

I had a busy time last week so did not get a newsletter put together.

One event was Chris Tabraham and I did the "Kiltwalk" on Friday along the Crinan Canal. You may have seen pictures which were put up on the Church Facebook page. We had a great day in the sunshine and met a number of people who we were able to tell that we were walking to raise funds for Christian Aid. In total we had donations of over £900 Fantastic! Very many thanks to all who donated and encouraged us. AND - The Tom Hunter Foundation is adding **50%** to all donations!

There will also be the opportunity to donate to Christian Aid during **Christian Aid Week from the 6th May** – look out for notices and envelopes. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk>

The news we see daily of drought and flood across the world, severe problems for agriculture, particularly subsistence crop growing and nomadic herding, the devastating impact of Covid in many countries, makes us realise even more how vital agencies such as Christian Aid are in ministering to millions of hungry, displaced and homeless people. We ask ourselves daily "What can we do today to help, to counter the changes happening to our climate, and how can we share what we have with those who have lost livelihood, work and homes?"

We are given a commission by Jesus to spread the Good News of God's Kingdom.

Jesus commissioned himself in quoting from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" Luke 4 v 18

We see people today who are poor and need to hear good news, are hungry and need to have food. We see people who are imprisoned by loss of land, of crops, of herds, who can no longer live freely in the life they have always known and need to be set free by having again a life of purpose and dignity. We see people blinded to the suffering of others by their own comfort and lifestyle, who need to be set free to have compassion for those in need. We see people oppressed by those who control assets and power and deny them to others, who need to be given the freedom to live lives of fulness and purpose.

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go and visit you?"
The King will reply "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25 v 37 – 40.

Since the start of the church after Jesus' resurrection the church has sought to fulfil the example of Jesus and we all carry this forward in our own ways as we share what we have and care for others, both nearby and afar. The church buildings in North Knapdale may have been closed but the church people continue to live as Jesus' disciples in wonderful ways.

Mid Argyll Mission Plan

I mentioned two weeks ago that Argyll Presbytery has invited the five parishes of Mid Argyll to start planning how the congregations can be structured to best work together in the future. All the existing congregations are losing numbers, and the finances available to pay for ministers or other workers is severely limited. We are therefore being asked to consider how the limited resources

across the five parishes can be used most effectively to tell people about Jesus and the Good News. How can we “go and make disciples” (Matt 28 v 19) in North Knapdale, Kilmartin, Glassary, Ford, Lochgilphead, Ardrishaig and South Knapdale?

We did give this lots of thought two years ago and then the Covid shutdown occurred and progress halted. This process has now restarted and Catherine Paterson, Norma Kelly and I attended the first meeting last week with representatives from the other parishes and Rev David Mitchell, Presbytery Planning Convenor.

The suggestions we had from the previous meetings of a form of shared ministry may be taken forward and we will also have to consider the best use for the buildings we have. This will all be considered in the light of the experience we have had during the Covid lock down.

Other meetings are planned and then proposals coming out of the discussions will be brought to the congregations for consideration. Please pray that our parishes will move forward in God's way.

Letter and prayer from Rev Owain Jones:

Hello, everyone.

It's hard for me to comprehend that this is the last set of weekly Presbytery Prayers I'll be writing for you. I'd said some time ago that I didn't want something I'd inherited from Douglas as an expedient during the pandemic – which was still then just into its scary first phase – to become a precedent for my successor. I had no idea then, of course, that we'd be blessed with Janet in that role, and she will, I know, make a rich and very distinctive contribution to it.

If all of that has filled you with the horrible thought that I might burst into a rendition of “I did it my way” as I hand over in June (however we do that), be reassured that I'd be equally horrified! No, what I have playing in my head now, as it has at various points during our trek across this awful year, is “The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended...” For me, it's the hymn that best sums up the zig-zag experiences of the past months. I understand that hymn better, now, after the year we've had.

Our *individual* experience is “The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended...” “And there was evening and there was morning – one day...” “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes with the morning...” And we need this. Grace and forgiveness work by setting us free from yesterday, from what was, and what we were. Yet to experience time in that way is to experience it as a series of disconnections, “one thing after another.” Sometimes, this pandemic year has seemed like that. And yet...

We thank Thee that Thy church unsleeping,
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day or night.

Now, that's the collective experience of the Church on earth. isn't the experience of eternity. We're not there yet! But it is the experience of my life, my day, my challenges,

difficulties, successes, failures, blessings and questions – and of course, of my prayers - being taken up into the rolling, unceasing round of the prayers and worship of the Church on earth.

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As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

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The sense of that is sometimes overwhelming – but even more so this year. I've been amused to see how a significant number of people watch the UCB's YouTube worship on a Saturday evening – and how many people watch it at 11 on a Sunday, and how many people (the pattern's remarkably consistent!) watch it at predictable points during the week. Initially, I fretted. What did it mean – was it even true – that these people were "joining" our "Sunday morning" worship not just before, but long after, that Sunday morning had taken place?

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But then, a penny dropped. Or rather: something I'd always known has come to life in a way I'd **never known** before. It's what CS Lewis says somewhere about "the Church, spread out through all time, terrible as an army with banners, and the Church gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb..."

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This might seem like a huge digression from where I started – but it's not, really. This has been a remarkable year to be the Moderator of a Presbytery. The sense of the time-bound work we do being taken up into the whole life and work of the Church on earth, and being grounded in eternity has been luminous. The way in which, distanced, we have been together, the awareness of the Presbytery's life as a continuous, dispersed but united fusion of work and prayer, the knowledge that in very different settings, in completely different communities, our congregations have been struggling with the same set of circumstances. We've found unique and diverse responses, each bound together by the prayers of all, all of this seems to have been disclosed by the stripping away of all that we'd usually take for granted.

I think we've all been privileged to see aspects of this. I've certainly been privileged, as Moderator, to see it from here!

You are all in my prayers. Thank you for your prayers.

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Owain

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PS While this is me effectively concluding my Wednesday prayers, I do intend to do something online to mark Pentecost, as to stop short of doing so seems to me to be to leave things incomplete. That said, I haven't firmed up my thoughts on that – so as they used to say on television "Suggestions on a postcard to..." (Actually, an email will do!)
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Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it." *Genesis 28:16*
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**Whither shall I go from your Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in She'ol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me. *Psalms 139: 7-10***
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Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8: 35-39*
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Let us present the experience of these past months to God.
Let us pray.
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In the sameness of our days
and their difference each from the other,
in the dislocations of time and memory,
in the tumble of emotions,
the torrent of experience,
and the eerie absence of "things that happened today"
noted in evening phone-calls, when friends ask
"How was your day?" –
And we realize that, even if we have been endlessly busy,
We have little to say.

In that strangeness – in this strangeness -
you have been with us, Lord.

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We have been grateful for the coming of evening
and the ending of many a day,
and have found it difficult to awaken
to a new day indistinguishable from the old.
We have been offered opportunities, new mastery –
And mastery of new things has been forced on us.
We have known every emotion, enhanced,
had to deny some, to carry on,
and had to watch in others the effects
of things we ourselves have not felt.
It has been difficult, but it has not **all** been difficult.
*In that strangeness – in this strangeness -
you have been with us, Lord.*

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And for us, and many of those around us,
a strange transformation has been wrought
in experience and existence, and in our relating to each other.
Friends we saw infrequently, in the busyness of “normality”,
have appeared much more regularly on small screens,
and us on theirs.
Family we met in the week’s regular round
feel distanced, not brought near
by a technology which, we feel,
is both “marvellous,” and “better than nothing”.
We understand this epoch so much better, after a year,
yet there is so much that we do not grasp at all.
We have learned how little we knew,
and we know how little we know.
*In that strangeness – in this strangeness -
you have been with us, Lord.*

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Yet for us, faith has set all this
in so much broader a context.

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We have both had to make do with what we have had
and discovered that we could live,
and more amply, more flexibly, more openly,
than ever we imagined.
We couch our diverse experiences so often in the same terms:

“We had said ‘We must, over the next five years...’
and it was done in three weeks.”

But more than this, we have grasped anew
how the life of the Church is grounded in the Spirit,
the unity of the Church is life in the Spirit,
the worship of the Church is taken up by the Spirit
out of time, and into eternity, and presented to God.
Space and time, distance and separation,
these things, though they retain their reality
have loosened their hold over us –
for we have rediscovered that they are nothing to you.
Love, and the risen life of Christ
have overcome them all.

*In that strangeness – in this strangeness -
you have been with us, Lord.*

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Worship by Zoom, worship by YouTube -
We know the imperfections of these, and bemoan them!
The loss of physical togetherness in shared space –
we have lamented its denial to us,
and rejoiced in its restoration –
partial, imperfect, tentative,
understandably not reassuring to all, yet.
But now we understand more clearly than ever we could
that our worship is one with the worship
of those who both are not, and are, with us:
the whole Church on earth,
the Great Church on earth and in heaven.

*In that strangeness – in this strangeness -
you have been with us, Lord.*

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We live in a world become strange,
in a new, alien, changed reality –
but we **are** living in it,
living out of the resources you have given us.
For that, receive our thanks and praise.

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The future is not what it was!
New challenges have arisen,
but old fears have evaporated.
A Gospel we felt was besieged
behind our beloved stone walls,

(as though that could ever be;
as though the Gospel were our Good News, to fret about,
not yours, for us to proclaim)
has burst, like its Christ from his tomb,
out into a world that *is* receptive.
For that, receive our thanks and praise.

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Yet we know the wounds inflicted on those around us –
and also on us,
by the unnaturalness of these times.
We bring these to you, and ask for healing.
[SILENCE]

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For those who have lived with fear, loneliness and isolation –
And especially self-isolation and shielding,
Hear our prayer.
[SILENCE]

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For those who have been tried and tested,
And whose sense of the reality and meaning of their lives has been called into question,
And those who will live with wounded minds and souls, because of this,
Hear our prayer.
[SILENCE]

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For those who have known bereavement and grief
And experienced their mourning and its rites truncated,
Hear our prayer.
[SILENCE]

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Lord, let our faith, and our hope,
and our new understandings of church life,
and our deepened understanding of who we are as your Church
allow us to face all reality, its heights and depths,
as you, in Jesus Christ, confronted the whole of our human reality
in all its complexity,
and overcame, and set us free.
[SILENCE]

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We bring those needs we know, and those we should know, but did not see.
[SILENCE]

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And as Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father...

You can find news on our church website: www.northknapdale.org

And our Face Book page – North Knapdale Church.

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