



Time to reset or rediscover our Mission?

Dear friends,

As of last weekend, we have begun to see the easing of lockdown restrictions. No doubt for many of us these changes are welcome. For example, I've heard several of you saying that it was the first time that you'd been able to meet a new grandchild, other than through a computer screen. What a joy that must have been! And for our younger people, who tend to have much busier social lives, it was at least a step in the right direction.

However, we should not be fooled into thinking that we will be back to normal any time soon - not least in terms of how church will be experienced. The easing of the restrictions does not include gatherings of more than a few people from up to two households and so we are still somewhat short of the kinds of gatherings that we are used to in church. Indeed larger gatherings in public places, such as churches, are still some way off.

While this will be disappointing to many, there remains much for us to be grateful for - not least the technology that is allowing a good number of us to remain in touch. Our services are accessible online and through Facebook and those who have no internet access can now use a dedicated phone number to listen to the services while others are watching. Home groups, prayer gatherings and Kirk Session meetings are continuing through Zoom, meaning that learning and devotion and fellowship and organisation are all still perfectly possible - thanks to digital technology.

I'd like to encourage more of you to consider taking the step into the digital world! It might seem daunting and you might find yourself thinking that you wouldn't know where to start - but many have gone before you and can assist you as you take tentative first steps. Those of you who are somewhat more senior should be encouraged to know that there is a whole legion of 'silver surfers' out there and that folks high up in their 80s have succeeded in getting connected online! Well done to them. Many have said that they should have made the move years ago!

I'd like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to those of you who have been continuing to support the church financially. The church is not meeting in the same way, but many of our outgoings continue all the same. Of course the easiest way to continue to give your offerings is by setting up a direct debit or standing order with your bank; this really does take the stress out of it. Alternatively, you can send cheques or drop off envelopes at our church building. These are being collected, counted and banked regularly. Your generosity of spirit, reflected in your giving, will mean that we can keep our heads above water as best as is possible and that we will be in a reasonable position to move forward when everything gets back to normal.

This leads me to my final theme for today. What will 'normal' look like? It might be some time - indeed the time might never come - when we'll be as we were before the pandemic struck.

But while there will be some sadness about that - after all, we all love what is familiar and dear - there is no doubt about it that every organisation needs from time to time to reform itself and the church is no different. I want to suggest that for us this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to re-design church, to make it fit for purpose for this century and for the circumstances we find ourselves in.

It's possible with various of our gadgets and devices to return them to what are known as 'factory settings'. This is to say that we can wipe the slate clean and start over. We are not exactly in that place, but we certainly do have an opportunity, with a blank piece of paper in front of us, to examine and reflect very carefully upon what God is calling us to in these days. We're not that quite 'in that place' because the basic nature of Church is not for us to mess with; it's Christ's Church and the building blocks of who we are and what we're about are given in scripture and are non-negotiable. But everything beyond that, about how we organise and what we actually do, is up for debate and should develop according to the changing circumstances.

It seems to me that principally the church needs to rediscover its calling to mission. That is true of almost the entire church across the whole of the western world where for some considerable time now we have known nothing but increasing secularism and church decline. Nothing is going to change in terms of these trends unless the church understands that it has good news and that its primary calling is to share that. That's what Jesus sends us out to do (Matthew 29:16-20) and we need to look at EVERYTHING we do and ask, 'is this helping or hindering us in fulfilling our calling'?

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ST. ANDREW'S ARBROATH**Member Records****May 2020****Baptisms and Blessings** - None**Weddings** - None**Funerals** - Doug Hamilton, Gladys Cooper

Martin and Ian, our pastoral assistant, conducted other funerals though none were of members of our congregation. Nonetheless, we remember the bereaved families in our prayers.

IMPORTANT DATES**JULY EDITION****Word Processed files, as attachments, should be sent directly to the Editor at quest@arbroathstandrews.org.uk****Please DO NOT embed articles in an email as these then need additional formatting work.****Monday 22nd June (Word-Processed file)****(Continued from page 1.)**

And so, when the time comes for us getting back to business, we should be thinking not so much about 'business as usual' as what business we need to be in for Scotland in 2020. It won't be easy or without hurt but the very harsh reality is that if the Church in Scotland doesn't open itself to this new reformation then it's likely that its demise will continue and that its death will be less than a generation away.

While we have breath in our lungs, and God's Spirit to guide us, let's not falter.

With every blessing,

Martin & Elaine

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Ask Theophilus

Question : In Matthew 5:13, Jesus is reported as saying:

'You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet'. But surely salt, (i.e., sodium chloride) cannot cease to be salt. That chemical fact makes nonsense of this saying supposed to have come from the lips of Jesus!

Theophilus answers : There are many, many references in the Old Testament prophets to merchants cheating in the market square. Here are several examples. In his seventh vision, Zechariah depicts a personification of Wickedness being pushed down into a merchant's measuring vessel (an 'ephah'), weighted down with a heavy slab, and swept away by winged creatures to be dumped in Babylon, to be confined there. This vision was a very clear swipe at crooked merchants who used false weights and measures—their cheating termed 'Wickedness', a Hebrew word often used as the opposite or antithesis of righteousness.

Hosea refers to the 'merchant in whose hands are false balances' (12:7). Amos represents rascally merchants as sighing for the Sabbath to be over so that they 'may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances' (8:6). Micah writes that the Lord was crying across the city and saying, 'Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights' (6:11)?

Sad to say, things had not changed very much. Thus in Matthew 5:15 Jesus could well be referring to the blatantly dishonest practice of salt merchants adulterating the salt by mixing it with chalk to make it go further. But in the humid atmosphere, the salt tended to dissolve leaving behind in the housewives' larders bland tasteless chalk with no preservative properties, far less with the ability to add flavour to the food.

However, it is no longer the dishonest, cheating merchants to whom these words were directed. Rather were Jesus' words aimed at insipid believers who were failing to be salt and light to the secular community. By suppressing the truth (because they themselves were compromising their standards) they were failing to preserve society, which consequently was declining and becoming increasingly corrupt.

So the challenge to us all is to stand firm for righteousness, integrity and truth. To quote again from an Old Testament prophet: 'The Lord has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). How easy it is for us who profess to follow Christ to become like adulterated salt that is mainly chalk and failing dismally to be worthy of Our Lord and Master. Someone wrote, 'Evil flourishes when good men are silent'.

David Searle

MODERATOR

As far as the role of Moderator goes, it's been an introduction like no other! Not since 1689 has there been no Assembly and the weeks prior to my installation, and since, have been marked by one email after another headed with the word CANCELLED!

Within that mix, there were some things directly relating to the life and work of the Church and some things of a civic nature, reflecting the Church's engagement with wider society. As an example of the former, each Sunday I would have been at different congregations leading them in worship etc. and as for the latter, this summer I would ordinarily have been a special guest taking the salute at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo and, later, at Balmoral (again!) as a guest of Her Majesty the Queen and preaching at Crathie Kirk. All cancelled.

But there are always other ways to look at things. Eight

hundred people would have been at my installation but upwards of 25,000 viewed it online! On Pentecost Sunday, I would have been in one particular congregation - instead I was able to share a message with well over 20,000 having viewed that service so far - including folks in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and the African Republic of Benin!

Whether we like it or not, we are in the digital age and the Church needs to quickly find its place there AND to stay there even when lockdown is lifted. We might think about it this way - that we'll go forward as 'analogue church' and as 'digital church'. In terms of reaching out in mission, the digital engagement is crucial.

For now, I'll continue living in Arbroath. That makes much more sense on every level. But as lockdown eases further - as we hope it will - the time will come when it will make sense for me to be in Edinburgh and to throw myself fully into the role of Moderator. For now, we proceed 'one day at a time'.

Guild News

Since the lockdown the Guild Office in Edinburgh has been emailing a weekly edition of "Church of Scotland Guild News". It's a way of keeping in touch with all the Guilds and also gives us information of any changes etc. (You can subscribe by going to the Church of Scotland website.)

The latest email (May 26th) explains changes to the National Convener's year of office. After careful consideration it has been agreed to change the start of the year that the National Convener serves, making it from the Annual Gathering to the next Annual Gathering instead of from the General Assembly. This would make it more a Guild event. The new Convener would start her year with the Annual Gathering. To this end Marian Macintyre has kindly agreed to continue as National Convener until September when the Annual Gathering would have taken place and Mabel Wallace will take up the role then..

I asked some of our Guild folk what they were missing most about the Guild and here are a few replies - "so missing the lovely Guild ladies, the chit chat, the speakers"..... "missing the fun, friendship, fellowship".... "chatting over cuppie"..... "missing seeing everyone".... "seeing happy faces just lifts me every time". We'll also be missing "our fish tea and good blether".... "our Summer outing" and of course the Annual Gathering in the Caird Hall with our new Moderator!!

These are things we are missing but they are all happy memories which keep us going. The projects were also mentioned so we'll need to be thinking about a big fundraiser for Seema's Project and Sailors' Society. One kind friend has already knitted two pull on hats for the sailors so please keep knitting folks! We don't know when we'll be able to meet up as before so until that time, like many other groups, we need to find new ways to carry on and we are working on "Guild at Home", but more planning is needed and we have a committee meeting on Zoom next week to discuss matters.

Virtual Messy Church

Our Youth, Children and Family Worker, Carla Ingram, has been working very hard at regularly making and distributing materials to well over two hundred families. Here are some pictures (also overleaf) from the Facebook page that is also being maintained.





Answers to Ken's Garden Quiz

Well, I didn't get any emailed answers, but I know that a few folk did have a look. (Martin did very well. He told me that he got to Daffodils - and then got stuck!!!) Nevertheless, a bit of flower and colour can cheer us up, so I have

given the pictures again with (most of!) the answers. I could not find the labels for T, U and V, but a few hours of research finally gave me the answers to T and U, though, sadly, not V - can anyone still help?! Finally, I apologise for the red herring clue for H - I was sure it was called a Bluet (hence Duet), but it is an Azalea called Blue Danube.

