

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,  
ServiceOrphir25th. June 2023; Prop7A  
Morning Service 1100  
Transcript**

**Welcome and Intimations**

Good morning. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly, or occasionally, perhaps even for the first time, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together. We're very glad to see .....

Today we think about some of the tough things Jesus told us, and about God's care for us.

**Gathering Prayer:**

Let us take a moment to be quiet and know the presence of God among us.

*Pause*

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

*'Christ be near at either hand'.* Let me make these simple words my prayer today. Let me know Christ's presence in my life, Christ's closeness to me in every moment of this day, and let me welcome that presence with an open heart. Amen.

**Call to Worship:**

Wherever we come from today,  
we gather with doubts and certainties;  
much faith and little, maybe broken and hurt,  
uncertain and sure, lost and found,  
loved and unloved.  
We gather together as people of God.  
Let us worship:

**1<sup>st</sup>. Hymn 511** Your hand O God has guided you flock from age to age

**First Prayer and Lord's Prayer:**

*In our opening prayer this morning, we conclude with the Lord's Prayer, and you should feel free to use whichever form, or whichever language, seems appropriate to you.*

*Let us pray:*

Gracious God,  
Wherever we come from today; whatever our circumstances,  
we ask you to breathe your Spirit into our service and our worship.  
In our prayers, may we speak to you as we would speak to a close friend.  
As we hear your word, help us to understand it, receive it, remember it, and put it into practice in our lives.  
May we meet with you today, and then go about our everyday lives  
as those who have been with Jesus.

Loving God,  
we thank you for everything that brings us, and keeps us, close to you:  
the influence of good and godly people; the love of parents and others  
from whom we first heard your name, and who taught us to pray;  
for teachers who taught us truth, and lived it out before us;  
for all who led us to you.

We give thanks for our Christian heritage,

and the traditions which we dare not betray.  
We thank you for all who love us,  
asking that we may be worthy of their love;  
for all who trust us, that we may not betray their trust;  
for all who believe in us, that we may not disappoint them.

In these times of change in the church, when many church buildings are closing,  
we give thanks for the church, here and world-wide,  
that is the people of God, the body of Christ.  
We remember with thanks the friendships we have made through the church,  
the strength we have received, the truth we have heard,  
the salvation we have been offered and have received.

Quietly, in your presence, we remember with regret  
times when we have got things wrong:  
times when we have not put you first;  
when we have failed to see the needs of our neighbours,  
and we seek your renewing power.

Loving God,  
save us from the blind eye which cannot see the tokens of your love in the world around us.  
Save us from the dull ear that cannot hear the whisper of your still small voice.  
Save us from the insensitive heart that fails to respond to the appeal of your love.

Lord, you have called us to be your disciples.  
Thank you for trusting us with this privilege,  
and for empowering us by your Spirit in the ways of service.  
Thank you for giving us courage when we are fearful,  
and for your strength in our vulnerability.

Thank you for knowing us, loving us, enhancing our lives.  
Above all we bring thanks for your Son Jesus Christ,  
for his life, his death, his resurrection, and for the example he has left for us to follow.  
All these prayers we ask in his name, as in his words we pray, 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.*

**Reading: Shona will read for us today:**

**Matthew 10: 24-39; New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised.**

*Jesus is speaking to the Disciples:*

'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.  
*Amen. Thanks be to God.*

### **Contemporary Reading:**

*From Rev Steve Garnaas-Holmes, retired United Methodist pastor, in Unfolding Light:  
From earlier in the same chapter, Matthew 10:7-8:*

Proclaim the good news,  
*"The kingdom of heaven has come near."  
Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."*

You are given power and authority and sent,  
not to proselytize [or convert], not to enact "Christian" legislation, *but to heal*,  
in your workplace, in your community, in your family.

How can you possibly do this?  
Because you are given power and authority.  
You are given love, which casts out fear— slowly, to be sure, but it does cast out fear.  
You won't cast out all the demons of greed or racism,  
or cure the whole epidemic of loneliness or despair.  
But you will love, even one person at a time, and maybe your witness will move crowds.  
But remember you are an empty vessel; *it is not your power but God's.*  
And though your vessel is small, that power is infinite.  
Go, then, and peace be with you.

**2<sup>nd</sup>. Hymn: 716** Come and find the quiet centre

### **Message:**

It's very tempting to avoid these bits of the New Testament that warn us that people who follow Jesus are likely to have a bad time, and tell ourselves that these warnings are reminders of how hard it must have been to be followers of Jesus in the 1st century, but warnings not really relevant to our world in Orkney in 2023. On the other hand, we need to consider what they mean to us today.

The disciples started out enthusiastically on their mission, but they soon realised that putting their Christian faith into action brought them up against the Jewish practices of their community, and their families as well. Nevertheless, they continued to spread the Word. Maybe we don't have problems like that, but there are still places where the Christian faith can cause division, even danger. Even in our times, a great many people are killed every year simply because they are Christians.

We are called to stand up for Christ and to confess "*whose we are and whom we serve*". We may meet people who oppose religion in any form, we may face ridicule from humanists, atheists and others, or indifference from people who don't care one way or the other. We're tempted to take a softer line, to follow the crowd, and it must be particularly hard and discouraging when the opposition comes from your own family and friends, but all this has been part of the history of the people of God down through the generations.

Today's reading does seem very far away from our lives, our times, our church situation, from a time of the developing church full of enthusiasm, encouragement for missionaries travelling around the ancient world, but it is still relevant to our age and place.

We need to remember that the Way of Christ involves *commitment*. We shouldn't kid ourselves, or anybody else, that it is easy.

Matthew 10 challenges any complacency we might have, but also offers real comfort to Christian people who face particular pressures and opposition at the present time. Matthew talks about situations where Christian witness may be difficult, unpleasant, where we meet opposition, or complete apathy. Just like the early Church, we could be called on at any time to stand up for the things we believe in, in the face of opposition and ridicule. Matthew 10 is a resource for when the heat is turned up.

In our situation, we have different challenges, but they're serious and they're urgent. I've already mentioned some depressing figures produced at the General Assembly in May. The Church of Scotland has lost more than half its membership since 2000. Over the pandemic, numbers attending church have fallen from about 88,000 to about 60,000. and more and more people are choosing to worship online or in "other ways" – or not at all.

It seems to me that, in our time, one of the biggest challenges is apathy: folk who don't care one way or the other. The folk on the Kirk roll who never come, and don't do anything to help. Sure, a lot of them contribute to church funds, but we need people to *do* things, people to replace the 'do-ers' who are getting older and less able, and also to resurrect things we used to do.

We know that churches are closing for want of people like that. There's a big fuss when closures are announced, lots of talk of support and community buy-outs, and all the rest. If all these people had been helping in the day-to-day, week-to-week running of the church, maybe there would be fewer closures.

People complain that they don't have a Sunday School, or a Youth Club, a Messy Church, or BB or scouts, guides and so on. But we need to have young people interested enough to take part in these things, and we need people prepared to go through the hassle of PVG training and prepared to give time to running and supervising them. Stromness BB closed because, despite repeated appeals, no one came forward to help lead it. Messy Church dwindled away for the same reasons – a convenient place to drop the kids for a morning so that you can go to golf or the pub or whatever, but nobody interested in helping running it.

Milestone Church has two new ministers, and their Website shows that they are *doing* things, with interesting things going on every day. We have a good basis here in Orphir. The Thursday Café is popular and busy and reaches out to the community and beyond. You can use the Post Office, buy *The Orcadian*, and have tea and coffee and home-bakes and a blether with interesting people. We need to build on that, and we hope that the plans for the redevelopment of this Kirk will go ahead.

We need to remind people 'out there' – and the people who used to come but no longer come – that the Church is still relevant in Orkney, in 2023 and beyond; still has something for everybody, still needs people willing to be involved.

We could have endless arguments about how to do all that. I don't think stopping people in the street and challenging them about their faith – like some well-meaning people do in our city centres - is the way to go. I think living and witnessing to our faith in our everyday life, showing folk that we really do have something worthwhile that they could have as well, is more likely to influence them. Jesus said, *"Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven"*. (Matt. 5: 16, CEV)

Back to today's reading. We all know the bit where Jesus says *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father"*, and *"the hairs of your head are all counted"*, and *"Don't be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."*

Familiar stuff, reassuring stuff, but remember the context.

Jesus was warning his disciples about the misunderstandings and persecution they would face in their mission. They were being sent out into the world *"like sheep among wolves"*. Some of them would be dragged before the courts, or brought before governors and kings for sentencing. Some would be betrayed by their own families, some abused, even killed for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is not speaking to a lucky few disciples who will have an easy life, but to those who will endure many troubles, who may even be arrested, tortured, convicted and executed.

If this happens, says Jesus, never be afraid, don't be at your wits end. Two sparrows can be bought for a penny, yet not one of them falls to the ground *"unperceived by your Father"* or *"without your Father's knowledge"*.

Jesus is not promising any favours, not guaranteeing protection in the way the world offers protection. If you want worldly protection, consult a security firm, get CCTV, a burglar alarm, bars on your windows, a body guard. And always be afraid - because you will be, if you chose to place your trust in the world's protection. You will always be anxious; always afraid.

Jesus offers a deeper security: a security that is better, and far more profound, fundamentally more secure, something that goes deeper than anxiety and relieves it. Jesus is saying that, even when the worst happens, you will remain precious to God. Not for one moment will you be alone. Not a fragment of your precious soul will be ignored or lost. The Heavenly *Abba* will be with you all the way, from here to eternity.

Please notice that Jesus doesn't say that God will **prevent** the fall of a sparrow. Nor does he say we will not lose some of our hair. (A few of us can testify to that). Jesus is speaking figuratively. The sparrows and the hairs on our heads are a pictorial way of saying that God cares for you completely, every second, no matter what happens. God will be with you in every moment of comfort or struggle, of laughter or tears.

There is no divine insurance policy guaranteeing "Christian sparrows" good health, nor protection for Christians as they board a ferry or an aeroplane, or drive on our busy roads; no promise of special treatment in times of fire, flood, or any other catastrophe. And a warning here: we can't judge the faithfulness or otherwise of someone else from what happens to him or her. No *'He got what he deserved'*, or *'Why did it have to happen to her?'*

**Yet there is a guarantee:** just one: one sure thing which stands the test of time and eternity. The guarantee is that God loves us and will be with us, no matter what happens. Nothing can cancel God's loving involvement, from our highest success and happiness to our deepest disaster.

Not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father feeling the loss.

The very hairs on your head are all numbered.

So do not be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows.

We continue our commission as agents of the loving Christ in a world where love seems scarce, not because by doing so we will receive God's special protection, but because it is the right and loving thing to do.

*Do not be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows.*  
Amen. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

***During the next hymn please bring the Offering to the Chancel***

**3<sup>rd</sup> (Offering) Hymn 187** There's a wideness in God's mercy

**Dedication of Offering :**

Prayer Of Dedication

Lord, out of our richness, we contribute to the world we live in.

It is right for us to do so, for you are the source of all that is good,  
and precious, and valuable in life.

Receive this offering we make in your name.

May it be used to further your Kin-dom on earth.

Let us be a hospitable people — welcoming, caring and showing a tenderness to all,  
as we faithfully follow our calling to servanthood within the family of faith  
that is this Church community. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

**Introduction:**

Snippets of recent news.

A 15 year-old boy stabbed a 14 year-old to death, just the latest in a succession of such incidents. On 14<sup>th</sup> June a fishing boat smuggling up to 750 migrants from Libya to Italy sank off the Greek coast. 78 people are known to have died; hundreds are still missing. People each paid 5000 US Dollars for passage. This news was pushed aside by an hour-by-hour account of the loss of a submersible and its five occupants, each of whom paid 250,000 Dollars for a trip to visit the wreck of the Titanic, which sank in 1912 with the loss of over 1500 lives. We live in a strange and alarming world.

*I invite you to join in the responses:*

**L:** God of life and light and hope,

**All:** hear our prayer.

*Let's pray:*

Creator God,

we pray for the world and its peoples.

We bring our prayers for people who are suffering in any way:

for all those who, in recent times, or in time long past, but not forgotten,  
have met with tragedy and injury and loss.

Help of the helpless,

we think of those affected by circumstances outwith their control:

by storm, and flood, and fire, by earthquake and landslide;

by war, especially in Ukraine and Sudan, and by oppression or terrorist activity;

for people who live in fear;

people who risk everything to flee to other countries

**L:** God of life and light and hope,

**All:** hear our prayer.

Jesus said:

*'Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.'*

Gracious Lord,

We pray for your Church everywhere,

especially for Christian people facing discrimination and persecution in their everyday life;

isolated, rejected, driven out, by families and friends for their beliefs;

people forced to choose between active opposition to tyranny and oppression and violence,

or seeking the way of peace through prayer and grace;

those afraid to acknowledge the encouragement that they find in your word.

In these times of change within the Church we ask for wisdom for those who make decisions on our behalf.

We pray for our governments in Westminster and in Holyrood, for scientists and advisors, and those who have to decide on policy.

**L:** God of life and light and hope,

**All:** hear our prayer.

We pray for people who are ill, at home, in hospital or hospice,

and for medical teams treating them, nursing them, reaching to them in compassion.

We pray for people who have been ill for a long time,

and for those facing surgery or prolonged treatment;

for people who feel that life has been too much,

beyond their capacity to cope.

**L:** God of life and light and hope,

**All:** hear our prayer.

We ask your comfort and strength for those broken by sorrow,

or preoccupied by memories of happier times,

or weighed down by the burdens of work and responsibility.

May they cast their burdens upon the Lord

and find in your all-sufficient grace

the strength and the courage to carry on.

In quietness we bring to you the people we carry in our hearts today:

the sick, the sad, the worried; those in trouble of any kind.

*Pause*

We pray for ourselves that, by your grace,

and by any means available to us,

we may be agents of your love in this place.

All these our prayers we offer in Jesus' name.

**L:** God of life and light and hope,

**All:** hear our prayer.

**Amen.**

**4<sup>th</sup> Hymn: 402** Take up your cross

**Choir:** *I need thee every hour.*

**All-Age Address or Afterthought: A fairy Story, or a Parable:**

I'll tell you a fairy story.

Once upon a time there was a young lass and a young lad. They met at school, and were good friends by the time they were about fifteen. They had other friends too, of course, but they seemed to have a lot in common.

Time passed, and the lad became an apprentice electrician, while the lass trained as a nurse. During this time, she and another nurse were involved in a traffic accident on a pedestrian crossing. Both were badly hurt, but with no life-threatening injuries, and both recovered, but with what we call PTSD nowadays. In due course there was a prosecution: seems the driver of the vehicle to blame was under the influence of something. There was legal action, and both lasses got compensation, an appreciable sum of money. During this time, the lass qualified as a nurse, and she and the lad both got good jobs, and they became what I think folk call 'an item'. They decided that they would stay together, and that eventually she would use her compensation as a downpayment on a house. Enter Fate, or something else: the lad's granddad offered to match the amount, so they went house hunting, and they bought a nice little house in a nice place and moved in together, as young folk do nowadays, and after a while they got married. A nice house, but the only approach was a very steep downward flight of steps. OK, but, after a while, there was a baby on the way, and they thought these steps would be very difficult with a pram, and dangerous for a growing child, and that they should look for another house.

A house directly across the road came on the market. They had a look: easy entrance, and other advantages, but they thought they would also look at new-built houses a few miles away. Problems: small properties, very big prices.

Then, once again, fate, or something else, took over. Seller of the house across the road approached them, explained that elderly mother, living alone, had died, family need to dispose of the house, not in any hurry, happy to wait until the lad and lass had sold their own house, named an affordable price. A bargain was made.

Then the worry. Their house on the market. A few people came to look, and went away. Worry. Would it sell before baby arrived? Shortly after, baby did arrive, safe and well. On the same day they received and accepted an offer for their own house.

The moral:

God moves in a mysterious way. Or maybe we have here a chain of coincidences. But, as Lord George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community once said, "If you think that was coincidence, I wish you a very boring life".

The bottom line?

The lass is our granddaughter, and the baby is our first great-grandchild. And yes, there was a lot of prayer involved.

**5 Closing Hymn: 646** Forth in the peace

**Closing Words and Benediction:**

As we leave our time of worship, and in the week ahead,  
may God guide our actions; may Jesus remind us why;  
and may the Spirit keep our hearts open to all those we meet, this day and every day.  
... And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you, and remain with you, now and 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.