



The Church of Scotland

Weekly Worship

31st January 2021

Taking part in today's service are: -

Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly
Rev Stephen Ogston, Minister of Inch linked with Luce Valley
Rev Ellen Larson Davidson, Kippen and Norrieston
Suzi Farrant, Young People and Young Adults Development Worker
Rev Tommy MacNeil, Martin's Memorial Church, Stornoway
Rev Sarah Brown, Castlemilk Parish Church, Glasgow

With music from Kirkton Church, Carluke and Martin's Memorial Church, Stornoway

Introduction – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

Hi everybody. Do you remember the old song, "Jesus Bids Us Shine" with a pure, clear light? And then the last line said, you in your small corner and I in mine. It can feel a wee bit like that at times and not least during this lockdown when we are isolated one from another, but at the same time we've come together perhaps more than ever before digitally, pulling our resources and that's what these services are all about. Yes we are in our small corner, but we're part of something much bigger. So we rejoice in that, but most of all, we rejoice to worship God, to sing to His praise and glory, to give Him all the honour God alone deserves. So let us come together and yes let us worship God.

Hymn - Be Still

Verse 1

Be still for the presence of the Lord

The Holy One is here

Come bow before Him now

With reverence and fear

In Him no sin is found

We stand on holy ground

Be still for the presence of the Lord

The Holy One is here



Verse 2

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendor He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Verse 3

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

Prayer of Approach – Rev Stephen Ogston, Minister of Inch linked with Luce Valley

Shall we pray?

Loving God, as we come before you, we come knowing that you welcome us and that you embrace us with a love that will never let us go. We are so precious to you, so valuable, and so unique. Every part of your creation is wonderful, every part has its purpose, and every part is special to you.

As we look at the beauty of the world around us, we remember the beauty that you see in each one of us. And we remember that you have designed us all with a purpose in mind. When our days are full of uncertainty, you place your reassuring hand on us. When our days are full of confusion, you walk with us and guide us.

When our days are full of worry, your words bring stillness and peace. Loving Father, Wonderful Counsellor, our Good Shepherd be with us during this time as we rest in you. Go before us and behind us, surround and hold us.

Lead us to green pastures and quiet waters, so that we can enjoy the peace of your security. Walk with us, strengthen us, and bless us so that we grow in our relationship with you through the good times as well as those days of darkness.



As we appreciate all that you have done for us because of your grace and mercy, we confess our sins to you. We are sorry for all that we have thought, said and done which has caused harm to you or to those around us. We are sorry for the times when we have failed to act or failed to speak out.

We are sorry for the priorities that we have in life which come from our selfishness rather than from an attitude of generosity. And as we tell you our failings, may your river of love purify us once more as we are reassured by how amazing your grace is.

We are so thankful that we belong to you because of all that Jesus has done for us. His life, His death and His resurrection have indeed given us a hope that is our anchor, a life that is eternal and the joy that lifts our spirit.

Father as your precious children, we ask that during this time you would teach us through your Word inspire us through your Spirit and draw us ever closer to you.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Gospel Reading – Rev Ellen Larson Davidson, Kippen and Norrieston

The Gospel reading is taken from Mark chapter 1 reading from verse 21 to verse 28.

Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit.

They went to Capernaum and when the Sabbath came Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching because He taught them as one who had authority not as the teachers of the law.

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

"Be quiet," said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him."

The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching and with authority? He even gives orders to the impure spirits and they obey Him."

News about Jesus spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

All Age Talk – Suzi Farrant, Young People and Young Adults Development Worker

Hi everyone, I wonder who's the messiest person in your family? Who's the one that really struggles to clean up and put things away? Is it you? Are you the one that's constantly being told to clear up, to tidy up? Does everybody else in your family agree who the messiest is?

I wonder, where's the messiest room in your house? Is it the kitchen piled high with bowls and tins from all the baking that you've been doing? Is it your bedroom, with clothes strewn all over the floor, schoolwork left in piles? Maybe you've even got some Lego on the floor and you're having to tip toe around it? Or maybe, maybe you've got one of those spaces in your house that's kind of where all the things that don't really have a home end up. A kind of cupboard that you just shove



things in and close the door and don't look. The sort of place that if you did open the doors, it might all come tumbling out.

I wonder, have you ever arrived at a church building to find it really messy for where you're gonna have worship? No, me neither. When I go to church for worship, when we're able to meet in a building, it's generally always really clean. I wonder if right now 'cause we're all online, you have to be a wee bit careful about where you put the camera, just 'cause you don't wanna show everybody the mess that might be hidden. Or maybe, maybe you've got your pyjama bottoms on and so you can't really stand up 'cause everybody will see.

Anyway, just like we can have messy rooms in our houses, we can actually have a whole lot of mess inside of us. And sometimes this mess, means that we're always doing things wrong. Doing things that we know we shouldn't be doing. Maybe it's, it's all about us kind of getting angry and shouting at people. Maybe we're always fighting with our brothers and sisters. And sometimes we actually find that we're crying lots 'cause we're really sad. Maybe we're just feeling like everything's just getting too much. Everything is going wrong. Nobody really cares.

Right now in this pandemic situation we've got feelings all over the place. Sometimes it can feel like we're all a bit messy. Sometimes we think that we need to clean up those inside messes on our own. And maybe, maybe we think that we need to hide these messes. Hide them when we go to church 'cause church is always so clean. Maybe it's just like, just like how we'd put a hat on to hide up our messy hair.

Well, in today's Bible story, we see someone in Jesus's faith community spill their mess out right in the middle of a worship service. But did you notice how Jesus responded to that person and their mess? He didn't get mad or upset with the person. He didn't tell them to go away or that they weren't welcome. Instead Jesus helped them clean up their mess right there and then. So although our church sanctuaries, where we go for worship, are generally always clean, that doesn't mean that we need to have everything cleaned up in our insides in order to be there. We don't need to hide what's going on, what we're struggling with. We don't need to hide that from Jesus or from anybody else in the church. Do you know what? People in our church communities they can actually help us. Help us with all these inside messes. They can help, help us clean them all up with God's help too of course just like Jesus did in today's story.

So I wonder who it was that you identified with most in that story. Are you feeling a bit like the man who spilled his messes out? Perhaps you feel all messed up inside and you can't quite hide it any longer. I wonder who in your church community you could share that with this week? Or maybe you feel like everyone else at the service, sitting there, watching, waiting to see what was going to happen. And if we're really honest, maybe a bit annoyed at the interruptions, at the mess. I wonder if when we next hear some interruptions, we next find some mess, we could maybe, maybe treat those people a wee bit more like how Jesus did. Or maybe, maybe you feel quite like Jesus. Maybe you feel open to such messy interruptions and you're actually really keen to help people, to help them clean up their mess.

I wonder if you know people that need help with their messes? Maybe you can help them by listening to them and by showing them, pointing them to Jesus, the one who's really able to help. I'll leave you to ponder on that one. Anyway, let's pray together. Maybe you could repeat some of these words after me. Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for Jesus. Who shows us how to receive and share your healing love even when things are messy. Amen. Thanks everyone.



Hymn – In Christ Alone

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light my strength my song
This Cornerstone this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love what depths of peace
When fears are stilled when strivings cease
My Comforter my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ



Verse 4

No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Sermon – Rev Tommy MacNeil, Martin’s Memorial Church, Stornoway

Good morning. It's my absolute joy and delight and privilege to be able to bring God's Word to you this morning. I'm indebted to the very Reverend Dr Martin Fair for inviting me, giving me this opportunity. And on your behalf, I'd like to thank Martin for his tireless work in providing worship service during the challenges of the pandemic especially during this time of lockdown.

My name is Tommy MacNeil, I'm the minister of Martin’s Memorial Church of Scotland here in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. I've been here for nearly 15 years and we've seen God do a remarkable work over that time. We've seen our church grow in lots of ways and certainly central to that has been The Shed Project, our youth and community facility. It helped us to go from being a one day a week service church, to being a seven day a week serving church. And we're very thankful for The Shed and even the way that it's been able to support our community during these difficult days.

As we come to God's Word this morning, our reading was from Mark 1:21-28. And in the Bible I'm reading from its entitled, Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit. And what I wanna share with you this morning really sits under the title, “Just another Sunday in Church”. I think one of the challenges we face as those who are part of the church is that church has become almost far too predictable and we know exactly what should happen, when it should happen even how it should happen. We are looking on our watches knowing when the service should finish and any minister better not risk going over their time. And I of course I understand the importance of structure and order of a service and I implement that and practise that. I've done that for this little message, but there are times in the life of Christ in the scriptures, but also in the life of the church throughout history where God wasn't just in His promised presence with His people, where two or three gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of them and there to bless them. But when he comes in a manifest way and that when God comes and shows up in the midst of our worship service, that unique things can happen. Things that we're unprepared for, things that we haven't seen or heard before and that's actually the context in which these verses are found. So verse 21, "They came to Capernaum and when the Sabbath came Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." I find this quite profound, Jesus going to church on Sunday. You see going the church isn't just a good idea, going to church is a God idea. I find it fascinating to consider what must it have been like for



Jesus to go to church? He had enjoyed the perfected praise of heaven for all eternity, rapturous praise and worship and wonderful music and song and the chorus of just the greatness of His name. And when He was at young lad and now in His adult life, He made it His practise to be in church every Lord's day. And you know, it could have been easy for Him to go there and think about how this could be improved or that could be improved 'cause often that's the way we are in church. We like things the way we like them, but for Jesus we never read in any of the gospels Him making any negative comment about church and a worship service. And there is a very simple reason for that. He was there just to worship His Father. He loved His Father and that was enough for Jesus. And what a blessing, even in the midst of lockdown, when we were not able to gather in our church buildings that you and I are afforded the opportunity of worshipping together, gathering together in the name of Christ assured of His presence with us. And so in a very real sense we're following the example of Jesus. And so for you to be part of the service this morning isn't just a good idea, it's a God idea. And I'd like to encourage you and invite you, take a moment, pat yourself on the back well done for opening up your heart and opening up your home to hear from God and to receive His love in your heart.

As Jesus is in church on Sunday He's preaching, verse 22 tells us that, "The people were amazed at His teaching because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." Now the reason for this authority and really what Mark is commenting on is that Jesus taught and preached with a real confidence. And there was a very simple reason for that. He was preaching His own Word. Jesus was the Word, He became flesh to make His dwelling among us. All of Scripture was breathed by Him in the power of the Holy Spirit. And here He is now and He embodies, He incarnates the very message, the very words that He's preaching. And that meant that there was a real sense of strength and confidence in it. And I think for years the church has struggled with the area of the confidence in the gospel and how we need that to be restored. And how did Jesus speak with authority and with confidence? Well He didn't just gather in church to worship His Father, He knew that He lived with the Father's presence with Him and his blessing on Him. And for all of us who are believers then this is how God wants us to live, not being apologetic about our faith, not being shy and kind of withdrawn, but actually that we have a sense of confidence because our confidence is not based on us or on anything we do but it is based solely on God and our relationship with Him.

And Jesus is teaching and His teaching is having an impact, the people are amazed, but then all of a sudden there will be a disruption. Verse 23, "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'" What I find fascinating and somewhat challenging is that we are aware and mindful that in the life of Jesus, there was encounters He had in different places where He encountered darkness, where He encountered evil and where He had to deal with that evil and he did so head on. But see what Mark said here, "Just then a man in their synagogue." This was someone who was part of the church, a member of the church. And this poor man had been assailed by darkness by evil forces and as the assail came out and attacked him then they had somehow taken up residence. This man was possessed by this evil spirit. And Jesus, as He came as the light of the world and as He's teaching the light of God's truth then this darkness was exposed within this man's heart. This demonic force was exposed and that's why it cried out. And this is the beauty of the gospel that whenever the light of Jesus' truth comes to our hearts and lives then it's never to condemn, never to judge, never to reject it is always to liberate and to free us. So if we have the experience sometimes of sitting under God's Word and we become aware



because of His light that there's areas of my heart and life that aren't pleasing to me that I know shouldn't be there. Then the same God who shines His light on us at the same time makes grace available to forgive us, to cleanse us and to take these things away.

I find it challenging that this man was part of the church but I also find it challenging that this demonic spirit that was attaching itself to this man, that he knew who Jesus was. It says at the end of verse 24, the demon speaking, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Now the people at the synagogue are amazed at His teaching, but the reality is they don't know who Jesus is. And yet here is darkness, evil forces and they know exactly who Christ is. And by what they say, they know that he has authority over them. And this is why whilst it's the most natural thing in the world for us to be somewhat fearful about issues of darkness and issues of sin, actually when it comes to knowing Christ, being in Christ and having Christ with us, we have nothing to fear. He overcame all darkness. He overcame all of the enemies forces and He did so not only to free us and liberate us but so that we might have a peace that passes all understanding. Look at what Jesus says here, verse 25, "'Be quiet, come out of him.'" And the evil spirits shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." Just another Sunday in church. How glad this man would have been that he showed up. It might actually be somewhat upsetting for him, having had the experience he did. At the end of the day he would be so thankful having met with Christ, not only receiving His Word, but encountered in His presence and the power to set him free.

I remember listening to Jack Deere, he was an American Old Testament professor, a teacher, a preacher, just a wonderful gift to the body of Christ, and Jack spoke about how he always had in his mind, the view, the picture of the church being like a hospital. And he said that he would see people in the community who whose needs were maybe a bit more obvious and they would come in and he saw the leadership as the kind of the surgeon, the doctors and then you saw the congregation as like the visitors and the chaplains and that, you know they would work together to try bring in health and healing and wholeness to individuals. And Jack Deere then stepped away from seminary teaching and he became the pastor of a church and his view of church totally changed. It stayed the same in this respect, he still viewed the church as a hospital but what he quickly discovered is that it's not that it's those outside of the walls of the church who are sick or unwell or who have emotional and spiritual needs, but actually the church is a hospital and every single person in the church, we all know what it is to be assailed by sin to be attacked by darkness. And so, we all have issues in our hearts and lives and we are all in the process of being healed. So as that understanding of the church changed for Jack Deere, he then had such more grace for the people in his congregation and he just encouraged them, let's journey together, encouraging one another to a greater degree of healing and health and wholeness, so that we too can know the wonder of Christ just setting us free.

Just a couple of brief points to leave with you on this Sunday morning. Verse 27, "The people were all so amazed." Now we have already read in verse 22, that they were amazed. And we learn with Jesus, that he will continually and regularly surprise us. Just when we think we know all about Him and we've got Him all figured out, He'll turn up and do something that we haven't seen before. They asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching." And this is what's important, "A new teaching and with authority." And what does that mean for you and me? He talked the talk and He walked the walk. What He said, He lived out.



Friends, I wanna make an appeal to you as I near the end of my thoughts with you. I think it's wonderful we gather in the atmosphere of worship. I think it's wonderful we gather around God's Word and the likelihood is many of you have chapter and verse and you know the Bible and it's wonderful that you do, but let's have this heart whereby we don't wanna just be able to quote chapter and verse for ourselves, we don't wanna just talk the talk, but when we look to emulate and follow the example of Jesus, loving people, loving everyone who we come into contact with, then you know what I think will happen? People will be amazed and they will see and hear the words of our mouth but they will see the reality of it being lived out through our lives. And I'm telling you in Stornoway, and in Lewis, and in Scotland, and to the ends of the earth, that's what people are longing for and living for and crying out for. So that the love and the mercy and the grace of Jesus, the good news of His gospel will not be contained within the church, but that it might be shared and shed abroad. That the gospel is not a secret to be hoarded, but it is a story to be heralded. What was the fruit of the peoples' amazement at the ministry of Jesus, His word and His actions? Verse 28, "News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee." As you and I look to talk the talk and walk the walk, then God will make sure that the news of who Jesus is, will go far and wide. And what was said here concerning Galilee can be said about Glasgow, or Edinburgh, or Dundee, or Perth, or Inverness, or Stornoway, or Lewis, wherever you're from. Let's be determined that as we have just another Sunday in church, as we encounter Christ, then let's listen to His teaching, let's learn from His example, and let's talk the talk and walk the walk, and share the good news that it might go far and wide. For the glory of His name. God bless you.

Prayer of Intercession – Rev Sarah Brown, Castlemilk Parish Church, Glasgow

Loving and amazing God, the unclean spirits that rage and shout within us, are hard to quieten at times. The voices from the past that say we should or fill us with shame about what we're not. Voices from generations gone by. Familiar voices we grew up with. Experience of trauma that shouts the loudest when we do everyday tasks. Jesus you call for silence and for these voices to come out of us. So that we're left with the wonder of us that you created us to be. More than enough as we are without trying to please or achieve.

Come to us in the silence, awaken our souls within. Enlarge our hearts for the task of loving set before us. We call into the silence, our heartbeat like a transmitter sending out our signal of care. The pulse that connects life with life, a current supplied by you. And we think of our signal going out to those we love in our community. Our neighbours and friends, our congregation and community members, to familiar homes, familiar places. We think of it arriving in homes where there is only one to receive it glad to have been thought of. And it arriving in bustling households where silence seems a long lost friend, and a moment to feel cherished transforms the day for each receiver.

We transmit our love to the unknown places reaching beyond closed doors and meeting with sadness and grief, despair and lost hope and it lingers there making friends, becoming a companion. We send the signal out to the people with riches enough to share. And for some, the riches are creativity and wonder. And for others, comfort and joy. And love becomes the way of enough for all.



Our signal lands too in foreign lands where change is afoot and conflict is rife reaching every place that disease reigns and your authority casts out evil and comes into its own.

And as we journey back inside ourselves to the heartbeat that is life. The life that is from you, we are reminded that the love we share is yours and it is for us too.

Amen.

Hymn – Because He Lives

Verse 1

God sent His Son they called Him Jesus
He came to love heal and forgive
He bled and died to buy my pardon
An empty grave is there to prove
My Saviour lives

Chorus

Because He lives I can face tomorrow
Because He lives all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives

Verse 2

How sweet to hold our newborn baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives
But greater still the calm assurance
This child can face uncertain days
Because Christ lives

Verse 3

And then one day I'll cross that river
I'll fight life's final war with pain
And then as death gives way to vict'ry
I'll see the lights of glory
And I'll know He reigns

Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

I'd like to thank everyone who took a part in today's worship service and not least those who have done all the hard work behind the scenes. Thank you to everyone.



And now may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you today and forever more.

Amen.