

# **Paisley Abbey**



## **Abbey Herald**

**March 2021**

In my former office at Bothwell Parish Church there is an unbroken record of Ministers and Rectors stretching back from 31 March 2019 (date of my retirement) to the early twelfth century.

During all that time, not once have the main doors of the building been closed to worshippers. Even in medieval times, when the armies of Edward I and Edward II travelled north to bombard the Norman castle at Bothwell and encamped within and around the building, the ancient liturgy was celebrated. The strong advice given at the beginning of this Covid pandemic that “*public worship be suspended until further notice*” is without precedent.

Over the past year since COVID restrictions have been applied, our Interim Moderator and Kirk Session have had little option but to accede to official advice from the Scottish Government and Church of Scotland authorities. Given the uncertainties of the ongoing threat presented by coronavirus, there would be no joy in conducting worship within an empty church and it is our duty to think of others whether working within the pressurised zone of the NHS or the elderly and vulnerable.

But I do wonder if the Church’s withdrawal will have a lasting effect in how the Church is regarded in the future. Will the congregation return when the doors are reopened? Will the threat of death stalking the land bring people to a more intense sense of their place as human beings in the great scheme of things? Or, maybe, people will start to wonder what they ever needed the Church for in the first place. Will all our regular worshipping friends and others who are elderly members of the congregation survive to the time when we reopen?

At time of writing, in Scotland, no-one actually knows just how long restrictions will last. Just as for some small businesses, I suspect some small, financially weak congregations may not survive. I have long held the view that, in time, bankruptcy will close congregations presently clinging to life by their fingertips. Churches exist only for one reason: the worship of God. If that cannot happen then as the poet Philip Larkin says in his poem *Church Going* as entering an empty church, he stoops to take off his cycle clips *‘in awkward*

*silence*, pronouncing *'here endeth'* more loudly than intended and hearing *'the echoes snigger briefly'* before wondering *'what is this place for?'*.

What indeed?

Thankfully, our worship at the Abbey has been able to be broadcast via the internet to people isolated at home. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has helped make this possible week by week. Our being able to do so has helped, but only so far. Worship is intrinsically a social activity. No matter how popular it may be, or how useful, social media can only ever be a distant semblance of the real, living thing.

Some argue that you don't need Church to worship God at all. That you can sit at home, or climb a mountain, or sail a boat and commune with the Deity in the silence of your own heart. Such naivety overlooks the fact that such religious faith as we may possess is not of our own creation but is our inheritance received from generations before us. Hopefully, enforced sitting at home may reawaken us to the vital role that meeting together with fellow searchers of truth, meaning and forgiveness has in knitting us together as human beings, dependent upon each other for life and life's joys and necessities.

'Live' religious services may have been suspended, but the love of God has not.

The love of God is for everyone. Sunday by Sunday in our worship, our consistent preaching and praying is that God's love is for all, regardless of race, creed, sexuality, colour or intellect. And for none more than the most vulnerable. Right now, that means all of us who – for whatever reason – may be fearful and anxious.

By the time you read this, the season of Lent will be well underway. It's a time of reflection. A time when we remember that, as Jesus experienced, life can be cruel and unjust, full of suspicion and

conflict. Yet, Jesus did not demur from his ‘calling’. In facing and enduring the ridicule, jealousy and fear of his enemies, Jesus demonstrated that a love that is real and deep can be so powerful that not even death can overcome it. That is why Lent is also a time that leads us eventually into the hope of new possibilities.

If you can, join us in our weekly worship online. Journey with us through the pain and suffering of these Lenten weeks. Then celebrate, with relief and joy, the hope that the Easter Gospel offers. So, let us not grow despondent but look forward to the Abbey ministering to the people of Paisley and beyond in ways creative, faithful and, as yet, unimagined.

Jim Gibson.  
Locum Minister.

## **PARISH REGISTER**

Funeral

24 February Mrs Elspeth Beetham



## **PAISLEY ABBEY.**

### **HOLY WEEK 2021.**

It's my belief that we cannot even begin to understand why Jesus was condemned to death unless we see, in

his life and ministry, moments of discernment which increasingly became cause of such frustration and fear

to those in authority; not because of his might and power but, because, of truth, compassion, love and

integrity. This is why Holy Week remains so important for those seeking insight and understanding of Christian

Faith.

Because of continuing Covid restrictions, services each evening cannot be held within the Abbey. However,

thanks to generous assistance being given, a series of very short recordings is being prepared which will be

broadcast on the Abbey web-site each day throughout Holy Week, March 29 – April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The series is entitled

‘Snap-shots into Life’ – each approximately five minutes in duration.

Jim Gibson

## STANDING ON THE GIANTS OF FAITH

The Very Rev. Dr. John Chalmers explains why those whose stories are remembered should encourage and inspire today.

On the day I graduated, I vividly remember thinking that I was done with slaving over old books and that with hood and gown I was ready for everything that life would throw my way. It is a strange thing to realise in later life that we know so much less than we did in our youth! Of course, graduation was just the beginning and, like most folk, I have learned much more at the university of life than I ever learned in the hallowed halls. There is learning; there is even learning to learn; but there is nothing to equal what we learn on the journey and what we learn from those with whom we share the journey.

Each succeeding generation is truly blessed if it realises the advantage of having learned from those who have gone before. It was Sir Isaac Newton, who said “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”. This is just as true in the world of spiritual development as it is in any other discipline.

Chapter 11 of the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews contains a section that for some reason makes the hairs on the back of my neck bristle. Some people think it is just a list of names but, in fact, it is a description of past heroes of faith who endured; but who never saw the completed work or who never reached the pinnacle they sought. It culminates with these words; *“And what shall I more say for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire; escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valient in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise”*.

It is an admission that the story is never fully completed, the race is never fully run by one generation, but that those who have gone before are like spectators in a great gallery looking on to see what their successors make of their legacy. Nothing, in fact, speaks more of eternity or of some sense of everlasting destiny than the continuum that connects us to the past.

That said, nothing in the great narrative of faith makes us a past-preservation society. We may be privileged to stand on the shoulders of giants, but we need to take what they taught us and reframe it so that it speaks with relevance into the confusion and challenges of our time and place.

The heroes of the past are remembered because they spoke to the urgent needs and injustices of their time and place. In succession it falls to us in our turn to take the substance of our faith and make it relevant in the context we now find ourselves.

There is a paradox in this—for at one level we exist in an atmosphere where professing a faith in God is perhaps more counter cultural than ever before, maybe even infra dig or anti-scientific. While at one and the same time nothing is more relevant in society today than the values and the beliefs that lie at the heart of a deep faith in God.

In the economy of faith, the poor, not the mighty appear first on the balance sheet. Violence is rejected as the way to establish power and authority. Truth and justice are sacred as is in created order. God is not distant and disinterested but gentle and compassionate—suffering alongside those who suffer. That's the message of Jesus and if you tell that story you can add your name to the list of the faithful.

*This article first appeared in the Life and Work magazine of March 2021.*

## **“COLLECTION OF CLUES AT CHRISTMAS-TIDE” COMPETITION**

Fairly unusually, both the winner and the runner up of this Competition are members of the Abbey – often it has worked out (very fairly I always think) that one is a member of the Abbey and the other a very much appreciated supporter.

On 7<sup>th</sup> February, however, when the draw was made, the 2 names drawn were not only both members of the Abbey but both are thoroughly deserving winners as both have been wonderful supporters of these competitions since their inception.

And the names drawn were: -  
first -MARGARET CRAIG  
second - SUE DONN.

I received donations amounting to £433.00 and, with the payments made directly into the bank, the total achieved by this competition was over £500.00.

Sincere thanks are due to everyone who supported the Competition – particularly in these difficult times- and, of course warmest congratulations are sent to Margaret and to Sue.

Well done to you both.

SGC

## **ABBEY AID**

The Abbey Aid fund has been gently ticking over in the last few months. It is surprising how a few small donations add up, since June last year there has been a total of £221.00 collected. Small donations for little acts of kindness such as shopping, and baking, and winnings from fun quizzes and sweepstakes have all contributed. Thank you to all who have remembered about this way of giving to the Abbey.

The following contribution to the Abbey Herald was sent anonymously by a member of the congregation. It takes the form of a letter written to God. I am sure there are others who feel the same way at this time of uncertainty.

## **Dear God**

Of late, I've felt that you have forgotten about me.

This has been a dreadful time. Covid has changed everything. The shops are closed, we can't meet with friends, and I have been very lonely. My anxiety level has gone through the roof.

Every day, it's the same old routine-wash, dress, watch rubbish on the telly, once a week trip to the supermarket. Weeks roll into months, and we're not out of the woods. Even the churches are closed.

Living alone is no fun, and I do feel quite neglected. Oh, some people from the church have phoned me on a regular basis, but two others, who really should have been in touch with me, have not bothered to do so.

I said as much to a friend yesterday: "I'm very disappointed that I haven't heard from Dorothy or Jean for at least two weeks."

"You don't know then? Dorothy is in hospital with Covid and Jean's mother has had a stroke. Jean is the carer, until other arrangements can be made. No wonder you couldn't make contact with them."

God, I am so ashamed, because I haven't tried to make contact with them-or with anyone else for that matter. I've been so busy feeling sorry for myself, and expecting everybody to run after me.

This has really given me food for thought. Time to take a long, hard look at myself. I could have kept in regular touch with friends, but I haven't done so. I've behaved as though my needs ought to be top

priority. But they're, not are they? We all have our own cross to bear.

Then there's the Church. People have been very kind on the whole and have kept in touch. The church has been hard hit financially during Covid and is now appealing for help. I have to admit that I don't give regularly. Oh, I put something in the plate now and again, but I don't go very often. And what about the voluntary work? Many a time I've been asked to be a volunteer, but I've left it all to other people-always excusing myself, and saying that I was too busy to help.

God, I must be a great disappointment to you, but it's not too late to change, is it? When Dorothy comes out of hospital, I could offer to do a bit of shopping for her, and cook her a meal or two. Jean could probably do with a sympathetic ear, so I'll give her a phone tomorrow. I'll contact other friends as well, and make sure they are all right, and I have to change my attitude towards the church.

To be honest, the church has always been there for me, but I haven't always supported it in the way I should.

After Covid, I'll see if anyone will have me as a volunteer. I'm sure that a few hours here and there could easily be managed.

Meantime, it's time to appreciate the support which the church provides, and make a regular contribution. I'll contact the Treasurer, and find out the best way to give.

God, you have given so much to me. How could I have ever thought that you had forgotten me? Even when times are hard, you are there-even in unexpected ways. Thank you for all your love and support, and help me to look after others, as you have looked after me.

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## MUSIC FOR MARCH

### 7 March 2021

Third Sunday of Lent

Kyrie eleison  
Anthem  
J.S. Bach

Nardone (Cantor, Joshua McCullough)  
Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig    BWV 410

### 14 March 2021

Fourth Sunday of Lent  
Mothering Sunday

Kyrie eleison  
Anthem

MacMillan (St. Anne's Service)  
(Cantor, Flora Ritchie)  
Ave maris stella    George McPhee

### 21 March 2021

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Kyrie eleison  
Anthem

MacMillan (St. Anne's Service)  
(Cantor, Valerie Turnbull)  
It is a thing most wonderful    Ireland

### 28 March 2021

Palm / Passion Sunday

Kyrie eleison  
Anthem

Nardone (Cantor, Joshua Stutter)  
Seconde Leçon des Ténèbres  
Fr. Couper

## SUNDAY READINGS

We are currently short of readers for the Sunday readings. If anyone is interested in doing the readings could the contact Rev. Jim Gibson at

[jamesmgibson@msn.com](mailto:jamesmgibson@msn.com)

Thank you for your help.