

6 September 2020

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Alison Quilter

Reading: Psalm 116:12-19 & John 8:31-32

Hymn: CH4 656 I come with joy

Holy Communion

PRAYER

Loving God, we come before you to sing a new song, to live a new life, to walk a different way, all of which is given in your grace for us and for all your beloved children.

So, we sing with joy, hope, and faith, in the knowledge of your care, and the assurance of your love.

We, your faithful children, delight this day, in proclaiming your name, and ask for the strength to continue to bear witness to your holy word, to constantly reform and rebuild your church, and to never waver from welcoming all, stranger and friend: seeing your son Jesus Christ, in the face of all whom we meet.

We come, not only to confess the wrong we have done, but to rejoice in the gifts you have given us, to do good in and for the world, and through this, we hope that we may have the ability to build your church which is truly for all.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

All:

Our Father, who 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

Psalm 116:12-19

- ¹² What shall I return to the Lord
for all his goodness to me?
- ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.
- ¹⁴ I will fulfil my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
- ¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his faithful servants.
- ¹⁶ Truly I am your servant, Lord;
I serve you just as my mother did;
you have freed me from my chains.
- ¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank-offering to you
and call on the name of the Lord.
- ¹⁸ I will fulfil my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,
- ¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the Lord –
in your midst, Jerusalem.
- Praise the Lord.

John 8:31-32

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'

MESSAGE

'Seek the truth.

Listen to the truth

Teach the truth

love the truth

Abide by the truth

and defend the truth

unto death.'

These words written by the great Czech theologian reformer, Jan Hus.

In March 2018, I stood alongside Christians on the shore of the Sea of Galilee on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Our group comprising of 21 people from 6 different churches in Scotland, three of us ministers.

Although, I was not the leader of the group, I was given the privilege of conducting a communion service on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, with my best friend. An absolutely over-whelming and emotional experience.

As I prepared the communion table, a table made of local stone with a plain stone slab top covering, a profound peace came upon me.

Tremendously powerful and re-assuring. I invited the group to come and gather round and take a seat. The seats were wooden benches

arranged in a semi-circle under a canopy of trees and we started our informal communion service.

All 21 individuals – pilgrims on a journey of faith – sharing in communion together. We gathered together on that spring morning which had a slight chill in the air; a haze over the top of the sea, but as the sun rose higher in the sky we felt the warmth surrounding us as we progressed through the service.

As we came together in a circle at the moment of sharing in communion – a circle of love, we passed bread and the cup full of wine from one to the other. And as I sipped on the wine, I was powerfully aware of 2 things – the great gift of friendship that was given to me and the great privilege to lead and share in communion by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Remembering Jesus and the meal he asked us to share when fellow Christians gathered together.

It was a reminder to me that our faith is shaped by those who have tread this path before us. When we think of those who tread the path before us, our minds may return to our own localised situations – those saints that Hebrews describes as the ‘great cloud of witnesses.’

Today we remember that the great cloud of witnesses are not just from our own local setting, but Christians who we have journeyed with from other branches of Christ’s church, Christians who have touched our lives as we have walked together in.

Christians whose footsteps made a large impact upon what we are able to enjoy today – the Bible in our hands in our own language – not in

Latin. The symbols of communion, seen, to be shared, to be enjoyed to be touched and held within our own hands as holy symbols of love from our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in that peaceful setting, I became aware of those in the circle with me eagerly waiting to receive the ancient goblet. They were smiling; some had tears in their eyes; and there was a profound sense of joy and connection as they passed the cup from hand to hand and greeted one another with a blessing for their journey.

And in those moments – I remembered Jan Hus, the Czech theologian – He was the first person to put the **common cup into the hands of ordinary people**. Hus, placed an empty chalice on an open Bible – as a symbol that the word of God and the celebration of the Lord's supper shouldn't be separated.

Neither should be seen as mysterious, or idolised, or hidden, or treated as sacred entities within themselves. Instead he taught - they are tangible signs of witness to a living faith that is always moving forwards; is renewed and embraced and experienced by each generation into whose hands it is entrusted.

This was a real means of celebrating the gifts that God had provided.....Building on Hus' idea of the priesthood of all believers, Luther was instrumental in reforming church worship as well as laying the groundwork for what historians now refer to as the Reformation.

And so we too today are witness to a living faith that is always moving forward; is renewed; is embraced and experienced by us into whose hands it is entrusted for this generation and the next.

There are 4 key words that Luther, Jan Hus and the other great reformers held true and they are: WORD & FREEDOM. GRACE & TRUTH, or if you prefer the more familiar words found within John's gospel - *'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, **and the truth will make you free.**' Amen.*

HYMN

CH4 656:1-5

I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved, and free,
the life of Jesus to recall,
in love laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
each proud division ends.

The love that made us makes us one,
and strangers now are friends.

The spirit of the risen Christ,
unseen, but ever near,

is in such friendship better known:
alive and among us here.

Together met, together bound,
by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world,
the love that makes us one.