

Upper Tay and Tenandry Churches of Scotland

Service from Dull and Weem Parish Church 18.10.2020

A warm welcome to this short morning service from Weem Church of Scotland. My name is the Very Rev. Dr James Simpson. Before retiring to Perthshire, I was the minister for 21 years of Dornoch Cathedral. I was delighted to accept the Rev. Neil Glover's kind invitation to conduct worship here this morning, to allow him and his wife to have a well-deserved break before the winter sets in. For me it is always a pleasure to conduct worship in this lovely little Scottish church, situated in the heart of glorious Perthshire.

Let us worship God. The hymn "*This is my song*", to the lovely tune *Finlandia* (691)

This is my song, O God of all the nations

A song of peace for lands afar and mine

This is my home, the country where my heart is

Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.

But other hearts in other lands are beating

With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine

Our skies are sometimes bluer than the ocean

And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine

But other lands have sunshine too and warmer

And mountains high and beautiful as mine

O hear my song, O God of all the nations

A song of peace for their land, and for mine.

Prayer

O God our heavenly Father, we would ask for your blessing on this time of worship.

It could mean so much to us or so little.

It could be just a dull repetition of a formal habit, or an opportunity to turn our lives upside down, right side up.

It could be just a medley of wandering thoughts, or an opportunity to ponder on those things that are of real worth in this world.

You know how it rests with us to make or mar this time of worship. Quicken within us now a real desire to use these sacred moments to the full, that our faith might be strengthened, and our concern for the needs of others deepened.

Use this hour also to make us wiser and humbler, to save us from counting as great anything that to you is small, or from belittling those things that are great in your sight.

Let us join now in praying the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever more. Amen

Readings

Each Sunday in our worship services we read one or two passages from the Bible. This morning I have chosen two short passages. The first is from the 12th chapter of John's Gospel.

"Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip and said to him, "Sir we would like to see Jesus" So Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went to tell Jesus. Then Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.....Whoever serves me will be honoured by my Father. Now my soul is in turmoil and what am I to say? Father save me from this hour. No it was for this that I came to this hour. Father glorify thy name."

The second reading is from Mark's Gospel, the 10th chapter.

Jesus called the disciples to him and said, "You know that in the world the recognised rulers lord it over their subjects, and that their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to surrender his life as a ransom for many."

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- 1 Morning has broken
like the first morning,
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing,
praise for the morning,
praise for them, springing
fresh from the Word!
- 2 Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness
where his feet pass.
- 3 Mine is the sunlight;
mine is the morning,
born of the one light
Eden saw play!
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's re-creation
of the new day!

Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965)

SERMON

In the early 20th century, Dr Frank Gunsaulus was the minister of the largest congregation in Chicago. Not only was he an outstanding preacher, he was a prominent figure in Chicago's educational and civic life. His congregation became so large that there was not room for all who wanted to worship under him. When the new Iroquois theatre was being built down-town, arrangements were made for the Sunday morning services to be held in the theatre. The first service there was due to be held on December 31st 1903. The day before the theatre was filled to capacity for a showing of a popular musical. 1700 people were in the audience.

That afternoon Dr Gunsaulus' nephew Will McLaughlin, who was a law student

had to go down to the library which was adjacent to the new theatre. On the way he called in to see his uncle. "Uncle Frank", he said, "there will obviously be a very large congregation tomorrow. What are you going to preach about?" His uncle told him that he had chosen as his text the agonising cry of Jesus the night before his arrest. "*Now is my soul in turmoil and what can I say, Father save me from this hour. No, it was for this hour that I came into the world.*" Dr Gunsaulus wanted the congregation to think about how God's purpose for them was determined and dependent on the special gifts they had been given.

An hour later, as Will approached the library, he saw smoke billowing out of the theatre. Entering the theatre by the stage door he saw hundreds of people banging on closed doors and trampling on others in their efforts to escape. Their clothes were on fire. Being in peak physical condition, Will managed to push his way through the crowd to the balcony where the panic was greatest. With sheer brute force he burst open one of the exit doors, only to find there was no fire-escape ladder. It had not been connected. In order to benefit from the New Year crowds, the owners had opened the building early, ignoring safety regulations.

Finding a long strong plank which the builders had been using, Will placed it between the start of the fire escape, which had not been completed, and the window ledge of the adjacent library. The people inside the library had opened the window to watch what was happening. Will helped many crawl across the plank to safety. But finally the end of the plank itself began to burn. It became so charred that the plank broke causing him to fall. As he lay on the road seriously ill, he asked a passer-by if he would contact Dr Gunsaulus. When his uncle arrived at the hospital Will said with almost his dying breath, "I have been thinking about your text for tomorrow, *For this cause came I unto his hour*. These frightened people in the balcony needed a certain strength which I fortunately was able to supply."

Had it not been for Will McLaughlin, the theatre death toll of over 600 would have been even greater. The Iriquois fire was one of the worst fire disasters in American history. Some months later, the university that Will attended put the old charred plank on display. On it they had carved, "Will McLaughlin. For this cause came I unto this hour."

Central to the teaching of Jesus was his strong belief that life is for service, not survival. It is for self-giving, not self-glorification or personal gain. He wanted his followers to be good neighbours, ready to help when help is needed, to use the gifts they had been given to make a contribution to the common good. He wanted them quietly and unostentatiously to share the best of themselves with others. We are called to do the same. As the old song puts it, "If I can help somebody as I pass along, my living shall not be in vain." Shakespeare has Mark Antony say, "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is often interred in their bones." I believe Mark Antony was wrong. The good we do, does live after us" Making sacrifices for the good of others is in fact the most important thing we will leave behind. We will be remembered and valued, not by what we earn, but by what we do and what we are. Jesus said, "He who would be great among you, let him become the servant of all". God seems to run his universe on the principle that only greatness based on service will last.

"Why have we come to this hour?" In a recent T.V. interview the ninety year old Sir David Attenborough answered that question by inferring that he had come to this hour, to use what mental and physical energy he still had, to continue trying to save our endangered natural world. I hope we will support him in this

vital crusade. I hope also that in many other ways we will make a real contribution to the common good, by sharing the best of ourselves with our families, neighbours, friends and strangers, by weaving gentleness and caring love into their lives, by being generous rather than self-centred. There is no smaller package in the world than a person who is all wrapped up in himself or herself.

Central to the life and teaching of Jesus was his strong belief that life is for service, not survival, for self-giving not self-glorification, for doing good to others, preferably unostentatiously. I believe God wants all of us to leave somewhere on this earth, the sign of the Cross, some sign of unselfishness, sacrifice and caring love.

Let us join now in our prayers for others

Father we live today in a world where daily life is far from normal, where greed and hate, violence and viruses cause so many problems and so much unhappiness, a world where many people unfortunately seek to grab as much as they can for themselves, with no thought for others. a world where some like us, have plenty of water to drink and to wash their hands, but a world where, for thousands of others, clean water is scarce. We live also in a world which for many has become a valley of the shadow of death, a world where many are suffering and dying from poverty and famine, and from the relentless march of the corona virus.

In our prayers this morning we would remember those hard pressed hospital doctors, nurses and members of staff in our hospitals and care homes. We remember also today the many volunteers known to us who do what they can to keep the machinery of community life well oiled. Help us also to play our part in enriching the lives of others, especially those who are experiencing isolation and loneliness. Though unable to share a coffee with them, may their hearts be gladdened and lives enriched by our phone calls.

Finally a prayer for ourselves in these difficult and trying days. May our faith be an anchor for us. However dark the night, let us remember that the morning star continues to shine in the sky.

Amen

Our closing hymn this morning was written by Alison Robertson. a personal friend of mine . It is Hymn 115 in the Church of Scotland hymn book "Love is the touch of intangible joy". This morning we will sing the lovely words to the Tune *Bonnie George Campbell*, number 165 in the hymn book

- 1 Love is the touch of intangible joy;
love is the force that no fear can destroy;
love is the goodness we gladly applaud:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
- 2 Love is the lilt in a lingering voice;
love is the hope that can make us rejoice;
love is the cure for the frightened and flawed:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
- 3 Love is the light in the tunnel of pain;
love is the will to be whole once again;
love is the trust of a friend on the road:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
- 4 Love is the Maker, and Spirit, and Son;
love is the kingdom their will has begun;

love is the pathway the saints all have trod:
God is where love is, for love is of God.

Alison M. Robertson (*b.* 1940)

Benediction