



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

April 2023 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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CONTACT DETAILS

Stornoway RPCS
 Bridge Community Centre
 Bayhead Embankment
 Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,
 Scotland, HS1 2EB

www.stornowayrpcs.org
info@stornowayrpcs.org
 Scottish Charity No: SC043043

WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

One would think that the primary objective of a Conservative party, and of a Conservative government, should be obvious. After all, the clue is in the name: ‘Conservatives’ are, or should be, in the business of ‘conservation’. But, as I wrote last time, it is increasingly difficult to see what modern conservatives are interested in conserving. Traditional conservatism, as a political and social philosophy, used to emphasise the importance of concepts such as law and order, authority and allegiance, and personal duties and responsibilities as well as the importance of maintaining, protecting and, indeed, promoting the important institutions which traditionally constituted the fabric of the nation – such as the monarchy, the church, and the family. It was always understood, if not always expressly articulated, that national governments – which were to be small and non-interventionist whenever possible – were never to undermine any of these ancient institutions.

Of late, however, a new version of conservatism has appeared that is really more akin to traditional liberalism – emphasizing individual freedoms with a strong emphasis on free-market economics. Modern conservatives seem uninterested in conserving the ancient institutions and, increasingly, it seems that being fiscally conservative is all that matters. This emphasis, which first began to gain ascendancy in the 1980’s, is not one which older conservatives (with either a large or small ‘c’) would have recognized.

That is why it was rather sad to see the conservative benches in such raptures at the chancellor’s decision to introduce even more free childcare so that the very youngest children can now be raised and nurtured outside of their home and family, thus ‘allowing’ or ‘enabling’ more women to go out to work shortly after their child is born. But why should true conservatives (again with either a small or large ‘c’) rejoice in a measure like this – one which can only contribute further to the erosion of family life and place further strains on the increasingly fragile bond between a mother and her child? Of course, for modern conservatives, the justification lies in getting mothers into paid work, thereby raising taxes and productivity, and boosting growth. *But how do we measure the real cost or value of such measures?* Consider this: the financial cost to the state of the disintegration of the traditional family unit is incalculable. Why, then, should a measure which inherently weakens family ties be viewed as an earner for the government? It’s a little like the superficial argument against the Sabbath which asserts that the economy could not sustain shutting down one day in the week. But common sense alone should tell us that the good done, both mentally and physically, to individuals and families by having a *common* day of rest, would yield far more economic productivity in the long term.

As things stand, it is impossible to believe that this government, or indeed any other government in the UK, either now or in the recent past, values motherhood, or indeed marriage, in the slightest. For years now, the way the economy is run has encouraged mothers into the workplace by making it far more rewarding for the mother to earn than for the father to earn more. It was a ‘Conservative’ government that removed child benefit from the higher earner and provided 30 free hours of childcare for three and four-year-olds when both parents were in work. Parents were then, effectively, penalized for having only one income. Now, it is a ‘Conservative’ government that is extending the provision to children over 9 months of age – just as the Princess of Wales’s ‘Shaping Us’ campaign has highlighted the critical importance of the first three years for brain development and building emotional resilience for later life.

Sadly, it would be vain to expect salvation for the family from any other political party: The Labour party – having itself undergone a radical shift in its own thinking since the 1980’s – has little to say on these matters. Its founders, steeped in Christian Nonconformity, would have had little sympathy with such a measure and the Trades Unions, which used to fight hard for a Sabbath and for an adequate single wage to enable child rearing in the home, don’t have much to say now either. Labour, like the Conservatives – and the rest – are now held captive by a new and dangerously amoral form of liberalism where the only freedoms to be safeguarded at all costs are sexual freedoms; the freedom to do as you please and the freedom to be whoever, *or whatever*, you wish to be. Society may sometimes matter, but families don’t.

It all seems to be about freedom and equality for women. But, in saner times, the worth, or ‘value’, of a mother was never measured by how much tax she could raise for a government. And, historically, women would have thought you insane if you had held out to them an economic or social ‘freedom’ that came at the expense of the privilege of nurturing a home and family. But after years of telling women, either explicitly or implicitly, that having children is really a burden, a restraint on their lives and their freedoms and a hindrance to their careers – resulting, of course, in the widespread and abhorrent murder of unborn children – the West is now in a population crisis with plummeting birthrates (which spells doom for any economy and way of life) while other

countries, such as China and Japan, are now trying to incentivize women to have children.

The myths surrounding this whole business are legion: people need to stop believing that women choosing marriage and motherhood are oppressed under a patriarchy (they are not); people, including fathers, need to stop thinking that mothers are not ‘working people’ (they are); people need stop thinking that anyone working outside the home and pursuing a ‘career’ is doing a more important job than a mother (they are not). And there are many more myths than these. I don’t know if men need to be reminded of these things more than women. But I’ve no doubt that if men valued women more, valued their wives more and valued motherhood more, most of our current societal problems would simply disappear. It is difficult not to conclude that had men been better men, better husbands and better fathers, the family as an institution would have held together far better than it has.

Paul tells us that although ‘woman came from man’ yet *‘man also comes through woman’* (1 Corinthians 11: 12). By saying so, Paul is not merely stating the obvious fact that every man born into this world is born from a woman. In context, he is going much further and deeper than that. The role of the mother’s womb gives way immediately to that of her breasts. In other words, after giving a man birth, a woman then proceeds to nurture: that is, to guide the man’s thoughts, his words, his prayers, his responses, his desires, his choices – in a word, his overall, physical, moral, mental and spiritual development (And, by the way, how *economically productive* is a mother who trains *that kind of person?*)

And all of that is at stake here. It is hard enough for society to withstand the shocking and disgraceful abandonment of their duties by fathers but, make no mistake, society will never withstand the willful and prolonged absence of mothers from their children. Motherhood needs serious recovery and serious promotion, not least within the church. Years of dumbing down the duties, privileges and opportunities of motherhood and talking down its importance have led to this sorry state of affairs where the government provides *no economic incentive whatsoever* for a mother to stay at home to raise her own child and, instead, pays others – who are very often far less qualified and, obviously, less committed than the mother – to do it. *But why should remunerated childcare provision exclude the option of mothers being incentivised to provide childcare for their own children at home?* And if it is the case that we have reached the sorry state that we can only value what we pay for, *then we should pay the mothers to do the essential work they do best.*

Fiscal and social decisions of this kind will only weaken the family and, precisely because they weaken the family, they will also weaken the nation – leading to the disintegration of its very fabric. The rate of mental illness amongst children is rapidly and seriously increasing – is this measure likely to help? Can agencies provide a mother’s love?

Plato’s vision, outlined in his ‘Republic’, of eradicating marriage (with men and women ‘sharing’ each other) and eradicating the family (which he considered a breeding ground for envy in society) and transferring the responsibility for nurturing children onto the state (which would then raise these children in state nurseries where they would be taught to venerate their ‘leaders’ without knowing their mothers or fathers) seems to creep ever closer. (It should be noted, as a matter of interest, that any unwanted children could be euthanized at birth).

At last, we would achieve a society in which all men and women are set free to work, perhaps owning little or nothing (because, for Plato, private property, like the family, was a source of great evil) but being much happier because they can now share each other without commitment and give most of their resources to an ever-growing government which will look after their whole lives – including their children who don’t need parents anymore, having professional state care-givers. Clearly, for some, like Plato, that is a kind of heaven. For those of us with a biblical, and even a common sense/common grace perspective, and who remember that the words ‘arbeit macht frei’ (‘work sets you free’) were written above the gates of Auschwitz, it is more like a hell on earth.

There’s more to life than money, careers and jobs.

Conservatives don’t seem to understand when they should cheer anymore, do they?

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

HEARTFELT THANKS

Laura-Jayne and Nicolas Davis would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to all within the congregation who so fervently prayed for their daughter, Lucy Beth, whilst in hospital. We were aware of your prayers throughout our time in Glasgow and beyond.

Lucy is now at home and is feeding and sleeping well. She is growing well and is a very content baby, despite all she has been through.

There may be need for further surgery as time goes on, so the surgical team are keeping a close eye on her.

Thank you all for your prayers and support during a difficult time.



Lucy Beth Davis

REPORT FROM ANNECY, FRANCE

When the churches were allowed to congregate again after the covid restrictions were eased, a young girl in her early twenties began to attend our Sunday morning services. It emerged that one day, although she had never received any religious instruction from her parents or at school, she had felt 'irresistibly inclined' to go to a bookshop and buy a Bible, had read parts of it with intense interest and decided to find a place of worship. She initially attended services in a Roman catholic church, but soon became convinced that what she saw and heard there did not tally with what she read in the Scriptures. She then discovered our website and began to attend our services on a regular basis. After a few weeks, an interview was arranged with Mr Blachon, our minister. It turned out that, having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as her redeemer and saviour, she had truly become a new creature and professed her desire to obey His commands in faith. In the months that followed she was received into church membership.

During the same period of time, a friend of that young girl to whom she had explained how she had come to the faith attended a weekly church meeting, partly out of curiosity and partly so that her friend should stop her incessant invitations. Just like her friend, she had never received any formal religious instruction. She believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was saved that very evening. Her life had not been particularly licentious by contemporary secular young people's standards, but prior to that church meeting, she often went dancing in nightclubs and was a regular smoker. Part of the glorious change she experienced that night was manifest in her being instantly freed from her addiction to tobacco and, without anyone telling her a word about her conduct, she never set foot again in a nightclub. A few months later, she also professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and became a church member.



Stephan & Brigitte Wilhelm

A number of young people began to attend church on hearing the testimony of these young converts. As one of them solemnly professed her faith before the church, Mr Blachon had the privilege to preach to

an audience comprising twenty or so of her friends and school acquaintances, and all listened with respect to the preaching of the Word of God.

In great part as a result of these conversions, a keen interest in the Gospel has been sparked among a by no means inconsiderable number of young people, mostly in their twenties, including several children of church members, who now regularly attend weekly as well as Sunday church gatherings.

We are grateful to the Lord for these tokens of His free grace.

Other evangelical congregations seem to have reported similar happenings since the end of the restrictions brought by the covid pandemic.

On the other hand, there have been clear signs of the French state tightening its regulation and surveillance of religious communities, including Christian churches.

One last point which I deem worthy of interest is that, for some time now – and this again seems to coincide with the end of the covid pandemic – several independent evangelical congregations seem to evince an enhanced desire to promote fellowship with one another so as to offer a coordinated alternative to the extravagances which now sadly characterise a number of churches and denominations.

We frequently give thanks for the encouragement and benefit we have so often received from the Christian people in Stornoway, and would highly value your prayers for the churches in France.

With our sincere love and prayers to you all,

Stephan

DISCERNING A CALL TO SECULAR SERVICE

There are various resources which can be used by those who are wondering whether they have a call to preach. Perhaps less is available for those who are discerning that they do not have a call to the gospel ministry. It can sometimes seem as though, if a young man has a pressing desire to serve the Lord, the only way to do this is to preach. However we still need to recognise the validity and the value of secular callings and the work that can be done for the Lord outside of the gospel ministry.

Someone who initially struggled to recognise their calling was Archibald Johnston of Wariston. A gifted young lawyer who desperately longed to devote his whole life (and death) to the Lord's service, he wrestled earnestly with the problem of whether he was being called to the gospel ministry or to continue in the legal field. He kept a detailed diary of his spiritual and psychological turmoils, including how he came to the clear view that his calling was not the gospel ministry. The various aspects of his decision-making process are still appropriate today, as can be seen from the following updated extracts from his diary for August 1633. Setting aside time for prayer and fasting, he coordinated the advice of wise friends, helpful contemporary writers, and the teaching of Scripture in his analysis of his own inclinations and gifts and the requirements of a gospel minister. Wariston went on to have a stellar career in law and politics, making huge contributions to the good of the Scottish church. In the end he was executed by hanging for remaining true to his principles.

My brother-in-law exhorted me to settle my resolutions concerning my calling, and gave me reasons to continue in what I had begun, letting me see my impatience for catechising on the one part, and on the other part the possibility of serving God and doing good as an advocate.

Monday

On Monday, after praising and praying, I resolved to keep a private fast to God all this week for my deliverance from my troubles, fears and perplexities, and for God assisting me against temptation and directing me in my confusions, chiefly concerning my calling. In this I prayed the Lord of heaven that He

would direct me in choosing my calling, and bless me in what He made me to choose, and enable me in and by it to glorify Him, edify His servants and my friends, and the poor people, and to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling. (Lord, hear and direct for Christ's sake!) I remembered how last Saturday night the Psalm which happened to be read was Psalm 127, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," and I applied this to my calling.

Thursday

On Thursday I heard Rev Henry Rollock preach on Genesis 2:2, where he argued that we should imitate God's example and rest on the Sabbath day, "but," he said, "it is most commendable to labour in our particular calling all the week."

After the sermon I looked at William Perkins's treatise on Callings (having first prayed to God to direct me and settle me in my calling, and reiterating all my vows to Him) [Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men* (1603)]. When I read Perkins, and finding my mind much settled by it, I resolved to follow his rules of choosing a calling, and to examine myself by his signs. Perkins directs us to examine what calling God calls us to, 1st, by our affection and inclination, and 2nd, by our gifts.

Then I spent all afternoon testing by both tests whether I should apply myself to the ministry or to law.

First, I found that I truly respected and honoured more in my mind the ministry than law, but that my affection and resolution constantly carried me to the law. This was partly because I saw that my mind could not be bent to religious exercises constantly, but fainted if it was not sometimes diverted to secular things, and partly also because I did not dare to take on the burden of more souls than my own – for I found it genuinely difficult for my own soul alone to work out its salvation in fear and trembling. So I found that my inclination was always to serve God in this, fearing lest I would be diverted from it to something else.



Archibald Johnston of Wariston

Secondly, I found my gifts not so fitted for the ministry as for law. My gift is dialectic rather than didactic – fitter for disputing pro and contra than for teaching solid grounds. Also neither my invention, judgment nor memory was in favour of handling such deep mysteries. Again, in the judgment of all, I have no gift for speaking, and would have no utterance at all in preaching. I was never a good linguist, either in Scots, French or Latin. However, the main point of the calling to the ministry lies in catechising, and this I am utterly incapable of, due to my natural hastiness, crossness and impatience.

As for law. My affection. My continual resolution since my childhood. My plying of my studies to that end. The manifold opportunities of making progress in it. My gifts being disputative, and therefore naturally fitting me for it. Also, chiefly, the warrant of the apostle, commanding me to remain in the calling in which I was called (1 Corinthians 7:20); the commentators Bolton, Pareus, and Perkins on that text all advise against an unnecessary or rash change of calling.

All of this greatly settled my mind, and made me resolve that, having craved God's direction in my choice and then His blessing on my choice, I would fall to my book next week.

My resolution was confirmed by reading Genesis 3:19 ("In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ...") and Matthew 25 (about the servants who received the talents). Also Mark 6:3, "Is not this the carpenter?" from which Perkins says that Christ used carpentry as His particular calling, and Exodus 20, "Six days shalt thou labour," which according to Perkins is a command. Also 1 Corinthians 12:28, "God hath set some in the

the church, first apostles, gifts of healings, helps of governments.” Ephesians 4:28, “Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” Colossians 3:22, “Servants, obey in all things your masters, and, whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 3:10, “This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. Now them that work not at all, but are busybodies, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.”

My mind was strongly prompted by these passages to be settled in a calling, and was then confirmed in my first resolution by Perkins’ rules of examination, but especially by 1 Corinthians 7:20, and I blessed God heartily for settling my mind so well.

Reflections

I remembered how I had presented to God as my greatest request that He would be well-pleased to settle me in a particular calling, in which I could glorify Him, edify His servants, and work out my own salvation with fear and trembling. This made me confident of the general principle that assuredly God would bless me in my calling. I also remembered how, having craved God’s direction concerning my choice of a calling, I got the same passage, 1 Corinthians 7:20, brought to my memory in my prayer as an answer.

Also, God answered all the objections that I could bring against my calling to law. The first objection was that God seemed to thwart me in the study of this calling. Answer: It was because I had not till now sought God’s direction and blessing so urgently. Now, after being so urgent with God, I can say with David, “The Lord hath delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the jaws of the bear, he will deliver me also out of the hand of this Philistine.” So the Lord who protected me in my travels [to France] and directed me in my marriage, will bless me also in my choosing and in my calling. All the more so, since on the one hand what I am praying for now tends more to His glory and the good of His servants and my salvation, and on the other hand the manner of my praying is [by His help] more humble, more frequent, and more fervent than before.

My second objection was that I would shame myself by something I said. Answer: That would be to distrust God’s assistance, which He will not refuse to any who truly desires it, not only in divine discourses, but also secular discourses tending to His glory and the good of the commonwealth.

Thirdly, I had a doubt about the distractions associated with law. Answer: My devotion, not being continually bent [towards spiritual things] would be the benter when it was [from time to time] employed in God’s service.

Fourthly, I had a doubt about the temptations associated with law. Answer: Those temptations are less dangerous than either medicine or theology, for there they endangered either the soul or the body, but with law they only endanger the purse. Also, those temptations would be like so many pricks in my side to keep me awake all the time, and to hold God’s graces in exercise, and to maintain my tenderness of conscience (which, if never stirred, would grow obdurate).

Then, for my greater confidence of a blessing, I remembered how all my prayers run on this line, that God would glorify Himself both in my life and in my death, and that He would send either life or death as He thought fittest to His glory, the best interests of church and commonwealth, and my own salvation. So that, seeing God now sends life, I may be confident that He has some work to do with me yet for His glory, the wellbeing of His servants, and my own good.

Thereafter I spent that night in confessing, praying, and praising for all His mercies, and in particular for settling my mind so well that day in my particular calling. Blessed by His name for it, for now and for evermore!

Archibald Johnston of Wariston kept a diary for many years. Extracts have recently been republished in a book titled, ‘For Christ and Covenant: The Spirituality of Archibald Johnston of Wariston,’ edited by Ruth E Alcalay.

Children's Corner



Dear children,

Have you ever wondered why God makes things the way he does? When he made flowers, he didn't make them all the same – he made them in lots of different shapes, sizes, and colours! Why do you think he did that? Don't you think it was for us – so that we could enjoy them all and so that we could see how amazing God is as a Creator? But he made them to look different for the birds and the animals too. They like the colours as well. Did you know that the hummingbird is attracted to red flowers?

Now, I should say that all the flowers have a different smell as well. And nearly every flower has a very nice smell – that's why we sometimes get some for our houses. They don't just look nice, they smell nice! Now one of the flowers with a very strong smell is called the 'corpse flower' It's a tall flower, nearly two metres tall, and some say that this flower has the strongest smell in the world. The smell is so strong that you can smell it nearly half a mile away!

But, believe it or not, it doesn't have a nice smell at all. In fact, it has a really, really horrible smell! It smells like something rotting – like a rotting body of an animal that's been dead for a long time. Now, who would think a flower could smell like that! But, amazingly, some insects really like it.

Now, this flower has another name. It's sometimes called 'The Devil's tongue' because, as you can see from the picture, the part of it that sticks up in the air looks a bit like a tongue and since it smells so rotten, it reminds us of the Devil's tongue.

We use our tongues to make words (try saying some words out loud and think about what your tongue is doing when you say them). Now, the Bible tells us that God hates a 'lying tongue' (Proverbs 6: 16, 17) and we should hate it too. But the Devil has always been a liar – he tells you that it's good to do bad things! He also encourages you to tell lies as well! And all his lies are rotten lies – telling us to believe rotten things about people and maybe even about God, and encouraging us to say rotten lies as well. And if we start to believe lies and to tell lies, we will start becoming rotten people ourselves. Now sometimes you might want to tell a lie to make people like you – but it doesn't really work. In the end, nobody likes liars so it's always best to tell the truth.

So if you 'smell' a rotten lying tongue, don't go near it. And make sure you don't have a 'Devil's tongue' yourself. Always tell the truth because that's what God wants you to do: 'Let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth' (Ephesians 4:29) And, remember, you need God's help to have a truthful tongue because God tells us that 'no man can tame the tongue, it is full of deadly poison' (James 3: 8)

Pray that your tongue will not be a rotten 'Devil's tongue' but a truthful tongue.



With my love and prayers,