Rev. Colin Sinclair has as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Bless, we pray, the new Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Martin Fair, as he takes up this post in such challenging circumstances. Uphold him by your Holy Spirit in all he does in your name, Lord God.

Gracious God, we pray for all those who have been made redundant in the past weeks and for everyone who is struggling financially.

Loving God, once again we bring before you the countless families who have lost loved ones, through Covid 19. Be close to all those suffering from the disease, bless everyone who works for the NHS, and all Carers in Care Homes and those who visit people in their own homes. Protect and strengthen them all we pray, as they risk their lives for others.

Bless too all those in schools, looking after the children of key workers, all those working in our supermarkets and shops that sell food, everyone whose work is necessary for our day to day living.

Compassionate and Caring God, we pray now for those from this church family, and others we know, who are in special need at this time.

Bless the families and friends of Nan Henderson and Margaret Stewart. Strengthen them with your Holy Spirit, as they face each day as it comes and may they know your peace in their hearts. We pray for all those who are ill, either at home or in hospital, or who are having treatment at this time. We thank you for all those who minister to the needs of others, all who serve you Lord with phone calls or who minister to others as unseen Good Samaritans. May we do all that we can, in these difficult days, to enrich the lives of others.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord,
Amen.

Hymn M.P. 33 "And can it be"

And now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always, Amen. *Rona*

Please remember in your prayers this week all of the people below in hospital, care homes or in their own homes:-

Mrs Marion Mulvanny	Mr Tom Aird
Mrs Betty McPherson	Mrs Alison Wilson
Mr Arthur Wilson	Mr John Cassells
Mrs Ellise Wilson	Mrs May Wilkinson
Mrs Heather McLeod	Mrs Jessie Rennie
Mrs Joan Ness	Mr Warren Corrigan
Mrs Cath Lindsay	Mrs Anna Irving
Mrs Edith Gray	Mrs Jean Hamilton
Mrs Aileen Morrison	Mrs Mary Ferguson
Mrs Catherine McDonald	Mrs Christine Martin

Please let the Session Clerk know of any member/relative who goes in to hospital or is ill at home. For those in hospital, please ensure you have their given Christian name which may not necessarily be the name by which s/he is usually known.

Prayer Chain Anyone having a request for prayer may contact Sheena Hunter on 01292 570200 or e-mail her at sheenachunter@hotmail.com

Birthdays

We have just heard that **Jimmy McCalmont** had a very special birthday on 20th April. Belated Happy **90th** Birthday Jimmy!



Birthday wishes this week go to the following:-

21st May Kay Stevenson

22nd May Jo-Ann Robinson

23rd May Mary Goudie

Salvation Army Foodbank A big thank you to all who have donated on the past two Sunday afternoons.

Please note that donations will now be accepted between **2.00 and 3.30pm**. Only leave your car when the person before you has gone and, if possible, please place your contribution directly into the boot of the receiving car.

While any donation is great, the foodbank has expressed particular needs for the following:-

Small Jars of Coffee

Tinned Vegetables

Tinned or Packet Potatoes

Tinned Cold Meat

Tinned Mince or Stew

Tinned or Packet Custard

Tinned Creamed Rice

Anything that is long life!

Additionally they accept -

Toiletries - soap, shampoo, toothpaste

Carrier Bags, particularly robust bags

Everything is distributed to those in need in our area and Newton Primary School which is also a centre for collection for other schools with vulnerable families.

Difficult times While these are times of worry and hardship for many people, the Church is also struggling financially. If you are able, we would be most grateful if you would consider making an extra donation (according to means) to help cover ongoing bills etc..

Please contact Janis Meredith whose details are on page 9. Thank you.

John Bell

Remember Live streaming of our morning service conducted this week by Rev. Rona Young and for the next two weeks by Gary McCleary will commence at **11.00am** then our **prayer time** starts at **12.30pm** with the Lord's Prayer followed by personal prayers. This helps bring us together to reach out to him in prayer while we are distancing physically. Please join us for the service if you can and take part in the prayer time which many are finding valuable and some are finding comforting.



**We are called to be God's people
Showing by our lives His grace,
One in heart and one in spirit
Sign of hope for all the race.
Let us show how He has changed us
And re-made us as His own,
Let us share our life together
As we shall around His throne.**

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