

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH, Sunday 18th September 2022;
Service for Second Sunday after death of Queen Elizabeth II**

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. It's good to see you again.

I have something to add to the Intimations this morning. You may remember that on 19th August we had Dave and Mag MacDonald, who came to celebrate their Golden Wedding. I have received a card and a letter. I have put a copy of the letter on the notice board.

Welcome to our worship. Wherever you come from today, your presence enriches us all in this time of fellowship and celebration together. Today we are thinking about the encouragement we have from people who went before us, not least our late Queen.

Let us take a moment of quietness to let go of the cares and the worries of the past week, and know the presence of God among us.

Pause

Prayer:

Christ be near at either hand,
Christ behind, before me stand,
Christ with me where e'er I go,
Christ around, above, below. Amen.

Call to Worship:

Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised.
(Ps. 113: 2-4; KJV)

Let us worship God:

1st. Hymn 160 Praise, my soul, the king of heaven

First Prayer + Lord's Prayer

Lord God,
we give you thanks for your love revealed in Jesus Christ.
We thank you that that love is greater than we can ever imagine,
stronger than death itself,
and we can always entrust to you the care of our loved ones and ourselves.

At this time of national mourning, we give thanks for our late Queen, your servant Elizabeth;
for the gifts which you gave to her, and the ways in which you sustained her
throughout her long life and reign.

We bless you for her dedication to duty and diplomacy;
for her commitment to country and commonwealth;
for her faithfulness and loyalty to your ways of love and peace.
We give you thanks for the respect and affection in which she was held
by people of different nations and generations.

At this time, we remember her family, our Royal family,
as they mourn a mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and family member.
May they find privacy to grieve for her,

solace as the public demonstrate their sadness and respect,
and the peace that you alone can give.

We pray for those upon whose shoulders new responsibilities now fall,
and particularly for your servant Charles.
As he succeeds to the throne, grant him wisdom, strength and courage
that he may rule wisely and well with the support of government and the people.

We ask this in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ,
whose reign knows no limits and whose kingdom of love knows no end.
In his words we sum up our prayers, saying:
*Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us
not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory for ever. Amen.*
(Prayers above contributed by the Revd. Alison Swindells; slightly edited)

Readings:

Hebrews 11:32 - 12:2

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

The Example of Jesus

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Amen

John 13: 31-35; NRSVA:

The New Commandment

When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' *Amen. Thanks be to God.*

2nd Hymn: 736 Give thanks for life

Message

Last time I was here, on 28th August, I spoke about the Letter to the Hebrews, from the same chapter, Chapter 11, continuing into Chapter 12. That reading, combined with today's reading from St. John's Gospel, has resonances for the situation in which we find ourselves today: encouragement in those who have gone before us, and encouragement to a new way of living through the new commandment from Jesus: "*love one another, just as I have loved you*".

The Letter to the Hebrews was probably written to recent converts to Christianity who, faced with opposition and persecution, were tempted to turn back from their commitment to Jesus and return to the old familiar "safe" Jewish rituals. The Letter brought them encouragement and reassurance, and it brings encouragement and reassurance to us as well. It reminds us of the commitment of some of the Old Testament heroes who kept the faith, a faith based on a close personal relationship with the living God: that '*great cloud of witnesses*', all men and women who not only demonstrated their faith, but, through that faith, accomplished great things for God.

These were people who thought, not about what *they* could do, but about *what God could do for them and through them*; people who believed that God could, and would, turn their weakness into strength equal to what seemed an impossible task. We are reminded that things that we find impossible to accomplish alone are always possible with God.

Through all the ups and downs of God's people there were always some who kept faith with God. Faith is about being able to look beyond the obvious, superficial things of the world to the spiritual realities – to things we don't see, but nevertheless know to be true: things like the truth and the trustworthiness of God's promises. This trust was vital to the Christian faith then, as it is now. We are encouraged to look to them as examples.

Through their faith, and in many different situations, all these people became instruments of the saving power of God, even though they often faced all sorts of hardship and persecution in the process. The faith that they all demonstrated in their lives is meant to encourage us, but also to point forward to the great deliverer, Jesus, the '*author and perfecter of our faith*'. Jesus also suffered rejection, but through that rejection, and through his suffering, he obtained the full and final salvation, which the Old Testament promised.

Today we add to those heroes who kept the faith, that 'great cloud of witnesses' the name of our late much-loved Queen, Elizabeth II.

Other people more knowledgeable and more eloquent than I have spoken and written, and will speak and write, about the Queen, her qualities and achievements, and how she managed the highs and lows of both her public life and her private and family life.

Throughout all of this she spoke frequently of her deep Christian faith, which supported her throughout her record-long reign. In her public life she was a model and an example to us all. She carried in full measure those qualities of dignity, integrity and discretion which earned her respect and admiration in this country and throughout the world. Many people who have met her on public occasions, and especially during her holidays at Braemar, have spoken of her ability to put people at ease, to hold ordinary, relaxed conversations, and to take a personal interest in their concerns.

In many respects her life has been unique. Few people live to be 96 after 70 years of active and productive life. We give thanks for her life, for her reign, and especially for all that she has been to the people and to the Church in Scotland, and we pray for all who mourn her

passing, especially those whose sense of loss is keenest because their love was deepest and most personal. None of us will aspire to such high office, but we would all do well to take note of and to follow her example.

Take heart from all these witnesses of the past, says the Letter to the Hebrews. It's like being in a race, cheered on by a great crowd of believers from the past, shouting encouragement like spectators at a marathon. If that's not enough, fix your eyes on Jesus, "*the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*". Remember how Jesus was prepared to accomplish all that was asked of him. He showed the way. We are asked to follow. Jesus the basis of their faith, and ours, an example of faith for us all.

Remember your past, and renew your courage and your sense of responsibility, says the writer. God's power has not grown less. What God did once, he can do again, for the God of history is the same God whom we worship today.

This message is important for us at a time of great change in the country: a new Monarch; a new Prime Minister.

It is important for us at a time of far-reaching changes within the church. Right now, the Church of Scotland is struggling to maintain hundreds of old and disintegrating buildings that no longer have congregations able to support them. Stromness Church is one of many churches scheduled to close because they do not meet the Church of Scotland criteria for '*well equipped spaces in the right places*'.

On the other hand, we are hopeful that proposals for upgrade of this church will go ahead, and that will be a great benefit, not only to the church, but to the community as well.

Times of big changes. We need to be open to changes in the monarchy, the government, and in the Church. We may not like the proposals, but we have to keep an open mind, and try to discern what is the way forward for the church and its outreach to the people around us. In these changing times there is a real danger that congregations could become discouraged, disillusioned, fed up, and start drifting away: finding some excuse to cut their ties with the church. We all need to forget old grievances and stick together.

Congregations everywhere are dwindling. People are getting older and less able, and they are not being replaced. We need to grow. We need to find ways of showing the people around us that the church has a place and a relevance in their everyday lives. We need to attract, and keep, younger, enthusiastic people, people prepared to join the '*do-ers*' who keep the kirk going. Our predecessors in Orphir and in Stenness built churches to serve the community and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. They are among that '*great cloud of witnesses*'. Despite big changes through the years, we need to find again that spirit and that driving force. Especially in our changing times we need to remember our reason for being: to proclaim the saving love of God as shown in Jesus Christ. We need to be open to new ways of thinking about God and about Jesus: to see the present-day miracles and hear the present-day prophets.

I keep returning again and again to these first two verses of Hebrews 12 - one of the great, moving passages of the New Testament. The Christian life is like a race marked out for us, the writer says. The goal, the objective, is nothing less than being like Jesus Christ.

For every one of us in this congregation, those who attend and those who don't; for every person throughout Orkney who expects the church to be there when it is needed, there is a goal set before us. The goal is to renew and to revitalise the church, locally and nationally, so that it can be once again a powerful force for Christ in this community.

The challenge, and the responsibility, are ours. We are the voice and the hands of Christ in this place.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

During Hymn could I have the Offering and Prayer boxes brought to the chancel please.

3rd. Hymn 159 Lord, for the years

Dedication of Offering:

Gracious God,
out of the abundance of our lives we offer these gifts to you.
Through your blessing and our willingness to share,
may our offerings become a source for hope and love
in this church family, and in the community beyond us,
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Introduction: *in our prayers today I am using some material from the Church of Scotland website.*

Let us pray:

Gracious God,
your relationship with your people is open and loving and liberating.
It is through knowing you that we discover our real humanity,
and through knowing you that we understand who we are,
and that we are set free to live as your people.

We give thanks for that life-giving and life-altering relationship;
for all that we have been, and all that, through you, we have yet to become,
and so we pray for our world, knowing that it is your world.

We pray for those people and those places kept apart from, or closed to, the values of the kingdom of God,
that kingdom where peace and justice, and compassion and grace will reign in abundance and will direct all things.

We pray for people who are bereft of love;
those considered unlovable,
people reduced to living a lonely life, grief stricken, outcast, forgotten.
May they experience the love you offer us all.

We pray for those who are bound by things which restrict them or damage them in life;
by problems of addiction,
by ill health in body, mind or spirit;
those trapped in outmoded ideas and traditions.
We pray that in you they may find the freedom that will bring them into fulness of life.

As we give thanks for all those who have gone before us in faith,
once again we bless you for our late Queen Elizabeth II,
for her courage in the face of overwhelming expectations;
for her sense of duty;
for her hospitality and kindness offered to so many people,
and for her daily trust in the example and grace of Jesus Christ.

As once again we commend her family to your care,
and trusting that she lives now in your nearer presence,
we pray for our King as he assumes his many responsibilities.
May he find support and strength and inspiration for the way ahead.
Direct his steps and guide his paths in the days and years to come.

Loving God,
In these days we have many things to occupy our minds. In a few moments of silence we bring
to you all those things of thanks and concern that we carry with us today.

Pause

All these prayers we offer through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Prayer by Revd Joanne Hood (edited)

Choir: *For your glory*

Tailpiece: Two poems:

Queen

Ower seeventy years an mair,
as long as mony folk can mind,
for ane an a' she's aye been there,
gracious, winsome, kind;
braw and canny, douce an leal,
eident, wise, an pawkie tae,
conscientious an dependable,
she had *smeddum* we nicht say.

They that come on ahint her
will hae fykie grund tae till:
thae wee bit shoon that the Queen has left
will be muckle shoon tae fill.

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And by the current Makar, Kathleen Jamie:

Lochnagar

The alder boughs hang heavy,
Red weighs the rowan-trees
That line the well-loved path which climbs
To Lochnagar from Dee

And knows at last the open hill,
Those ancient wind-honed heights
Where deer stand shy and sky-lined,
Then vanish from living sight,

Where grief is ice, and history
Is distant roiling skies,
Where weather chases weather
Across the lands she strived

To serve, and served supremely well,
Till the call came from afar:
Back to the country kept in her heart,
the Dee, and Lochnagar.

4th. Hymn: 192 All my hope on God is founded

Closing Words and Benediction:

God grant to the living, grace;
to the departed, rest;
to the Church, the King,
the commonwealth, and all people,
peace and concord;
and to us and all his servants, life everlasting.
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and abide with you always. Amen.

Doxology:(Hy. 786)

May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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**Hymns, Readings and Prayers for Use on the Second Sunday following the death of the Queen.
From Church of Scotland Website; downloaded 09.08.22**

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/99059/prayer-and-worship-material-for-website.pdf