

Moderator's Second Service

Let us worship God, Praise the Lord all you people.

HYMN Love divine all loves excelling

Love divine all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down
Fix in us thy humble dwelling all thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus thou art all compassion pure unbounded love thou art
Visit us with thy salvation enter every trembling heart

Come almighty to deliver let us all thy life receive
Suddenly return and never, never more thy temples leave
Thee we would be always blessing serve thee as thy hosts above
Pray and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love

Finish then thy new creation pure and spotless let us be
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee
Changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place
Till we cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder love and praise

READING Ephesians 2:1-10 Good News Translation. Read by the Rev William Wilson

In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. ² At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God. ³ Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.

⁴ But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, ⁵ that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. ⁶ In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. ⁷ He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus. ⁸⁻⁹ For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. ¹⁰ God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.

REFLECTION

Last time when we were together we were reflecting on one of those big questions, who am I; this question of our identity. I spoke a little bit about the book Sophie's World. How it happens in the book is simply this; Sophie checks out the mailbox at her house and she finds in it a simple envelope and in the

envelope there is one piece of paper and on that piece of paper are three words only – WHO ARE YOU? As Sophie reflects on that she begins to realise she has no idea. She finds it odd to think that she really doesn't know who she is.

I wonder if it is all that odd? I wonder if in fact it's true of many of us, that we are not all together sure of who we are. How would you answer that question? If you had picked up that envelope today, if it had been posted through your letterbox and you opened it and on that one piece of paper were those three questions WHO ARE YOU how would you answer? Last time I defined my identity by saying first and foremost that I am a child of God. I am a child of God and flowing out of that, as I try to work out about what it means to be a child of God, then I begin to think about my connectedness, my relationship to God Himself, to other people, those around me and to the very planet on which I live. That's at least a beginning of an answer to the question who am I from a Christian point of view.

Following on from the question who am I, which as we've said is about our identity. Following on comes this question, why am I here? Which is a question of purpose. What is the point of my existence? Is there any reason? Is there any point in me being here? We all need at some point to work out our purpose.

Of course as a Christian there are so many parts to that answer and I'm sure it's not one against the other but a combination of those many different aspects. We could think, for example, back to Jesus when he called those first disciples, when he said to them, "Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people." Maybe that is part of our purpose, yes to follow Jesus and to fish for people, which is about embracing other people in the net of God's love, expressed in Jesus, or at the end of the gospels when we find Jesus again with his followers now after of course his death and rising again and saying to them, "Go into all the world, make disciples of all nations baptising them and teaching them all that they must obey. So surely that for the Christian will be part of our purpose; to go into all the world to share the good news of Jesus and to lead others into that life of following after him as his disciples.

Or what about this as we consider further the question of our purpose. The very last verse we heard read to us from the letter to the Ephesians this morning; God has made us what we are and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds which he has already prepared for us to do.

Sometimes people get a bit cagey when you begin to talk in these terms. Folks, I want to say is we are not saved by doing good works, good deeds. No of course not and we don't need to go down that road. Clearly it says just a little earlier in the passage; it is by grace we are saved through faith, the amazing grace of God shown to us through Jesus Christ it is by grace we are saved. So we are not saved **by** doing good works, good deeds but it is abundantly clear in the passage that we are saved **for** a life of good deeds.

The jaw dropping part of this passage is when it says that God has already prepared in advance this life of good deeds for us, this life of good works and service.

Folks stop and think about that for a moment. The Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of all things bothers about us, about each one of us and has plans and purpose for our lives. I wonder if at time folks are looking for perhaps something more dramatic. Well maybe that comes but isn't it a great starting point in terms of thinking about our purpose, about why we are here, to think in terms of those good works that God has prepared for us to do. It seems to me that if we started there we'd be on the right road.

Maybe the way to begin is by simple acts of random kindness. I noticed in our town, just a street or so away from where we live, one household has put a cardboard box at their doorstep. It has been there pretty well all through lockdown and in that box they put items one after another and there's a simple sign on it which says, "Please take anything that you need." Well there's an act of random kindness. It warms my heart to see that kind of thing taking place.

And two observations I make are these:

Number one, do we have to stop these acts of kindness when we get back to something like normal and out of lockdown. I'd love to think our communities would continue to be kind in those kind of ways. And the second observation is this, of course kindness is not restricted to Christian people or churches. Far from it. Many folks are showing kindness now, many folks are engaging in these good works and good deeds. And I for one rejoice to see that.

Acts of random of kindness may be the starting point for us as we seek to put into action the purpose for which we have been created. But there's more to it for sure. We might at one moment be random and at the next very deliberate. And it comes to that deliberate working out of our purpose then I think we need to look no further than what's offered to us by the prophet Micah, who encourages us to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. Now when we begin to take these things together then we have the beginning of a strategy, a deliberate way of living in terms of our purpose being enacted.

What would this acting justly begin to look like in a world that is still so horribly divided? What would acting justly look like when some have so much and others next to nothing? What would acting justly look like in the face of, for example, this recent pandemic when it has been so abundantly clear that those in poorer communities have suffered considerably more so than others and in the light of the most recent debates what would acting justly look like when some are still treated differently because of the colour of their skin, because of their ethnicity? It can't go on. Acting justly is what is called for from all of us as we seek to work out our purpose, why we are here.

And what would it look like as we started all the more to love mercy. Might it be that we would be engaged with forgiving much more than is perhaps the case? Might it be that loving mercy might require of you to forgive that person or those people who have offended you, who have hurt you beyond measure? Would love mercy involve reaching out to them?

And walking humbly. Might that mean that we have to listen more than tell? Might it mean that we had to begin to defer rather than insist and might it mean that we move well beyond it's all about me.

So, I am a child of God and so are you and as God has plan and purpose for my life and as for me so for you. Go and live.

HYMN What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry everything to Him in prayer
O what peace we often forfeit O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations is there trouble anywhere
We should never be discouraged take it to the Lord in prayer
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share
Jesus knows our every weakness take it to the Lord in prayer

Are we weak and heavy-laden cumbered with a load of care
Jesus is our only refuge take it to the Lord in prayer
Do your friends despise forsake you take it to the Lord in prayer
In His arms He'll take and shield you will find a solace there

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION The Very Reverend Dr Susan Brown Convenor of the Faith Impact Forum

Faith Impact is where the Church hits the ground running!
The job of the Forum is to help individuals, congregations, Presbyteries and the Church as a whole, to live out Jesus call for 'all to have life and have it in fullness' (Jn 10:10)
We are about caring for those on the margins - in Scotland and in every corner of the world
And we are about caring too, for the world itself.
How do we pursue the peace and justice Jesus called for - for people and the world?
How do we work with our Lord in transforming this world in the light of God's love?

By listening to people's stories. By speaking out. By standing up and reaching out. By holding and of course by praying.

So let us pray:

Heavenly Father, since the beginning of time you have so generously given to us.

The breath you breathed in creation brought every living thing into being,

Help us we pray, not to take that creation for granted

But to care for it, protect it nurture it

As well as enjoy it...

Help us to live responsibly.

You have given us people too, to share this world with.

When we fail to notice the needs of others,

When we don't hear their cries or see their tears,

Open our ears and our eyes our hearts and our hands

To hear and see

To heed and help.

Father, You sent your Son for the sake of all humanity -

Inspire us to live as sisters and brothers

And to live that connectedness

Generously and lovingly

Enjoying the companionship of your people in every part of the world

As we journey through this life together.

Heavenly Father, like your Son,

Plant in us a discontent with injustice.

Give us the courage to stand against what is unfair

And help us to reach out to those who are suffering...

Suffering through poverty, prejudice or oppression

May we dare to speak out for change in systems

That perpetuate such suffering

And model that change in the way we live

As individuals

And as a Church.

Give us the courage, Lord God, to love even as we are loved

And to do so in the name of Jesus Christ and for his sake... Amen

HYMN**The Celtic Blessing in Gaelic and English**

May His favour be upon you and a thousand generations and your family and your children and their children and their children.

May His presence go before you and behind you and beside you, all around you and within you. He is with you, He is with you in the morning, in the evening, in the coming and the going, in the weeping and the rejoicing, He is for you He is for you.

BENEDICTION

And so send us out Lord with your blessing, with your favour which lasts from generation to generation which extends to our children and children's children.

Send us out knowing that we are children of God and that our purpose is in serving you. Show us how you would have us live and may the blessing of God Almighty Father Son and Holy Spirit be upon each one of you today and forever more Amen

The Lord bless you and keep you, make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.