



**Chrystal Chronicle
Newsletter
October/November 2020**



**St Mary's-Greyfriars' Parish Church
Locum Minister: Rev Douglas Irving**

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Scottish charity no. SC00943**

From the Locum Minister

I write on a day the Prime Minister and First Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all issued revised restrictions in view of a rise in Coronavirus cases in the UK, this part of a world pandemic which has already claimed over 200,000 lives in America, with high numbers of deaths in particular in European countries, in India and Iran in the Middle and Far East, and in the South Americas too. It is indeed a depressing outlook we face in the coming months, with many of us in these times finding ourselves in prisons of depression. What is our God doing in fearful days? For me, His call to service as your Locum with weekly YouTube messaging, telephone calls, and more recently with parish visiting resumed, has infused my life with purpose and provided framework and lifting of the human spirit.

In his time, the somewhat reclusive hymn writer, William Cowper, (1731-1800) struggled with depression, with a lifetime history of mental breakdowns and suicide attempts. He was, however, to come to experiential saving faith in Jesus Christ, through reading the account of Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead, seeing himself as "summoned to life", as Jesus called him by name. He drew inspiration too from words of Paul in his letter to the Romans, 3:25, "For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past" (NLT). He put trust in Jesus's sacrificial death for him. William Cowper was to write on reading Paul's words in Romans, "Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me".

In his own faith walk, William Cowper was much strengthened by the ministry of a former captain of slave ships involved in the slave trade, become Church of England clergyman in nearby Olney, Buckinghamshire, the evangelical John Newton (1725-1807).

Newton's writings were of not inconsiderable assistance to me, too, 200 years on in the working out of my own call to the ordained Ministry in the 1970s. I thought and still think that the Evangelical Revival of the 1700s, of which Cowper, Newton and Whitefield (1714-1770) and brothers Charles Wesley (1707-1788) and John Wesley (1703-1791) were all part, along with Wilberforce (1759-1833) and other members of the Clapham Sect and other social reformers of the time, was one of the great periods in the History of the Church in the UK.

Cowper's most famous hymns include "O for a closer walk with God", "God moves in a mysterious way" (modern rendering by Stuart Townsend at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tpl2Jst2_eY) and "There is a fountain filled with blood" from which we derive familiar verses:

"Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his word? Return, O holy Dove, return, sweet messenger of rest; I hate the sins that made thee mourn, and drove thee from my breast."

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain."

"There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away. E'er since by faith I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die."

As in the days of Noah, it seems, the pandemic of Coronavirus covers the face of the whole Earth. Not since two World Wars last century

has there been so much warring, a theme of my April/May 2020 pastoral letter to you. President Trump identifies China as first cause. Why has God allowed this to happen? God is not much mentioned in the media in regard to the Pandemic. He's not even blamed for it!

But the pandemic is surely held in His purposes sure as Arthur Campbell Ainger wrote (1894):

“God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year: God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near; nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. March we forth in the strength of God, with the banner of Christ unfurled, that the light of the glorious gospel of truth may shine throughout the world: fight we the fight with sorrow and sin to set their captives free, that earth may filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.”

The imperative upon the Church, upon us as Christians, is unceasingly to discern and preach God's Person and Word in the here and now, pursuing renewed transformational evangelical fervour.

My study of William Cowper's life has led me to a modern day theologian and William Cowper devotee, John Piper, born 1946, Chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He shares the truth that God's purposes are being outworked in these days and that God is in control! See online, first, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/insanity-and-spiritual-songs-in-the-soul-of-a-saint>.

Also, second,

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/gospelbound/john-piper-coronavirus-and-christ/>

In Piper's analysis in the first, Cowper's life is seen to have been marked by self-examination, which the present lockdown has offered us anew opportunity, a focusing on the greater reality of God, a pointing to the efficaciousness, in terms of personal salvation, of our redemption from sin through the blood of Jesus shed,

and the instilling of faith and love through shared worship, to which we all hope soon to return shortly, and which is the aim of my weekly online YouTube services these last months. The second provides Piper's consideration of Coronavirus in the purposes of our God.

In terms of the global mission of the Church, Piper points out that this crisis of pandemic in the world affords the Church opportunity to proclaim afresh Christ crucified, risen, ascended, just as the death of the Church's first martyr, Stephen, to which Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, was consenting, fuelled evangelical fervour furth of Jerusalem and throughout the World. The current status quo of settled social conditions and everything being OK is being upset today. The known world comes crashing down. Businesses and the prevailing life-order close down. Christ's Great Commission calls again urgently. In the shake-up, the prospect of a long eternity ahead for each of us is in focus again. Christ-less life and entertainment is again revisited, "spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care" are anew reflected upon. The beauty of Christ and His infinite worth are anew spoken of and proclaimed. The individual's call to repentance and Christ's call to us to be received as Lord and personal Saviour anew heard, to be responded to and affirmed.

There is much opportunity and work for the whole Church in these times! Let William Cowper have the closing words:

"The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be,
help me to tear it from thy throne, and worship only thee
So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame;
so purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb."

Your Locum Minister and friend,
Douglas

Church Register

Please let me know of any changes of address: **Marion Bennett**, 2
Wolfgill Drive Dumfries DG1 4XY. Tel: 263106

Deaths

Mrs A Motroni on 30/7/20

Mrs I Opstad on 9/9/20

From the Editor

Because our church buildings remain closed, and we are still waiting for guidance from the Church of Scotland and our local Presbytery about when services might resume, we are unable to produce and, more importantly, distribute printed copies of our newsletter. We appreciate that not all our members will be able to access these online-only editions but we would urge you to let others know they are available and how they can see them.

Well done to any eagle-eyed readers who spotted that the cover photo on this edition of the newsletter is of the same tree that featured on the cover of the June/July edition. A beautiful chestnut tree in the grounds of the Crichton.

Church grounds

Following on from the article in the last newsletter asking for help in weeding and tidying up the paths, etc at the church, we'd like to thank the anonymous person (or people!) who cleaned the church steps recently. Every little helps, as they say!

Congratulations!

To Robert and Eleanor Haining who celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 2nd September.

And to Dick Geddes, who was 100 on 20th September



From the Session Clerk

Dear fellow Members,

On a chilly but thankfully dry Sunday, 23rd August, Catriona Logan made her farewell to the Eldership of SMG and Caerlaverock Churches. We had chosen David's commemorative seat at the Lifeboat Station, Glencaple as a most appropriate place. As we assembled for 2pm, we were all impressed by the tidal bore coming swiftly past, gaining volume as it went. Many of us had never seen such a thing, and in such force, we all felt that this was something very special, laid on just for us.



As we are not allowed large gatherings, you may like to see what was said. “Good morning everyone and thank you for coming here today to say goodbye to Catriona Logan. During David's short ministry with us, Catriona has won her own place in the hearts of our two congregations - as a steadfast, loving, and supportive wife, an Elder at SMG, and the one who introduced us all to Parish Nursing.

We have all had cause to be grateful that David and Catriona answered our call and gave such committed and energetic service to church and community alike. Normally, we would have held a more traditional farewell do in the hall - with much excellent home baking - but currently that is not possible. So, no engraved crystal, no commemorative pictures of Dumfries, hopefully you have enough of those, stored in good memories. Just this wee pear tree, which, we hope, will remind you of us as it grows, blossoms, and bears fruit. We hope it will get on well with sister apple and that they will live harmoniously in your new garden for many years. Please accept it with our good wishes and prayers for your future wellbeing and happiness in your new home, Catriona.” Sheila Wilson expressed similar good wishes on behalf of Caerlaverock. Catriona has accepted the post of Manager of Parish Nursing for Scotland and we wish her well in this exciting new post. She moved out of the Manse on 2nd September and was very grateful for this last year with us.

Anne Mackie
Session Clerk





Catriona receiving the pear and apple trees from the Session Clerks



From Dumfries & District Christian Aid

As we are aware, the Coffee Morning on 19 September in the Usual Place did not take place - however we can still donate. If we receive donations directly, these will be added through our local bank account. Alternatively, those on Facebook can donate to Dumfries & District Christian Aid Fundraising on their Facebook page. Anyone can donate by using this link <https://e-offering.christianaid.org.uk>

Thank you.

Shoe Box Appeal

It's that time of year again and we do hope that people will feel that they can contribute to the appeal. We need to support and publicise the appeal now more than ever. If you would like a leaflet please contact one of the three people below and we will make sure one is delivered to you as soon as possible. Please also feel free to contact one of us if you would like to donate either items to go in a box, or a monetary gift so that we can either purchase items on your behalf and make up a box for you, or put it towards the transport costs. We are more than happy to collect boxes/contributions from you (or your doorstep!) so please do not hesitate to get in touch and we can confirm collection arrangements with you.

The completed boxes will be collected from Dumfries on Monday 2nd November.

Contacts:

Gillian Boyes (262262)

Liz Tanner (261486/07810 200493)

Anne Twiname (263241)

Wider Church Group

Crossreach Calendars

The 2021 wall calendar includes a picture of the Caul on the Nith for the month of March. Cost £5. The appointments slim line wall calendar features a series of pictures painted by people who attended the Crossreach Heart for Art groups. Cost £4.50. Please let Liz Tanner know by end of October if you wish to put in an order (01387 261486/07810 200 493).

Kirk Session on Zoom

Due to the current restrictions, the Kirk Session is unable to meet in person, and so on Wednesday, 2nd September we met online, via Zoom. There were 20 of us in total, using various methods of getting online – phones, iPads, laptops and desktop computers. We (almost) all managed to see one another and have proper discussions.



Our church Treasurer, Rod Williamson, who organised the technical aspects of the meeting.



Poem

The following poem was submitted by Pierluigi Angelini, who has occasionally given us poems for the church magazine.

A Message of Hope

In this critical time that we have in our world today,
We should retain our faith and continue to pray.
Jesus listens and is always there,
Because for all of us we know He does care.
Stay united and help and consider one another,
By sharing love, the greatest gift of all, we can get much further.
Then we have the strength to get through
This is what we should try to do.

For reflection

Sing praises to the Lord

Hymns and psalms

Oh most wonderful God, we praise you

Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.

**Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to
Trust and Obey.**

Everlasting God, we know that you are always with us.

**Remembrance Day: we remember all those who paid the ultimate
sacrifice for our freedom.**

**Difficult days, difficult times: we know Lord that you are always with
us. We gain strength and comfort from this knowledge and we thank
You for your manifold mercies.**

**Autumn colours - how beautiful they are and we thank you Lord for
your creation.**

Yesterday, today and tomorrow you are with us Lord.

**Saviour God, be with us all in the coming days and let us always be
mindful of the needs of others.**

Glory to your name, O Lord most high!

Next newsletter

The deadline for our December/January issue is **Sunday November 22**. As we do not know if the church services will have resumed by then, any items will need to be sent direct. Many thanks as always.

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Treasurer, Gift Aid and freewill offering envelopes

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