



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

January 2022 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear Congregation,

Early in 2016, I wrote these words in your congregational newsletter: 'I'm writing this as your new Interim-Moderator hoping, for all the right reasons, that my tenure might be short-lived!' And now, with 2022 beginning (DV), I am back in the same capacity – and with the same hope!

Of course, much has changed in the intervening years, notably with the arrival of a global pandemic which very few have taken to heart. With the arrival of the new omicron variant (effectively a third, if not a fourth, wave) although there is probably a little less bombast and hubris from our leaders regarding our ability to take these things on and defeat them, it remains clear that human resources are enough to take on viruses and beat them.

Early last year, writing on behalf of the Scottish RP church, I asked the First Minister to consider calling for a National Day of Prayer. In response, I was told (from her office) that all available energy had to be employed to defeat the virus and, once that goal had been achieved, it would then be time to consider how best to mark the occasion. Clearly, then, God was not needed to defeat the virus – although his presence might be invited to a celebration party (as a mere courtesy, one assumes) once it was all over.

So, they will seek advice and help – but not from God. It seems that everything, from disease to climate, is under human control. Politicians and scientists have all the answers, and even when they don't, they can be trusted to find them. But can they?

Trust in politicians, eroding significantly since the turn of the millennium, is now crumbling very quickly and not without reason. Perhaps more surprisingly, trust in scientists is beginning to erode as well. For long enough, there has been an unmistakable tendency to look to scientists, in every scientific discipline, as 'gods' and an expectation that one day, hopefully soon, they will find the means to heal all our diseases and extend our ever more comfortable lives – even if immortality might remain elusive. That is why, as the latest wave of this national disaster overtakes us, God's help is still not required (blind faith in white lab coats replaced blind faith in black priestly robes a long time ago). However, there are some honest voices expressing doubt.

I read an article recently in which the writer expressed surprised at how his own confidence in the authority of science had been so shaken by the virus. After all, here were experts suddenly disagreeing with each other in public (was it not confused theologians who were supposed to be doing that?) These experts were not quite sure how the situation would develop, how the virus might mutate, and what effect it could have on us all. This writer was realizing that he thought the scientists knew more than they did. Of course, he was right. Again, the issue is not what the scientists thought they knew – I am sure that would vary considerably according to their personalities and beliefs – *but what the writer thought they knew*.

And for most people, their trust remains in the wrong place. This reminds me of the old French proverb 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose' or 'the more things change, the more they remain the same'. 800 years before the birth of Christ, God said to Israel 'Woe to the rebellious children who take counsel, *but not of me...*and who devise plans, *but not of my Spirit...*who walk down to Egypt to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh *and have not asked my advice*' (Isaiah 30: 1-2) and, again, 'Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help...*but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel nor seek the Lord!*' (Isaiah 31: 1).

As the Lord's people, we need to continue to remember who remains in control and that the answers lie where they have always lain – in the Lord! And to remember that the key to his help lies in repentance and faith at both personal and corporate levels. Only then will the Lord restore to us the years that the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25).

I know it is a very difficult time for the congregation, losing your minister and with several of you now regularly absent with illness or weakness of some kind. The Elders will be speaking with you regarding the future of the congregation and we will be meeting early in the new year to seek direction from the Lord regarding the way forward. But, as I was led to say to my own congregation last Wednesday evening, I now feel led to say to yourselves: although your resources may be few and you have but a 'little strength', still it is true that 'you have kept God's Word and have not denied his name' and, therefore, you can now look to God to set before you 'an open door which no man can shut' (Revelation 3:8).

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Wishing you God's abundant blessing,

Rev Kenneth Stewart (Interim Moderator)

GIVE ME SCOTLAND, OR I DIE



Perhaps more than anything else, John Knox is known for his prayer “Give me Scotland, or I die.” Knox’s prayer was not an arrogant demand, but the passionate plea of a man willing to die for the sake of the pure preaching of the gospel and the salvation of his countrymen. Knox’s greatness lay in his humble dependence on our sovereign God to save His people, revive a nation, and reform His church. As is evident from his preaching and prayer, Knox believed neither in the power of his preaching nor in the power of his prayer, but in the power of the gospel and the power of God, who sovereignly ordains preaching and prayer as secondary means in the salvation of His people.

Although Knox had been imprisoned and enslaved, and though he was often infirm and under threat of persecution, he consistently lived out his theology, believing that “one man with God is always in the majority.” As such, the prayers of one man heard at the throne of God were a threat to the throne of Scotland. During the time of the sixteenth-century Scottish Reformation, Knox’s ministry of preaching and prayer were so well known that the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, is reputed to have said, “I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.”

Above all, Knox was a committed pastor and churchman whose ministry served as a compass to numerous pastors throughout Scotland. Knox’s unwavering commitment to the pure preaching of the gospel was a bright and shining light amid the darkness in a nation steeped in doctrinal and ecclesiastical compromise. He reinvigorated God’s shepherds throughout the nation; this, in turn, reformed the church and, thus, in God’s providence, revived the country. Most notably, what inspired the pastors perhaps more than any other characteristic in Knox was that he did not fear men, because he feared God—he was a man willing to offend men, because he was unwilling to offend God.

John Knox preached and prayed to the end that God would rescue Scotland precisely because he was clinging to Jesus’ promise and prayer to save His people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. It should be no surprise to us then that when Knox was near death, he asked his wife to read to him the High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that our Lord Jesus prayed the night before He went to the cross. Knox called this passage “my first anchor.” For indeed, Christ is the captain of our souls and Christ’s prayer is the anchor and only hope of the nations. Therefore, in light of so great an example of God’s power working through one man, let each one of us pray with the same passion for our nation—and all nations—as Knox prayed for Scotland.

Children's Corner



Dear Children

A very Happy New Year to you all!

Do you like playing the game Follow My Leader? If you do you will know how important it is to have a good leader to follow, someone who will not take you into difficult and dangerous places. Some people also like to have a Hero or Heroine whose example they think it is worth following in life. Again, it is very important that your hero or heroine is one who will give you a good lead and whose example is very worthwhile.

As you begin another year, having a good leader is very important. The best leader of all is saying to you: "Follow Me." Who is this leader? He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If you were invited to follow a king, queen, prince or princess you might feel honoured but these can't be compared with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No man or woman in this world can surpass One who is the Lord of Glory. They are all sinful human beings but the Lord Jesus is perfect. He is the very best leader that anyone could have.

You are all young and starting out on life. It is, therefore, very important that you have the best leader right from the start. Other leaders might lead you astray and take you on a course of life that will not be good for you. The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, will lead you into paths which David calls in Psalm 23 'the paths of righteousness'.

At the present time the Lord Jesus is in heaven and you may wonder how He can lead you down here on earth. You know that He has given us a book of instructions which He wants us to follow. That book is the Bible. As with any appliance or gadget you may have it is very important to read the instructions and follow them. So it is with God's instructions for life. You need to read them to find out what God is asking you to do in order to follow His leading. So, make sure you know the Maker's instructions!

Following the Lord Jesus and His instructions will not always be easy. His leading will at times be very demanding because of the sin in us and in others but He promises to give you strength and wisdom for all the difficulties in life. Above all, He promises to be with you at all times to help you when life is difficult for you and He also promises you life eternal. What a reward for being one of His followers!

Is this going to be the year when you will obey the Lord's command : "Follow Me"? Make sure you do not delay becoming one of His followers. Remember Rebekah was asked the question: "Will you go with this man?" Her answer was: "Yes, I will go." Read the story in Genesis chapter 24. Read also about Ruth in the book named after her where she came to make a decision on who she was to follow. She said to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was a follower of the Lord: "Your people will be my people and your God my God." I pray that you too will respond in similar ways and if you do then 2022 will be a very happy and blessed year for you.

May the Lord bless each one of you.

With my love and prayers.

Granny M