

COMFORT in North Carrick

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Providing comfort to the people of North Carrick at a time of crisis
Sunday 19th July 2020

TOURISTS OR PILGRIMS?

In Scotland, hotels are now permitted to reopen and accommodate aspiring guests. Indeed, in this summer season, our country should have been a welcome venue for tourists, with sightseers out in force, and our popular tourist attractions overflowing with visitors from all parts of the world.

Many tourist attractions were created for that purpose only - to attract tourists. For instance, Blackpool Tower, EuroDisney, Alton Towers and Windsor Safari Park were all created with that intention. Tourism is the only reason for their existence.



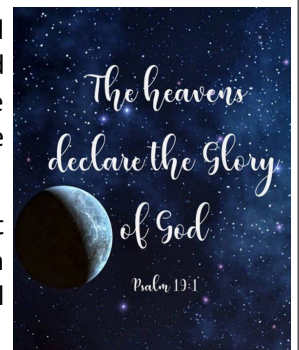
There are places people will visit, which do not owe their origin to a burgeoning tourist industry. We think, for example, of the great Border Abbeys: Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Jedburgh. Nearer to home is the roofless ruin of Crossraguel Abbey, now a tourist landmark for those who wish to stop and survey the architectural merit of a previous age. These were built, however, not as tourist attractions, but as places of Christian pilgrimage, telling us 'How great is God!' or 'How great thou art!'

The original designers and builders had no other motive than to express the glory of God through the beauty of these places of pilgrimage. Over the centuries, such monuments to Christian faith have evolved into tourist venues, but if we enter a great cathedral or small country church with a true understanding of its primary purpose, we suddenly see the building in its proper context as a place of Christian pilgrimage.

There are people who pass through life as a tourist. They move quickly from one place to another: they seldom put down roots, and have little or no sense of the eternal. Their life is a state of perpetual motion, and like the tourist, their attention is limited to the short-term and to the transient. They see no spiritual dimension to life and its experiences.

There are also people who pass through life as a pilgrim. They see a divine hand and purpose in everything. They agree with Psalm 24:1 that the earth belongs to the Lord and all that is in it, and with Psalm 19:1 that the heavens declare the glory of God, while the skies proclaim the work of his hands. They have a deep understanding, and love for the sacred, and see their life as God-blessed and God-directed.

In 1877 the English poet, Jesuit priest and teacher, Gerard Manley Hopkins, wrote a sonnet called God's Grandeur. The first lines affirm his conviction that 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God', and those who pass through life as a pilgrim, and not a tourist, will appreciate the world and everything in it in this way.



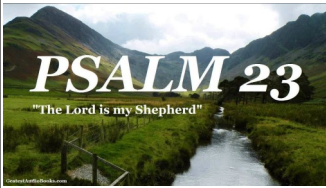
Indeed, the only hymn John Bunyan is credited with writing, recalling the words of Hebrews 11:13, declares that the Christian's 'first avowed intent' is to be a pilgrim, and that they ought to 'labour night and day' to attain this stature. How would we describe ourselves? Are we tourists, flitting through life from pillar to post? Or are we pilgrims, who see God's glory in every person and in every place? Tourists or pilgrims? A relevant question for our day!

***"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it;
the world, and all who live in it."***

The Rev. W. Gerald Jones

From Rev Dr John Lochrie, Locum minister at Crosshill and Maybole Parish Church

The Psalms have long held a place in worship. They were at the centre of synagogue worship in Jesus' day. They were his 'hymn book'. The Psalms are usually attributed to King David though it is unlikely that he was the author of all of them. It is generally agreed that he did write the 23rd. Certainly it is full of imagery of his life as a shepherd. That is what makes it so appropriate for so many occasions in our lives. It is a Psalm that somehow contains almost all of life.



The 23rd Psalm has sometimes been called the Psalm for all seasons because of its popularity at weddings and funerals. It is unfortunate that it is now used so often at these special services that it seldom features in Sunday worship although it would be quite possible to have a service in which only the 23rd Psalm was sung, for it has been set to more than enough tunes.

Crimond is now the usual, though Wiltshire is also common, but before the Queen's wedding in 1947 at which the psalm was sung to Crimond, Orlington was the tune normally used in many churches across Scotland. But other tunes fit the words of the psalm equally well.

It is said that there are over 100 different versions of the psalm; such is its popularity, even one set to the theme tune of the TV series the Vicar of Dibley. In fact had it not been for the Lockdown the choir of the Parish Church would have sung this as the anthem during one of the services before Easter. As well as the psalm itself there are paraphrases such as the hymn "The King of Love my Shepherd is" and other versions such as Brother James Air and the setting by the French Jesuit priest Joseph Gelineau. All of this comes together to make this psalm possibly the best loved of them all.

Through these last difficult months many will have found a degree of solace in its words, especially the verse that speaks of death's dark vale. The psalmist is at pains to reassure us that even there we are not alone for the shepherd with his rod and staff journeys with us even there to guide and protect. And there is further comfort in its ending with the assurance that goodness and mercy shall follow us all our days of our life and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. It is said that these words have a certain royal approval for it appears that the translators of the Authorised Version used words for this verse that were proposed by King James himself.

To ignore this psalm is to miss so much. This is very much a case where we ought not to allow any familiarity to lead to contempt and dismissal. There is so much here that speaks to so many aspects of our live that make this a psalm to be cherished, not forgotten.

From Marguerite Hunter Blair, Our Lady and St Cuthbert's

There was quite a big frog sitting on my husband's shoes when I went to feed the dogs. He loves frogs, toads better! I took this as a good omen as he isn't very well this week.

We often look for signs to help us through difficult times and make sense of things. For this reason, Jesus speaks to his followers and to us in parables, telling simple stories with two meanings and using familiar signs and comparisons.

Jesus introduced many of these parables with a question. For example, in the parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus answered the question, "What is the Kingdom of God like?"

Jesus explained to his disciples in Matthew 13:10-17 that those who sought God would grasp the deeper meaning.

In this Gospel Jesus provides an answer when asked about his use of parables. The disciples asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you..."

Scholars have commented that although parables seem simple, the messages they convey are deep, and central to the teachings of Jesus. In the parable of the seeds we learn that some people have strong faith and remain dedicated to a Christian lifestyle, even when things are difficult.

This brings me back to the Frog—Firmly Rely On God!



Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God in parables using everyday examples to point out this or that feature. He compares it to treasure to be sought and bought at any price, to the one ingredient, like yeast in bread, which makes life rise above its capacity, to a tree which has room for every bird in the sky to nest etc. He left his Church the work of establishing the foundations of that kingdom in the hearts and minds of people here on earth.



As we look around our world today, we might be forgiven for wondering how far we have succeeded. But we have to keep trying, especially as we come out of lockdown and face unprecedented challenges to life as it used to be. Now is the time to keep asking how our faith in Christ can contribute to rebuilding communities in line with God's kingdom values.

The challenges are immense, not just financially, economically and internationally as we listen to them being expounded by politicians and health and social care experts. The growing concern over the possibility of a second and more dangerous wave of the virus presents a further challenge to our faith in combatting fear and despair. Somehow by our ordinary, mundane and often quiet example we have to fly the flag of justice, peace and love—the marks of God's kingdom. Maybe we don't wield much political, financial or economic clout, but socially, as individuals in the small communities which make up the larger, we can surely make our voice heard in the marketplace.

The hard bit is that that change has to start in our hearts, where Jesus told us the kingdom must exist first and foremost. There the Holy Spirit tests the waters. It's in our everyday familiar tasks in families, workplaces and local communities that change begins and takes root in time. Communities will be as good or as bad as the people who make them up.

So far we have seen new and encouraging signs in this pandemic—neighbours looking out for the vulnerable, food distributed where most needed, local and national government support for the hardest hit and of course the courageous example of health and care staff. As Christians we can try to ensure such practices are embedded in our society. We pray that Christ's love for all, working in and through us, will help us overcome whatever lies ahead.

Ellen Hawkes



In this Sunday's Gospel we hear the story of Martha and Mary. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching, she seeks to grow closer to God through the words of Jesus. For women to be disciples, students of great teachers, would not be possible in the culture of that time and yet when Martha complains and wants Mary to help her, Jesus mildly rebukes her. To seek to grow closer to God, to know Him and love Him was the right thing for Mary to do at that time.

Prior to the story of Martha and Mary we have the parable of the Good Samaritan leading from the question, who is my neighbour?

These two teachings of Jesus are pointers to His overarching message, love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

We have had several months now separated from the normal demands of our daily life, an opportunity to spend time at the feet of Jesus, an opportunity to grow closer to God, to know Him and love Him more. Guided by the Holy Spirit we have spent time discerning what discipleship will mean for us in a changed world, what it means to love God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Slowly restrictions are being lifted and what a joy it will be to be able to worship together again, it seems so long since we have been able to meet with our faith families.

We have been able to spend time loving God, now we must show that love to our neighbours, sharing the love and compassion of Christ and bringing His joy and His light to those who will be facing this time with nervousness and possibly fear.

May the Holy Spirit guide us and strengthen us as we come together again as Christ's disciples in this place.

Fr. Jim., St Oswald's

Lynne Rankin Maybole Parish Church

I did the oddest thing this week—I got on a train.

Now this wouldn't have been an odd thing 6 months ago. Most of my family and friends stay in and around Glasgow with some in Fife, and as I don't drive, visiting them means getting a bus or train (usually three or four). So, I would travel on public transport quite regularly.

But this was my first time on a train in the 'new normal', and to be honest it was a bit scary.

First of all, I had to remember to take a folding chair with me. My son Calvin had visited last week and told us that Ayr bus station seats had been removed to stop the spread of Covid. But I have really bad arthritis in both knees, which means I can't stand for any length of time. So, when I go out now for any reason, if I'm going further than a couple of hundred yards, I take a chair.

Then of course I had to remember to take my mask. I have a lovely bright orange one, which I ordered through Fairtrade—not realising of course that with my hair in a ponytail and my mask on I look like a demented chicken. (I need to tie my hair back now as I don't have a hairdressing appointment till the 7th August!)

Turns out there are still seats at Maybole rail station, but these were wet on account of the Scottish school holiday weather.

Then the train came we all donned our masks and prepared to board. "Not at this door", the guard said and pointed towards the middle doors, where we all filed in 2 metres apart and found separate seats. We were on our way. My glasses were steaming up, I took them off and tried to get use to wearing my mask. It felt odd—no conductor came to give us tickets, no accidentally hearing other folks' conversations—it was quiet.

As we arrived in Ayr, I had to change trains. I gathered up my courage again, kept my glasses off and stood 2 metres back from the man already at the doors. I held on to the pole by my side and wondered if anyone else had done that since it was last cleaned.

Out on the platform, a hand sanitising station was right in front of me, I used it (just in case). Then more out of habit than anything, I walked over the bridge to the other platforms to find the Glasgow train, following the woman in front. I was about halfway across when I realised there were signs on the floor, it was one way and I was going in the wrong direction. I paused for a second, then continued over. I don't like to break rules generally, but I was halfway and sanitised and could blame my lack of observation on my bad eyesight. My glasses were still in my pocket.

I assume I should have left the station and walked all the way round to get to the other side. I didn't find out. I unfolded my seat 2metres away from other waiting passengers and waited on the Glasgow train. When it arrived only a minute or two before it was due to leave, it was seven carriages long! So, we had plenty of space to spread out. I haven't seen a train that long on the Ayr line since I was a girl, "goin' doon the watter fur the fair".

All in all, it was an odd journey and I arrived at my friends in Glasgow shaking but well. We had a lovely visit, she has been shielding for four months and I was only her second visitor.

Coming home was a lot less exciting; my husband came and picked me up. So, I returned to a grey Maybole with the roof down on the old convertible, breathing in all that good Scottish air.

Now why am I sharing all this? Well like me you might not drive, or even if you do, my story might help you see what other people are going through. Travelling now is something psychological as well as physical. I prayed before I left the house, I prayed on the train and I prayed when I arrived safely home. I could not have undertaken that journey alone; I was just too nervous. With God at my side I had the courage I needed to get to where I felt I should be.

Finally, there is a bit in the Bible where Jesus says that if the people are quiet, the trees and the rocks themselves, will shout and sing for the glory of God.

As we are contemplating worship in the "new normal" without singing, I saw this picture on social media. We are still not meant to hug one another but stay socially distant.

Perhaps God knew how much I miss hugging my family and friends but now at least I can see them again.

