

*Govan and Linthouse
Parish Church
Magazine*



March
2015

Sidelines

‘Without a vision’ says the prophet, ‘the people will perish’

There are few things more essential than a vision in a church context. We always need to be working towards something, something that will catch alight, something that will draw people into the circle that surrounds our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Many of you recognise that the times in which we live, the spirit of our age, is not one that readily allows people to cross the bridge into faith. Everything is working against us rather than for us. There are the proclaimed atheists like Richard Dawkins who are always in the news. There is an idea ‘out there’ that somehow science has disproved the existence of God. This doesn’t mean that people don’t believe any more, but rather that they don’t like to discuss it unless they are in secure company. Better to keep your head down. Then, there is the media. Always slow to grasp what is trending in society, media types assume that all that stuff is old hat, we have done with that, no-one wants that any more. The accumulation of denials, dismissals, eventually takes a toll. It wears down our spirits too.

Last year, the Centre for Human Ecology, a national organisation but based here, promoted a series of on-line papers, looking at every aspect of Scottish life – every aspect, that is, except faith, except religion.

Last week, online, everyone was promoting the Stephen Fry outburst on Radio Telefis Erin, where he said he would tackle God, should he meet him/her, with the bone of a child suffering from bone cancer. It was a very angry exchange, hardly surprisingly. No-one wants any child to suffer, or any innocent person to suffer pain and sadness. The problem of pain and suffering is one which has exercised the minds of faith scholars throughout the centuries because we in the church are compassionate, angry, too. Television celebrities don’t have a monopoly on anger. In fact they have rarely spent any time reading and discussing these issues at all. The sound bite is good enough. It sets them up as fearless defenders against an indefensible, cruel God – and people of faith as supporters of an indefensible, cruel God.

It is not my intention to ridicule. The subject is too important. The depth of hurt contained in some of these outbursts and opinions should make us weep for those who feel themselves so lost to God.

But at the very time when we should be declaring the love of God, at a time of intense cruelty and brutal acts in the name of faith, at a time of exposure of the church’s sins, at a time when we are worn down, and no longer know what we believe - that is the time when it is most important to hold onto faith, to light the flame of faith, to believe and hope in faith.

We are witnesses to the presence of the Living God, and that is never an easy place to be.

God bless you all, Moyna

I recently attended the Diaconate Council. This is the collective name for the group of deacons serving in the Church of Scotland. We had a guest speaker who gave us an insight into human trafficking and how it affects Scotland, as well as what the Kirk is doing to help. She told us harrowing stories of people who had been brought over here with the promise of work only to be kept prisoner and being forced to work long hours for nothing. Young girls being forced into prostitution, young men being forced to do whatever task their master ordered them to. What she described was quite simply horrific. More horrific was that there have only been two cases brought against these traffickers because people are too scared to speak out. There have been threats against their families back home if they say anything. This is happening in our streets, our towns and cities are being used as places of slavery, keeping people in the most barbaric lives imaginable.

I would go as far as to say that this was one of the most disturbing, thought provoking talks I have heard in a long time. Often speakers need to ramp up the emotional side of things to keep us on board, but she needed only to speak plainly and simply about this because the shock factor was all too evident. Later I reflected on where this might be happening. Surely not anywhere I live or visit? How would I know if it was happening? As I thought about this I was struck by the moans we often hear about the world, the church, other people, and I stopped for a moment to lay all that aside and try and wonder what it must be like to be a victim of trafficking. How does it feel to be trapped in a life you didn't choose? What anguish does a soul feel when each day brings more misery? Imagine getting up in the morning knowing that today was going to be the same as yesterday, that you would be forced to do things you didn't choose to do.

Fortunately there are agencies working hard, including the church, to try and identify victims and to rescue them from this life of abject misery. Our prayer needs to be that there would be a change of mindset among those who would want to inflict such horror on others, and that the countries they are being taken from are given the resources they need in order for people to not want to leave. But we would do well to remember them when we are feeling angry with the world or with another person. For what are our menial groans when compared with what they suffer daily? That's not to say that our concerns are invalid, but sometimes it does us good to reflect and gain a sense of perspective before we react to something we think as being wrong. In the cold light of day, are many of our concerns that bad? Can they be easily solved with the right approach? I would think personally, many of the things I see as being giant issues are no more than simple puzzles to be solved. I can't imagine saying that were I being kept confined with my family threatened. Now that is a problem!

Paul

Dear friends,

I write to you as I put the finishing touches to the Sunday morning service on the 8th February. I cannot say just how much of a privilege it is for me to plan services for our congregation. To lead you in adoration, prayer and thanksgiving brings me such joy. On the weeks when I am not preaching, it is such a pleasure to sit amongst you and worship God beside you. I feel so blessed to be among such a friendly, caring and welcoming congregation.

I am also working on a short six week course called "Walking the Way". It will run from the end of February until Easter – probably on a Wednesday afternoon. We will be journeying across the parish– meeting for two weeks in each of our three worship centres.

The aim of the course is to help equip us with spiritual resources as we walk the journey of faith. In life we are often faced with difficult times. We are faced with times when we must forgive or ask others for forgiveness. We are not always sure what God is asking of us – and also, what we should be asking of God!

Each week the course will start with refreshments and worship – I will be digging out my acoustic guitar to lead the singing. If that doesn't make you want to come, then I don't know what will!!

We will then look at a passage from Mark's Gospel before reflecting on a theme such as forgiveness and reconciliation. There will be group discussion and also a chance to respond to the passage through drawing, writing, a craft or a practical activity – though these are optional!!

There will be time for prayer and for growing together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

I have been so blessed by all of you and I look forward to spending this time with you as we seek God's blessing in our lives - as we gather together, before our friend, lord and saviour to ask: "Jesus, show us how to walk the way of faith together".

I pray that you, and all those whom you love, will be richly blessed as we seek to serve our Lord in the parish of Govan and Linthouse.

Christopher Rankine

Safe in his arms

Emma Walker – Member – December 2014

The Guild

This is Monday 2nd February and Gillian has told us all that our articles for the magazine have to be in her hands by 3rd, so I have little window to gather my thoughts and put pen (type) to paper. Firstly I have to say that the Guild resumes on Monday 23rd February when we will welcome Moyna back into our midst. We then go on to hear about one of our projects, the Julius Project which is involved with homelessness.

Our theatre outing is on 10th March to Eastwood theatre for a production of Guys and Dolls which will no doubt be a great night out.

We have a few old faces and new ones coming in this session which is really great and keeps us interested. We look forward to Easter and all the celebrations that brings and we will be planning our Annual outing.

At this point I would personally like to thank you all for the support you give the Guild in very way, your attendance at the service in November, your tremendous generosity in your wonderful amounts of gifts for hospitals, nursing homes and schools. It's a great time for us sorting out the amazing amount of different gifts given to us. We spend time at Thornliebank Church with around 500 pairs of socks for the Lodging House Mission, sweets and goodies to Hazelwood School and presents for every resident at numerous homes in the area and then having the pleasure of delivering these presents to the homes. It's a wonderful feeling.

Again my sincere thanks and prayers to all the congregation of Govan and Linthouse for their continual support and again invite anyone to our meetings, you will be made to feel most welcome.

With God's Blessing

Elsbeth

Guild President

World Day Of Prayer

This year the World day of prayer will be held in Govan Old on Friday 6th March at 2pm.

Weddings

Ainsley Conn and Jamie Wark were married in Govan Old on Friday 5th December 2014

Renovation Fund

I am pleased to record that the total raised to date is just over £16,200. Thank you to everyone who continues to support this cause.

The Renovation Fund hamper raised £600 and the winner was Frank Brown.

Sandra MacDonald

Communion Collection

It has been decided that the second collection from our next Communion Service will go to Hazelwood School in Dumbreck. Hazelwood is a purpose built school specially designed to meet the requirements of pupils with sensory and dual sensory impairment and additional complex needs, they aim to provide a safe and secure learning environment for all pupils with a particular emphasis on developing life skills and promoting independence.

We thank you in advance for your support and generosity.

Centrepoint

As you will remember we had an additional collection on Homelessness Sunday for a charity called Centrepoint who help youngsters get off the streets and provide them with a safe place to stay whilst helping them with education and getting into work. It would have cost £144 to provide one of these rooms for someone for a year and we had hoped to raise that amount...as usual your generosity was abundant and we were able to raise £404 which means we can support not just one but nearly 3 people for a year. We received a lovely thank you letter from Centrepoint who were very much appreciative of our gift to them, please see the letter included.



Govan and Linthouse Parish Church
796 Govan Road
Glasgow
G51 2YL

29 January

To all at Govan and Linthouse Parish Church,

Centrepoint Head Office
Central House
25 Camperdown Street
London E1 8DZ
Tel 0845 466 3400
Fax 0845 466 3500
www.centrepoint.org.uk
Donation Line 0800 23 23 20

Thank you!

I was delighted to receive your wonderful donation of £404, which you have kindly raised and donated to Centrepoint through the collection by your congregation. It is a great amount and you should be so proud of what you've achieved. You have all done fantastically well, particularly considering your original aim was to raise £144! Thank you for taking the time and effort to raise funds for Centrepoint; we truly appreciate your support and generosity. Please accept this letter by way of receipt of this kind gift.

'I can't describe my gratitude to [Centrepoint], I'm really thankful to be here. The staff are really helpful and always here to support you in any way you need them' Suzie, Centrepoint young person

Although her home life had always been violent and dangerous, Suzie was finally forced to move out aged seventeen and stay in a local B&B. She was living alone without cooking or washing facilities, or any form of support. Eventually, Suzie was referred to Centrepoint, where she is now holding down a part-time job as well as attending college to study a GNVQ. She plans to finish the course and go on to study further. This vital work to help vulnerable young people like Suzie, is only possible with your support.

Centrepoint is the UK's leading charity for homeless young people. It supports over 8,400 16-25 year olds into housing and employment every year. Working directly in London, Yorkshire and the North East of England, Centrepoint also partners with other organisations across the UK and gives homeless young people a voice through the Centrepoint Parliament. It conducts research and influences government policy with the overall aim of ending youth homelessness.

Thank you once again for your amazing support.

Best wishes,

Caroline Hughes
Relationship & Events Assistant
c.hughes@centrepoint.org

Patron HRH The Duke of Cambridge

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GOD'S GANG

As the days get brighter and the little bulbs pop their heads out of the ground, our Nativity service in December seems so long ago.

We hope you enjoyed the Nativity, our children certainly did. Thanks go to Paul and Christopher for their help.

Since the start of the year one lesson was 'Jesus escapes to Egypt'. We spoke about how we would deal with packing all our stuff and escaping. It was decided that it would be very difficult choosing whether to carry food or phones/games etc. Another lesson was for Valentine's day and God's love for us. We are also planning to spend a few weeks discussing the Lord's Prayer.

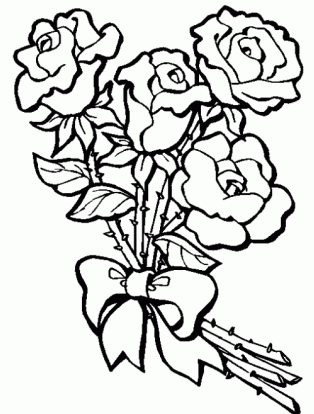
As yet we have no confirmed plans for our next outing but are hoping that it is soon and that the weather is kind.

Springtime Prayer

Ralph Waldo Emerson

For flowers that bloom about our feet,
For tender grass, so fresh, so sweet,
For song of bird, and hum of bee,
For all things fair we hear or see,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee!

For blue of stream and blue of sky,
For pleasant shade of branches high,
For fragrant air and cooling breeze,
For beauty of the blooming trees,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee!



34th Glasgow Girls' Brigade



We had a great Christmas Fayre raising over £2,500 for Company funds. Just under £2,000 was sent to Girls' Brigade Headquarters for our capitation fees. We really do appreciate everyone who worked so hard to help us and to all who turned up on the day to support us. We could certainly not run an event like this without all the help we get.

We took the children to the pantomime in the Church, The Govan Cat, on the last night before our Christmas break. We had a good night with the children all taking part in the usual way.

On the first weekend in May we are off to Glenshee Compass Christian Outdoor Centre. This is a great weekend and the children get doing many activities they might not otherwise have the chance to try.

The Display this year is in the MacLeod Hall at the Pearce Institute on Friday 15th May. We have outgrown the school hall and this venue will give us more room for our items. We hope you will manage along to support the girls on the night, as usual.

Sandra MacDonald

Dear friends

We have some news for you: On the 14.1.2014 Mirjam Ruth Breakey was born in the biggest hospital in Bern. When the doctors in the operating theatre asked what her name was - Neal replied: "that's a good question". Once we were in our room we eventually managed to agree on the name.

We were both quite surprised about her dark hair! She seems to have quite a peaceful personality and drinks well - the nights so far have been surprisingly calm.

Raphael was relieved when mummy and his new sister could leave hospital and return back home. He enjoys pushing around the carry cot in the living room.

May you know God's SHALOM and blessing in the New Year.

Overjoyed with gratitude, we send you the warmest greetings

Neal and Judith with Raphael and Mirjam



One of our Members makes the papers...

Cathy Sutherland who turned 104 in January was interviewed for the paper, here's what she has to say...

MORE AT DAILYRECORD.CO.UK

DAILY RECORD Thursday, January 29, 2015

CATHERINE, 104, EXPLAINS WHY SHE NEVER WED

A LADY HAS STANDARDS, YOU KNOW

Settling for second best was never on the cards

A WOMAN who celebrated her 104th birthday has revealed why she has stayed single all her life.

Catherine Sutherland said "the desirable were never obtainable and obtainable were not desirable".

The Hunterhill Care Home resident was born

LYNN JOLLY reports@dailyrecord.co.uk on January 22, 1911, and was one of six children.

Her only remaining sibling is Sheena Patrick, 88, from Lochwinnoch, who regularly visits her big sister.

Niece Rhona and her husband Dr Malcolm Young, from Bridge of Weir, and nephew Randal Patrick, also from Lochwinnoch, also visit often and dropped by to help her celebrate her 104th birthday.

Renfrewshire Provost Anne Hall also popped in to see Catherine on her big day and helped cut the cake.

Catherine's father passed away when she was young, so she played an active

role in raising her younger siblings and cared for her mother when she was diagnosed with dementia.

She worked as a masseuse in Sneddon's, a homoeopathic clinic in Glasgow, for more than 50 years before retiring aged 85.

Catherine, on why she never married, said: "The desirable were never obtainable and the obtainable were not desirable."

"I was waiting for a bowler hat whilst I let the cloth caps go by."

A spokeswoman for Hunterhill Care Home said: "Catherine is a very elegant lady and never has a bad word to say about anyone."

"She is kind, considerate, caring and gentle and gets on well with others in the home."

"Her faith is important to her, and she was actively involved in the church throughout her life and was a member of St Mungos Gaelic Church in Govan."

The desirable were never obtainable and the obtainable were not desirable

CATHERINE SUTHERLAND

BADGE OF HONOUR
Catherine is all smiles on her big day. Pic: Andrew Neil



MARY'S MEALS

2015 and our great support for Mary's meals just keeps getting stronger...I was delighted to get an e-mail to say that they have reached a total of 989,791 children being fed in schools they support...their target is to reach one million. I am sure they will do this soon as they rose by 66,000 in the last 6 months. Thanks to everyone who continues to donate to this charity, I have new box's if anyone needs one...

I hope you are all keeping safe in this horrible weather.

ACTION AID

Another new year, time really does fly by. I have already received a few donations to this brilliant charity, thank you all so much, I have worked out that we must be supporting this charity for over 30yrs, now I really feel old ha ha. Anyone wishing to also help this great cause please give me a shout, it's a payment of £6 per year, payable in 3 instalments of £2, or a one off payment. The letters from the charity I post on the board upstairs, showing the effect our donations make is unbelievable at times, but so rewarding....thanks again...Rose



Stories from the Heart by Peter Kerr

The first time I met Alison I fell in love with her and I told her this but she said she was too old for me – I was only seventeen and she was twenty six. She changed my life over the years and we became very close friends. We met up at the Tic-Tac theatre group weekly which is a theatre group for people with disabilities.

Alison asked me to go to the Billy Graham Crusade back in 1992. We met a lady there who we took home. On the way home we met a drunken man and we stopped cause the lady we were with wanted to talk to him. Alison and I stood there freezing for ages but this gave us a chance to get to know one another better. From then on we started to attend church together regularly and we became very close. I thought of Alison as my sister in Christ.

Alison was very open about her faith and very understanding towards people with learning difficulties; she was also able to do sign language for deaf people. Alison made me feel as if I was loved and also important. Whenever I was in trouble or needed someone, I knew she would always be there for me. She made me feel like a real person and she understood me more than anyone.

Alison taught me to be myself and to be more understanding towards other people. She gave me the confidence to learn how to study better; she also introduced me to and taught me about Christianity.

At the beginning of her illness Alison had epilepsy and she went through torment with her family as they couldn't understand what she was going through and what was happening to her. I feel they put her through hell. Eventually she got better and her life changed but she still felt low because of what her family had put her through.

Alison made me feel like part of her family as we were always there for each other. The day she found out she had cancer we cried in each other's arms. We prayed together that one day the cancer would leave her body but God took her away to a better place. I have now moved on with my life, even though I still think about her and still love her as much as ever. The day of Alison's funeral was sad but I was glad to be able to say my goodbyes and put her to rest.

I met Jim through college; he was my tutor and became my friend. He asked me to go to his church as he was preaching. In Jim's church I felt accepted for who I am but I have been to other Churches and have been made to feel isolated and discriminated against. I have found a brilliant friend in Jim and feel I can trust him just as I could with Alison.

A Meditation for Holy Saturday

A dialogue between two unnamed followers of Jesus, in hiding with others on the first Holy Saturday.

1. You OK?

2. Yeah. Well... you know.

1. Yeah. *Pause* You want something to eat?

2. I thought... It's the Sabbath, I didn't think anyone had had time to prepare something beforehand.

1. Oh, some of the women did it yesterday, after... you know, after they came back.

2. Oh. I thought they were making up ointments and things, for... for tomorrow.

1. They got some food ready as well. You know women. The end of the world it may be, but you still have to eat.

2. Yeah. That was nice of them.

1. So, you want something?

2. No. Thanks, I'm not hungry. You have something if you want.

1. Maybe later. I haven't really been hungry since... That was a really nice Passover meal we had on Thursday, wasn't it? He always made it special, but this one... I suppose he knew, from what he said, or guessed, at least.

2. What, that it would be his last? He knew all right, and he knew one of us would betray him.

1. Judas. He'd been with us right from the beginning too, hand-picked. I wonder where he is now? Does he regret what he did?

2. If I got my hands on him he wouldn't live long enough to regret anything. Why didn't he - the Master, I mean - why didn't he tell us who it was? We'd have stopped him.

1. He did tell us way back that this was going to happen. I thought it was another of his stories, his illustrations, especially when he brought in Jonah and the whale - inside the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

2. Yeah, well, in that case we can expect the grave to spew him out on ... what, Monday afternoon? Don't hold your breath.

1. *Pause* What are you going to do now?

2. Go home, I suppose, if there's still a home to go to. I'll get work as a farm labourer until I can scrape enough together to buy into a business.

1. Remember his story about all the labourers in the marketplace, and the guy coming out at intervals to hire them... and paying them all the same, even those who only did an hour's work.

2. Well, it would have got my back up too, working all day in the hot sun, and then some layabout comes along, does an hour's work and gets the same wage. *Smiles and shakes his head*

1. What?

2. He got me every time, you know? Turned me around, made me look at the other side of things. And when you thought about it, it made sense. Weird sense, maybe, but true.

1. And he never lied to us.

2. Not that I could see. Not even about... all this. Kinda wish he had.

1. Why?

2. It would be easier to turn my back on it all. Just go home, fit back in, pretend it never happened.

1. That what you're going to do?

2. I suppose so. What else is there? But... I don't think I'll go tomorrow. I'll wait till Monday, maybe even Monday afternoon. Just in case.

1. Funny, I was thinking the same thing. Just in case.

2. Yeah. After all, he never lied to us.

Fun Corner

Okay folks it's that time again to get your answers into me for the fantastic prize of...Chocolate!! The winner from the last magazine was James McAlpine who correctly found the well known phrase to be 'Peace be with you'. Let's see how you do this time...get those bibles out and try to find the answer, the winner will be announced in the next magazine.

_____ Ezekiel 5: 5 1st Word

_____ Ezra 7: 27 5th Word

_____ 1 Samuel 9: 12 3rd Word

_____ Jonah 4: 8 5th Word

_____ Exodus 3: 9 3rd Word

The well known quote is:

LOVE IS...

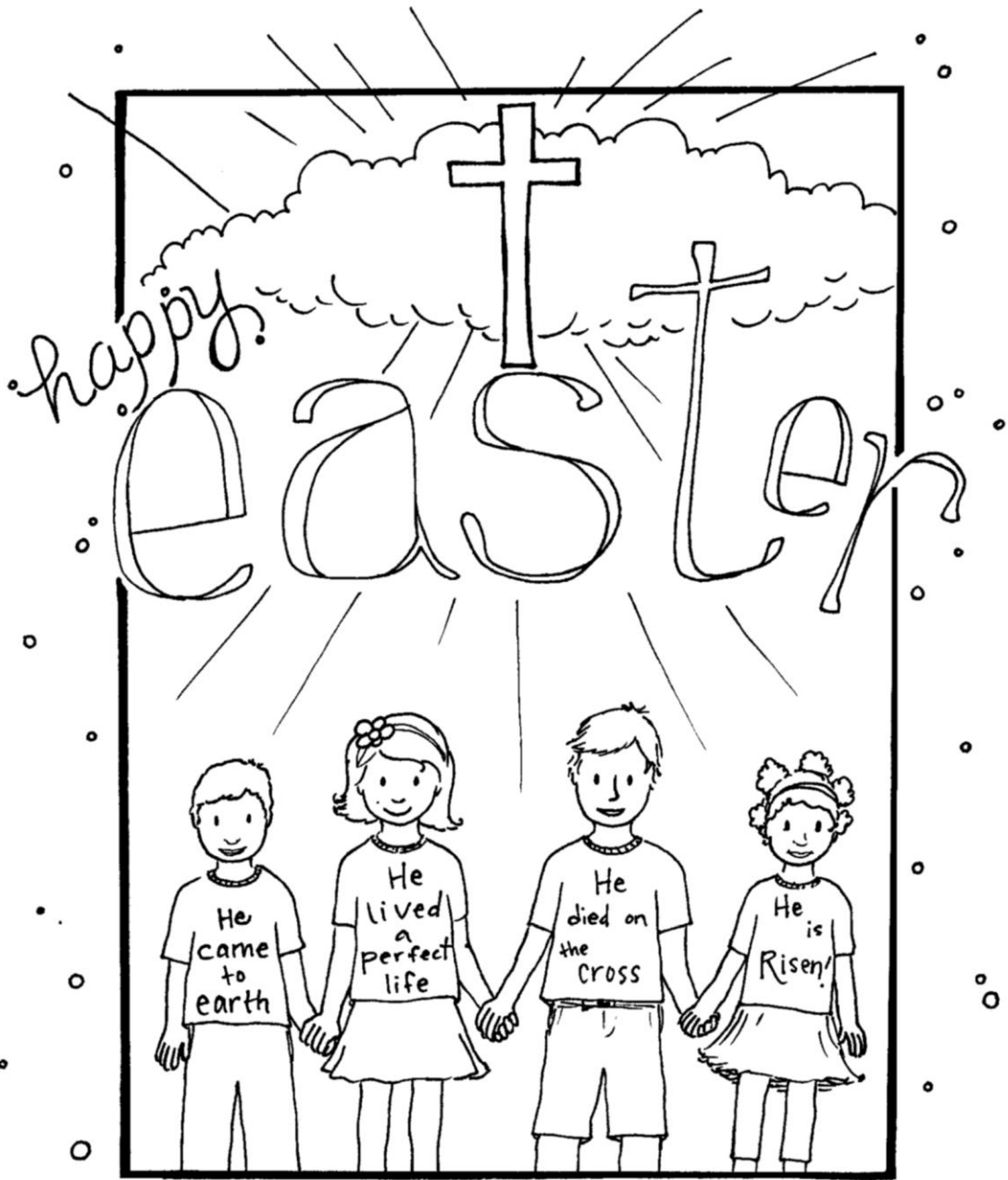
All of the Words of Love hidden in this puzzle, except one, are presented in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Words can be found in any direction. Can you find them all?



PATIENT
KIND
TRUSTS
PROTECTS
NOT RUDE
NOT PROUD

NEVER FAILS
AGAPE
PERSEVERES
HOPES
TRUTH
DOES NOT ENVY

Which word is the special word? What does it mean?



Mandy Groce '12

ministry-to-children.com

Sermon – Sunday 8th February 2015 (Christopher Rankine)

Talk 1

I remember when I started studying divinity (aged just 17!) - one day I was asked by one of my professors to explain, in a sentence, the core belief of Christianity. What did you have to believe to be considered a 'true Christian'? I remember wanting to show off all my learning and, somewhat smugly, I answered that the core belief of Christianity was that God was three-in-one – the trinity: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

He looked at me with bewilderment.

“Is that the core of your faith?”

“Yes” I replied.

He then said “how would you explain the trinity to your granny?”

I then spent a few embarrassing minutes trying to explain what the trinity means and it turned out a real mess.

“Are you sure this is the core of your faith?” he asked.

It is not easy to describe something we have not seen and which is beyond the power of words to describe!

At the heart of Jesus' message was his teaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. But what does this actually mean?

How can we describe a Kingdom which we have never seen? How can we describe a kingdom which is beyond description?

I would like you to think about this for a moment by discussing it with the person beside you. If a Martian landed tomorrow and asked you to explain the Kingdom of God - what would you say?

Take a minute to talk to the person beside you – what is the good news about the Kingdom of God?

Any suggestions?

It's not easy to describe, is it?

This is the problem Jesus faced when he began his teaching ministry in Galilee. People had been healed by Jesus, had been forgiven by him, had their lives changed by him. People knew he was from God and they flocked to him. Having been introduced to Jesus in the first three chapters of Mark, we are now given some of his teaching.

But what would he say to them? How was he going to describe the Kingdom of God to these people?

Jesus' solution was to use parables.

Parables were nothing new in Jesus' times. They were and still are used by Jewish Rabbis.

A parable is really a comparison.

Jesus says – "The Kingdom of God is like this..."

It is like a mustard seed. It is like a father who forgives a son.

It is like a farmer who sows seeds.

Jesus cannot give a direct description of the Kingdom – because it is beyond our ability to understand.

So he points to things we do know – and uses a comparison, a parable, to describe it to us.

This is the first thing about a parable – it is a comparison.

The second thing about parables is that they invite discussion. They are open to interpretation.

Think back to my parable from the children's talk earlier. A fox finds a garden, slips in through a hole in the fence, eats the grapes and then cannot escape through the hole again because he is too large. He is caught by the gardener and killed. The point of the parable is that there is no point in being greedy because we can't take it all with us.

Or is it? Maybe the parable means that we are going to die anyway – so maybe we should take as much as possible and enjoy it now. We come into the world with nothing and leave with nothing. Who knows what will happen next? Live for today!

One simple parable. Two very different interpretations.

Parables are meant to invite discussion and debate – and this is what happens in our scripture reading for this morning. Jesus tells a simple parable.

The Kingdom of God is like a man sowing seeds. Some seeds make it and some don't. Regardless, the harvest is a hundred times bigger than the amount of seeds sown.

What is the meaning of this parable? The disciples are confused and ask Jesus to explain it.

Interestingly, when he re-tells it, the meaning of the parable changes.

The first time, Jesus describes a sower who is very generous and hopeful. He sows seeds where you would not expect - rocky ground, among bushes, along a path. I really like the painting of the sower by Pieter Bruegel - as it shows how widespread the sower travelled and the variety of terrain he covered.

If you had limited seed, you would be more careful would you not? But the sower is so generous he throws the seed, hoping for the best.

And he is rewarded – some seeds are lost but the harvest is great indeed.

My interpretation of this parable is as follows: God's love, like the seed, is unlimited. He scatters it lovingly everywhere. Some of the seed may not grow but God does not give up. He does not abandon anyone. And the harvest of souls will be rich – even greater than the generosity of the scattering of the seeds.

But when Jesus tells the parable a second time, the meaning has changed.

Now the focus moves from the seed to the soil - the soil now stands for different types of people. Some people will not receive God's love and will not be harvested. Only some will be saved.

And in between the two tellings we have this very harsh statement of Jesus: I tell parables so some don't understand and will not be forgiven.

Why would Jesus, who freely forgave the man lowered from the roof, not want to forgive people? Think of the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus' whole life, and death, was to bring forgiveness.

What is happening here?

Biblical scholars tell us that the first version of the parable – the one which is more hopeful – existed before Mark's gospel was written down. The second telling of it – the harsh version – and the harsh statement about not forgiving people – was added late by Mark when he wrote the Gospel. We know this because there are words attributed to Jesus in the second version which do not appear anywhere else in the sayings of Jesus. Rather, the language of the second telling belongs to the early church.

Mark's Gospel was written to a church which was being persecuted. It makes sense when you are being attacked that you close ranks – that you divide people into 'us' and 'them'. This does not mean we can't learn from scripture here or that scripture is less beautiful because it was written during a time when the church was confused and afraid.

This passage shows us how the early church interpreted one of Jesus' parables and applied it to their own context. It gives us permission to consider how we should interpret Jesus' parables for our own context.

And we can learn from what the early church did. This passage shows us that the same problems which faced the church when Mark wrote his Gospel are the same problems we face today. We can relate to them – when we are afraid of losing our identity, our church, our sense of security, it is all too easy to divide the people of God into different camps.

This parable often leads people to worry about what kind of soil they are: am I a soil in which the word of God can grow?

And this tendency still lives in the Church today. A few weeks ago the Church of England consecrated its first female bishop – a wonderful day not just for the Church of England but the worldwide Church. Yet, reports have come out saying that the Archbishop of York, who laid hands on Libby Lane to make her a bishop, will not lay hands on a man to make him a bishop the following week. Why?

Because there are those who believe if the Archbishop of York laid hands on a woman before laying hands on the man, then the man's ministry would be "tainted! Some in his congregation have said that if this male bishop is tainted then the sacraments he celebrated would also be tainted. Children would not be baptized properly. The Lord's Supper would be made worthless.

All because the Archbishop laid hands on a woman first.

Such attitudes go back to our reading. Jesus taught a parable of the boundless love of God – a love which touches all people, even those some would deem a waste of time, beyond hope. A persecuted and troubled church turns this parable into a text which can set people against each other and makes them worry about who is in and who is out.

But we must remember what Jesus taught in the earlier version of the parable: God is generous with his love. It is for everyone. God is at work even in places where the Church is afraid to go. And the future harvest will be beyond counting. This is what God's love is like. This is the Gospel. This is the core of what we believe.

Talk 2

Earlier I asked you to think about the Gospel message – and how hard it is to describe something which we have no words for. Jesus used parables.

But parables only work when they come from the context in which people live. Jesus did not randomly choose to talk about seeds and farmers because he had little imagination. He chose these things because he was living in a large agricultural community.

You can almost imagine Jesus surrounded by people – all desperately seeking answers, wanting to know what the future kingdom will be like. Will it be better than this? Will there be no more pain and fear? Will we be safe? Will we be loved?

And you can imagine Jesus looking around him and seeing some sheep. God's love is like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep. Or seeing someone sowing seeds. God's love is like a sower scattering his seeds with reckless abandon – such is God's love for you.

But we don't live in such a society anymore. If Jesus had come in the year 2015 what comparisons, what parables would he have used instead?

Another way of asking the same question is to say: we are the ambassadors of Jesus to the world. What comparisons, what parables should we be using – to share the Gospel with the people of Govan and Linthouse – the people God has called us to share the good news with?

There was a Christian missionary, Vincent Donovan, who lived in the 1960s and 1970s with the Masai people in Africa.

But the Masai people were pastoral – they kept livestock. They looked down upon farmers who planted crops and worked with seeds.

So the simplistic telling of Jesus' parables would not work. The Masai would not be interested in this morning's reading – thinking that Jesus was not speaking to them because he was talking about seeds.

And to an extent they are right – Jesus was not talking to them directly. He was talking to Galilean farmers 2000 years earlier. He was using parables for people who lived in a different part of the world.

So we need to re-tell the Gospel through new stories, comparisons, and parables. Vincent Donovan learned that not only did the Masai people have to learn about Christianity; he also had to re-learn it. He had to learn how to communicate it to a different people living in a different context.

So we too must work together to answer my opening question. What is the Gospel? How do we share it with the people living in our community?

The only way we can answer this is to spend time with them. Like Vincent Donovan we can't assume we have all the answers. Yes, we are the Church, but the church cannot exist in a vacuum. We are not just the church but the Church in Govan and Linthouse. So we must spend time with the people who live here. We must get to know them.

This is why our Messy Mondays are so important. It is not just one project amongst many that we carry out every week. Rather -it provides us an opportunity to come alongside people who have never been part of our church tradition - to teach them but also to learn from them.

Do you know the people in our parish who come to Messy Monday? Do you know what their struggles are? Their hopes? Their dreams?

If not, how can we fulfill our task of sharing the Gospel with them? Expecting them to come to us on a Sunday morning will not work. Thinking we have all the answers will not work.

Only by living with and sharing the lives of the people outside the church can we relearn what the Gospel is in the context in which we live.

And we must be willing to go there. Like the seed scattered in places where you would not expect, we are to go and find God already working, already loving and inviting us to join in. And maybe they too can teach us something about Christ – because it is in the dark and lonely places that Christ is to be found. When we go into the world Jesus is waiting for us – saying come and love these people.

There is no outside and inside. No us and them. No pure and tainted. God loves all and is at work in all – and he has called us to join him. This is what we believe. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

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