

Thursday 4th June 2020

GETTING ON WITH THE JOB.

About four years ago I attended a church conference in a housing scheme on the periphery of Glasgow. The Session Clerk welcomed us to the event, taking the opportunity to tell us a little about his church which was without a Minister at that time. He said the congregation was small. They did not have any members under 65 and in fact, most members were in their 70's, receiving the state pension, and on a restricted income with little over to spare.

They were enthusiastic about sharing their faith within their community but limited in what they could do. However, their church building was in particularly good repair (as we saw) and was an adaptable space. Local organisations used it every day of the week - morning, afternoon and evening - and they hosted the occasional church conference on a Saturday. They felt they had an important ministry of hospitality, and of support for organisations working for the local community. And they were also able to maintain their church buildings out of the income they received from hall lets.

Two weeks ago I attended a Webinar (*this word has become part of the everyday vocabulary of ministers now that every meeting is online*) which was organised by the Trustees of the Church of Scotland, and attended by 1,000 people, mostly ministers. The event was to update everyone on the key issues facing the wider Church because of COVID and Lockdown.

This year was to be the beginning of a 3 Year 'Radical Plan of Action' that would involve significant changes. That has all had to be put on hold – and most staff at 121 have been put on 'furlough'. The Growth Fund which would have been accepting applications for new mission and outreach projects as of early June is also on hold. There are concerns the Church of Scotland may not have the funds available that it initially thought – investments have steeply fallen in value. And concerns also about Crossreach, the social care arm of the church – dependent on fundraising activities for many of its projects. And at a local level, some churches are struggling to pay their way. So there is real concern about what the church will look like when we eventually come out of the current restraints. We are presently in that space between 'what was' and 'what will be' – with no real idea how the latter will look.

When finance was mentioned, I remembered the housing scheme church in Glasgow – their hospitality to the community, and their building as a mission resource. How were they faring?

So, later I checked up on their Facebook page, and found pictures of members collecting trays of bread from factories to go to their local Food Bank resource. Nothing was said about any financial troubles they might have. Nothing was said about what they might need. Just getting on with doing what they can do – responding to their community's needs. Vulnerable, yes. But still with a mission to serve.

I believe the picture is the same in every church in the land. Concerned about finances – yes. But leaving that until the appropriate time to deal with it. What is now of primary concern are the needs of its community. Such is our ministry.



Photo: Freda Stobo

This multi-coloured foliage is leaves from *Populus Candicans*, a tree known as the **Balm of Gilead**.

You will hear more about it on Sunday.

The resin was said to cure pain and promote healing, leading to why we say 'Jesus is the Balm of Gilead', curing pain and promoting healing in our broken world.

"Whatever we are, we are.

Everything in our history comprises us, but we also walk into our future, which will not look quite like anything in our past.

We should be ashamed of nothing that we have been.

All of it has made us what we are, even—especially, maybe—the parts in which we really didn't come off well.

And we should envy no one. Not ever. We cannot be them and they cannot be us. We belong to ourselves and to God and it is more than good enough."

Part of a 2017 reflection by Barbara Cawthorne Crafton., from www.geraniumfarm.org

"You are not
a drop in the
ocean, you are
the entire ocean
in a drop."

From 'The Wisdom of Rumi',
The Sufi mystic poet. Jalal-ud Din Rumi who died 1273