

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,
Service Sunday 22nd January 2023, Epiphany 3A
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.

Today we think about divisions in the early Church, and about Jesus calling his disciples.

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

Pause

Let us start this service well, by reminding ourselves:

That it is not we who chose Christ, *but Christ who chose us,*

That we are not here because of our goodness *but because of Christ's grace,*

That we are not here to enlighten ourselves, *but to allow Christ to enlighten us,*

That we have not come to be entertained

but to worship God with heart, soul, mind and strength. (from Bruce Prewer, ed.)

Call to Worship:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (*Psalms 27:1*)

Let us worship God:

1st. Hymn 123 God is love, let heaven adore him (Tune Hyfrydol 519)

First Prayer and Lord's Prayer: *Let us pray:*

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

The Lord is our light and salvation, the stronghold of our lives.

We come today to worship him,

the Light who shines in our darkness and brings us hope.

We walk towards his light, knowing that it can never be extinguished.

We come to the Lord, the powerful, the almighty, whose kingdom draws near:

we come to sit at his feet today.

Jesus, Light of the World, came into the darkness, and lived among us:

we come to sit at his feet today.

The Holy Spirit breathes life and guidance into our calling:

we come to sit at his feet today.

In the presence of God, we acknowledge with regret

times when we have failed to respond to his call;

times when we have chosen to follow our own paths;

when we need to say,

"We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" – or*

- done less than our duty,

Yet, knowing that those who turn again in true repentance

are cleansed, healed and restored in his love and mercy,

we come in our remorse seeking renewal.

May God grant us his pardon and his peace.

We give thanks to God that he sent Jesus
to give us freedom through the cross, and,
as he called the fishermen to leave their nets and follow him,
may he help us to rise anew, ready to go in a new direction with him,
transformed by his grace, and made whole;
for he offers us new life, a new path to follow,
and his gracious presence on the journey
from our darkness into the marvellous light
of the one who came that we might have life in all its fulness.
We bring our prayers in his name, and in his words:
*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.*
**(Luke 17: 10)*

Readings: Liz will read for us today:

1 Cor 1: 10-18; New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

Divisions in the Church

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Amen.

Matthew 4: 12-23; New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:
'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.'

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.
Amen: thanks be to God.

2nd. Hymn: 198 Let us build a house where love can dwell

Message:

*Through the written word, and the spoken word,
may we know your Living Word, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.*

We are living in times of change. Obvious. Changes within the Government at Westminster: a succession of prime ministers and others who run the country. Big changes, in the Church of Scotland, throughout the country, and in Orkney.

As part of a review of the resources of the Church of Scotland, the General Trustees needed accurate information on the current condition of church properties – like an MOT for each building – to help them to assess draft Presbytery Plans. They did that through Asset Management Building Audits (AMBA) which categorised Buildings as A, those that would be required for the next 5 years, or B, those that were redundant and should be discarded.

As you would expect, the outcome of all this has caused outcry and protests. In many places the message has been very unwelcome, and I don't envy those who had to break the bad news. '*Don't shoot the messenger*', the saying goes, but in a lot of places the messengers have been shot, and shot again. Thanks to our plans for the future, *this* Church is categorised as A, while Stromness Church and Manse are B, and are required to close.

Also at this time, to reduce costs and deal with some of the vacancies for ministers, the number of full-time equivalent ministry posts is being reduced. In Orkney we have been allocated seven full-time equivalents.

The first meeting of the new *Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles*, which includes and supersedes Orkney Presbytery, was held on 10th January. Nicol and I both attended (via Zoom), along with folk from all over this huge area. In Orkney we are apprehensive that, as a small group, we may be swamped and side-lined, and we need to make sure that our voice is heard.

Big changes for us all. Many Churches will close, but that doesn't mean that the congregations disappear. The church is not a building – the Church is people, as the song says. Yes, I know, I have seen churches close before, and heard people say that they will not go to another building, and some don't, but a lot do.

Big changes, and big challenges too. The Orkney congregations need to work together for the stated common purpose of the Church of Scotland (Quote):

to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities. Central to the Church of Scotland is our love and worship of God through following the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ. We express our love for God by our love and practical care for each other and for those we live with and encounter in our daily lives.

In other words:

to inspire people everywhere with the Good News of Jesus Christ through worship, witness, and looking after communities; through following the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ, and expressing our love for God by practical concern and care for each other and for those we live with and encounter in our daily lives.

So what? What does this mean for us?

The message is that we need to continue to work together and to keep adapting to changing circumstances. The Church in Orkney could become – maybe already is – like the Church in Corinth that Paul is writing to: a community beset by quarrels and threats of serious division, based on allegiance to different leaders; people jealously guarding their own little groups, to the extent that they are forgetting what the Gospel is all about. Maybe we can recognise some of these things in the Church 2000 years later.

Somewhere among all this is the unspoken understanding that dissention among Christians is not appropriate, because all Christians acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, and it was in his name that all believers were baptised.

It's easy for church members to identify with a particular leader, or a cause, or a point of view, to the extent that it distracts us from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It happens within denominations and branches of the Christian Church, and it happens within congregations too. *'Oh, it's no the same as it was in Rev. So-and-So's time.....'*

Do we ever find ourselves taking sides for, or against, activists, or evangelicals, or traditionalists, or fundamentalists, or feminists, or leaders of particular denominations, or with figures within our own community? Do we all agree about the style of worship, about the role of women in the Church, about skin-colour, about same-sex relationships?

The Christian Religion has been used, still is used, and misused, as an excuse for division. Do we consider ourselves Protestant, or Catholic, or Anglican, or Methodist, or Baptist, or Salvation Army, or Brethren – or of any of the 45,000 denominations globally? Does it really matter? Can we not aspire to simply calling ourselves Christians, and live up to that ideal? Diversity is healthy. Paul defends freedom of choice. We can differ about details, but we need to be absolutely united on the fundamental truths of Christianity. *"United in the same mind and the same purpose"*.

Paul calls for unity. *'There should be no divisions among you'*, he writes, but later in the same letter he defends freedom of choice – provided the unity of the church as a whole, and the faith of its members are not damaged. *Unity* is not the same as *uniformity*!

When Jesus chose his twelve disciples, he didn't go for the people you might expect. No educated, professional people. Four fishermen – no offence to fishermen – albeit with a business employing other people; a tax-collector, a political activist, a thief, and five others we know little about. And we know that later they kept falling out among themselves, even when Jesus was still among them: frictions and fall-outs – hassle between the brothers James and John and the others, and Peter liable to foot-in-mouth disease at any time.

Different people, different talents, different ideas – just like us – *but working for the same cause*, and look at what they achieved. Look at the legacy they left for us to carry on. What a challenge!

We *hope* that the plans for the redevelopment of this building will go ahead. Already it has an important place, not only as a place of worship, but as a hub within the community, notably on Thursday mornings when the café is busy, and people come to the Post Office, and buy 'The Orcadian' and have a cuppa and a bun as well. Outreach. Opportunity.

In March 2022 'The Herald' reported a study that had found that, since 2011, people in Scotland identified as Christian had dropped from 53% to 33%. – only one in three – and only 18% attend church service.

I don't know how that compares with Orkney, but I suspect it will be near enough. About the same time, official research showed that the Muslim population in Britain is growing rapidly,

and their biggest population is *among the under 40s*, whereas the biggest Christian population is *among the over-70s*. We need the young people!

Obviously, Christianity faces competition from other faiths. Maybe that doesn't affect us much here in Orkney, but we need to keep on speaking up for our faith, because the real threats to the Christian Faith are atheism and indifference, even apathy. Many leading politicians and media celebrities readily admit to being atheists. Books and newspaper articles pour scorn on religion of every kind. More and more people, especially young people, have no interest whatever in religion, and don't want it to impinge upon their lives.

Somehow the message is not getting through to the people "out there", and especially to our young people, that the Church does have relevance to their everyday lives; the Church does *have something eminently worthwhile to offer*.

What can we do?

We need to remind ourselves, and we need to show the people "out there" that, as Christians, *we do have something enormously worthwhile*. We do that by witnessing to our faith, by what we say, and by our example.

Jesus put it perfectly when he said:

"Your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16)

How would we have reacted to Jesus' call to follow?

Are we remaining open to the many invitations to follow that continue to unfold as changes come and time moves on?

Plenty to think about today.

Amen. May God bless to us this word preached in his name, and to his name be the glory and the praise.

During the next hymn please bring the Offering to the Chancel

3rd Hymn 739 The Church's one foundation

Dedication of Offering:

Lord of all,
in our offering today, we bring you not only our money –
we bring ourselves, our fellowship, and your Church everywhere,
praying that you will use all we do, all we say, and all we are,
for the growth of your kingdom and the fulfilment of your will,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession: *Let us pray:*

Our hope and our prayer is that, in both the brightest, and the gloomiest, places on earth, the call of Christ may be heard, and heeded.

In the jungles of government departments, boardrooms of powerful companies;
in offices, on ships, on farms, in factories, in over-stretched hospitals and clinics,
on college campuses and school playgrounds,
please call us, O Christ, into the light of your kingdom.

Wherever men and women are unemployed; where people toil in boring jobs,

or in unhealthy or hazardous working conditions,
please call us, O Christ, into the love and justice of your kingdom.

Where relatives sit by the bedside of one terminally ill,
or watch helplessly as a fine intellect sinks into dementia;
where desolate souls weep by a grave;
where families celebrate a marriage, or a newborn child,
please call us. O Christ, into the service-joy of your kingdom.

Where people reach out to others in need, whether they serve their neighbours grudgingly,
or extend their care with kindness and friendship,
please call us, O Christ, into the compassion-service of your kingdom.

In places where faith has faltered and decayed into uncertainty or apathy;
in places where earnest souls serve God fearfully,
where it is dangerous to be a Christian,
where congregations meet in the face of derision or persecution;
or where they serve God freely and happily;
where congregations worship without hindrance,
please call us O Christ,
into the inclusive love of your kingdom.

In places where there is peace and prosperity;
in places where there is conflict, tyranny or oppression,
in the wars in Ukraine and many other places,
where innocent people are maimed and killed,
please call us O Christ, into your promised peace on earth and good will to all.

Where personal relationships have broken down, where old marriages are under strain;
where new relationships are formed, and new weddings celebrated with high hopes,
please call us O Christ,
into the disciplines and delights of your kingdom.

We bring to you, O Christ, all those for whom we have special concerns today:
Pause ...

Holy Friend,
we pray for all our families and friends, neighbours and colleagues,
in their prosperity or in their hardships.
According to the need of each, may their joys be blessed and their sorrows comforted.
Through Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

4th Hymn 721 We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet

Choir: *Make Way.*

Afterthought

Mutual Support* by *Ralph Milton

We visited the giant redwoods on a trip to California recently. These magnificent giants stand as much as 300 feet tall, and are hundreds of years old. How do they survive that long? How come the strong winds blowing off the Pacific Ocean don't topple them?

A sign board in a park provided the answer. Giant redwoods seldom grow alone. Their shallow root systems spread out and intertwine with the roots of other giant redwoods, and in that way they support each other.

That’s why giant redwoods always grow in clusters. They need each other for mutual support.

5 Closing Hymn: 533 Will you come and follow me

Closing Words and Benediction:

Let us finish this service well, by reminding ourselves:
That it is not we who chose Christ, but Christ who chose us,
That we were not here because of our goodness but because of Christ’s grace,
That we were not here to enlighten ourselves, but to allow Christ to enlighten us,
That we do not go our separate ways alone,
but in the company of the Spirit, who has great things in store for us. *(Bruce Prewer; edited)*

Grace, mercy and peace, from God most wonderful, be with you and yours today and always,
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you, now and evermore. 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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