



Giffnock: the Park Church
Sunday 6th December 2020
Light at the End of the Tunnel



Good morning everyone,

As always I hope you have remained in good health this past week and what a week it has been. We have had the first cold winds of winter with not just frost but snow on the ground. We have had the breaking news of a long promised Covid Vaccination Programme that is about to start and how the UK is the first to initiate such a programme across the world and joy of joys we look forward to this, the last week (hopefully), of Tier 4 Lock down which has hammered the central belt and churches across it, some suspending their services of Reflection and Prayer, returning to a virtual way doing things again while others like ourselves have ploughed on even with a drastic reduction in numbers allowed to attend. As we come to last five or six days of the lockdown and a vaccine visibly on the horizon, there could only be one theme for this Sunday which is of course "Light at the end of the Tunnel".

It's an old expression dating no doubts back to the heady days of preparing steam trains to be able to course their way through the mountains. Explosives would have been used to tunnel their way under a mountain and as they got near the end of tunnelling through the mountain and as the last explosion would see the dust settle the cry would go up - "I can see light at the end of the tunnel".

That expression also remains an appropriate theme for this morning's reflection where we continue our theme of Advent - Jesus the Light of the World has come. We are planning for a different Christmas this year, different from any other in terms of services and expectation of being able to see loved ones over the festive period. Hopefully in this regard, 2020 is a year that will not be repeated. In the meantime I hope you enjoy this Devotional, as we look to the week ahead and give thanks for the week that has gone by. I hope you manage to steer clear of the all the sniffles around at this time of the year as we at the manse wish you all God's blessing at this Festive time.

Yours in Christ

Calum D. Macdonald

CHURCH NEWS



Our Flowers in Church this week have been donated by Mrs Margaret Young in fond memory of her husband Ronnie and her sons Alan and Craig.

Christmas Arrangements

We will formally set out the arrangements for Next Sunday in relation to arrangements for Christmas Eve & Christmas Day
Watch this space



Meeting of the Congregational Board & Kirk Session

Wed 9th December 2020
7.30pm

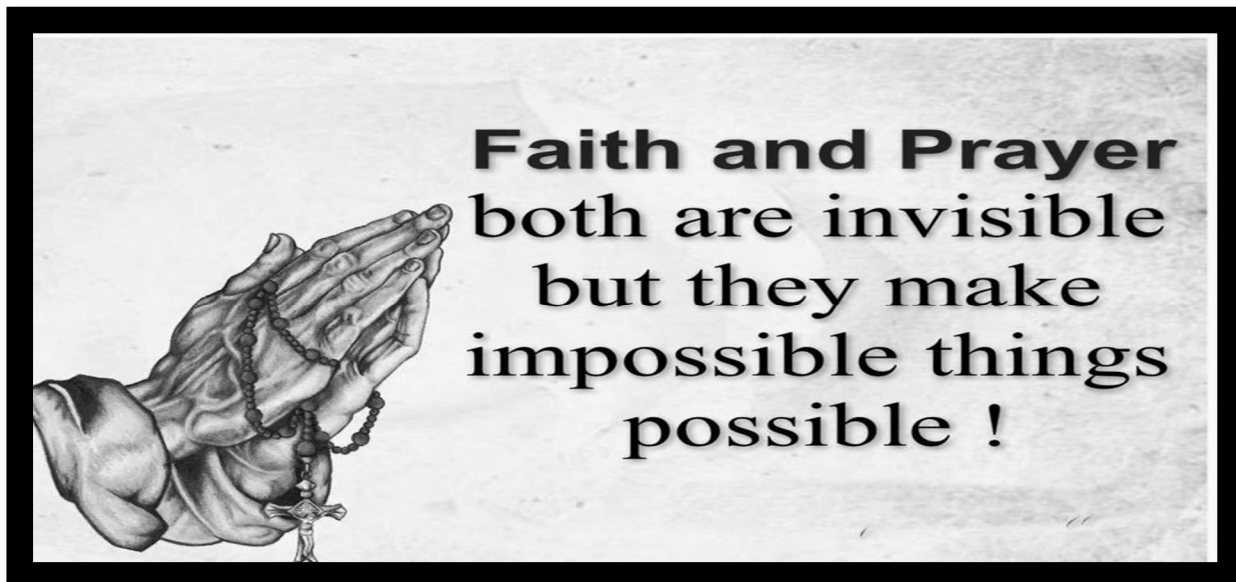
The Kirk Session will meet for a short meeting after the Board has met.



Church Mice

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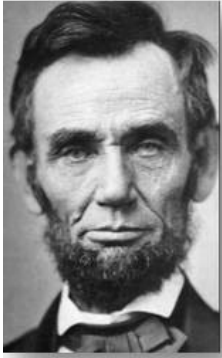
This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (1 John 5: 14)

Let us pray,

Our Gracious God and Father, the cry of the Hymn writer is Come Thou Long expected Jesus, the one who was born to set your people free. While in the course of this week we have had much to be thankful for, we can be most thankful for this time of the year when the day is shorter and the darkness of night pre-dominates at this time for us. Father in Heaven, the Joy of the Advent season reminds us that the Light has indeed come and that light is Your Son and our Lord. Excite us with the wonder of your Wisdom and Power. As we look to You once more. See with our hearts this day a genuine desire to express our thankfulness for the gift of Christmas, the sacrifice of Easter and the promise of eternity.

Our father we recognise your love shed abroad in our hearts but we also see the things that conflict with it, these deeds and thoughts and words which are sinful in your gaze. Forgive us for those moments when we opt to do what we should not do and not do the things we should. In our Advent celebration helps us to see once more the purpose and the promise of a saviour's birth and sins forgiven.

By Your Spirit this day, institute within us that sense of your Peace that exceeds every comprehension at times in our world, in our homes and in our hearts. As your promised peace effects change within us, bring us to that place of Joy in Your service where we can seek You with a sense of Gladness and Love all the while extolling your praises. As we celebrate this advent Season Gracious God, giving thanks for the Good news of a Covid Vaccine developed, We thank you for the greater news of the Coming of our Lord Jesus all those years ago and so as we look to the celebration Christmas 2020, we see an example in his life that we can follow, that in his sacrifice and his victory over sin and Death there is a hope and joy like no other through the gift of faith, we thank you, we honour you and we praise you for all that has been achieved in Jesus' name ... Amen.



In regard to this great book, I have but to say, I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for this book we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.

(Abraham Lincoln)

John 1: 1 - 18

(New International Version)

The Word Became Flesh

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ **In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.***

*⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

*⁹ **The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.** ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

*¹⁴ **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.



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Good morning,

Such great news this week, given in such a fanfare of proclamation that we here in the UK were to be the first in the world to engage with the task of a vaccination programme using the Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine with the further good news that additional vaccine products may also be available in the UK very soon. There was such a sense of patriotic fervour about this coming to the UK population that they seemed to forget that this was not a British innovation as such. The company is a jointly owned German and American Venture based in the Netherlands using staff from Holland and other places. I am sure in the politics of all this, there were a few raised eyebrows at some of the comments expressed in the excitement of it all and this perhaps explains why the US Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Anthony Fauci initially made critical noises before retracting them quietly. The bottom line in all this is that we have a cure for the Covid-19 virus now on our doorstep. We have every reason to shout about that from the rooftops.

When the nation went into that first Lockdown on the 23rd March, (a date I will never forget as that was my birthday) I and probably many of you would never have imagined that the story of the Covid-19 Pandemic would be with us all this time. Personally, I had envisaged this being with us until the month's end of June, perhaps stretching to August by the latest. Here we are, only a few weeks away from Christmas all these months later where we have had to endure a second period of stringent lockdown which all going according to plan will see restrictions begin to ease up later this week. (We can but hope.)

There has been a great deal said about this time describing it as a Dark period in our history where we have seen across the UK some 60,000 deaths, massive unemployment and job uncertainty. Many of our teenage children went through terrible angst and worry over the exam period and many of the younger children have really struggled with not being at school and missing their friends dreadfully. Some children particularly new born children may never have known people to be without a mask. Parents at home and adults in general have contended with the pressures of this and for many this culminated in a real threat to their emotional well being and mental health while Health and Social Care workers worked their socks off on the front line to save lives while even putting their own lives

physically at risk and on hold from their families for fear of taking infection to them.

Meanwhile those in the second lines of defence in this story keep our schools open, maintain the transport of goods and serve in the supermarkets allowing us all relief from worry to some degree at least about our kid's education or finding somewhere to put food on the table. These have been incredibly dark times and I suspect that when we look back in the new dawn of a Vaccinated and Covid protected time we will realise even more so, how dark a time this has been. I am sure we ourselves have all been impacted by this Pandemic or at least know someone who has been affected by these times, I know I certainly do.

These introductory comments from the Gospel Writer who many believe refers to the disciple John on account of the reference made to him as "the Disciple whom Jesus loved". (**John 21: 20**). How do these times we live in all tie in with these opening verses and great words of John Chapter 1, verses often referred to simply as, 'the Prologue'. As I have said before, John's gospel in particular has a very strong sense of the metaphoric language of light and dark referring to good and bad, good times and bad times, good things and bad things happening, good things said and bad things uttered. There are a couple of key verses for us to consider this morning and to do this we need to look at this back to front. Let me explain further by just working through these verse.

Firstly in verse 14 we see a summary of what is about to happen - "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

There is a theological understanding we call the Pre-eminence of Christ that argues that Jesus is God's son and was in existence before the world even came into being. The apostle Paul described in this way....

*"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (**Colossians 1: 15 -17**)*

John chapter 1 of course opens the gospel account by sounding very like the creation accounts of Genesis chapter 1, citing initially almost word for word the start of the Old Testament and throughout the history of the Old Testament people of God there had always been a time where someone was appointed by God to be his spokesperson to the nation and King. Many of these great characters became more well known and learned about attending Sunday School, people like Jacob and Moses, King David and the prophet Nathan, Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the old Testament prophets.

However, there has been a gap in time of some 400 years where God has not stirred up a Prophet on his behalf and so people begin to read the Old Testament

Law and the Prophets and begin to see that something new was going to happen and Bethlehem becomes a city prophesied to produce the Messiah, (Micah 5:2) who would be one who would come as the Great Redeemer. As we look back on the life of Jesus, we can see how these Old Testament prophesies of which there are hundreds were all fulfilled by Jesus in his birth, his early life and later on his, three year Ministry, Death and Resurrection. These were dark days for the people of Israel 2000 years ago and life was anything but easy as a nation under the control and occupation of the Roman Empire. But in these dark days a light was to come that would change everything and we of course believe that the light spoken of was the person of Jesus. That is where we come to the reading of John 1: verse 4,

“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”

He would be the only one who could take us from the dark world of Sin to the Light of God's Love and our redemption. Last week we spoke about the uniqueness of Christ where He was more than just an ordinary man, he was exceptional and like no other. John chapter 1 and indeed his Gospel account proclaims him to be much more even Divine in his humanity. The 19th century hymn writer Cecil Frances Alexander, author of the Easter hymn 'There is a green hill far away' sums it up better I think when he said,

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

We are celebrating this week that after 8 months a vaccine has brought an end to incarceration in our own homes for fear of being infected by this awful and deadly virus. We are celebrating the Good news that we may be able to return to some sort of normal life again free of restriction and we are even perhaps beginning to hope again that maybe, just maybe, jobs can be saved and livelihoods preserved.

The good news proclaimed these past 2020 years has been that the problem of Sin having been resolved, is now on offer to all who will receive this great gift from God securing not just our lives today but for all eternity. The prophetic words of John's gospel reveal a tremendous sadness for us.

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”

With the promise of the Vaccine there will be those who cannot see past their suspicions and distrust of good news that they fail to recognise or accept this gift to them. Likewise with the Christmas story of a precious gift

from God offering more than this life can offer through his Earth-given Son, there will be so many who will intensively prepare for and celebrate Christmas this year where their focus will be on the fripperies of the occasion and not really on the occasion itself. Celebrations with family, parties to enjoy and gifts given and received are all good things but not at the expense of the central core thing that Christmas truly means.

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)

In the weeks to come we will no doubts have politicians declaring how we are coming out of these dark times in to brighter days. I wonder who will be the first to say, we can see light at the end of the tunnel. People whose health has been compromised so much that they have been at death's door will often talk of the near death experience that usually draws them closer to the Light. Whatever analogy and metaphors we use these days to describe our situation, the central theme and the message of Christmas will be what it was , what it is and always will be - that Christmas is truly a time for us to celebrate, perhaps all the more so on account of these Covid prevalent days. The Light is not just at the end of the tunnel but here with us in the tunnel bringing us back into the light of God's deepest love for us.

Have a great week

Calum



An Advent Prayer

God of light and hope,
look upon us in love,
and fill us with the Spirit of Jesus
that we may love you and serve you in your kingdom.
Protect us during this week
and keep us watchful in prayer
as we await the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ,
who is the light of the world,
and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

