

The Claik o' the Kirk

*The Magazine of Fraserburgh Old Parish Church
December 2011*

Supplement

Flower Ministry

Our flower ministry is important in many ways.

Flowers beautify the sanctuary week by week (which makes us feel good)

They are taken out to members of our fellowship who are perhaps ill, bereaved or celebrating a special event. (this lets them know our thoughts are with them)

The people who supply the flowers usually have a memorable reason for doing so (which is also comforting to them so everyone benefits.

A HUGE thank you to all involved in this wonderful ministry. If you would like to put your name to a date on our 2012 rota please contact Beldie Blackhall or the office.



Elder Mrs Annette Milne showing off the flowers at the front door .

Bequest from Mrs Jean Wadsworth

With reference to the main article in the magazine relating to the generous legacy left to the church by the late Mrs Jean Wadsworth, I can now inform you that the Kirk Session carefully considered how best the bequest could be used at the Session Meeting held on Wednesday 23rd November. As you will be aware, significant structural work is required to the church gable wall which houses the main stained glass window and the window itself is currently out for safe-keeping. The work, including full refurbishment of the window, is estimated to cost in the region of £70,000 to £80,000 and, the legacy aside, this is money which the church simply does not have.

Prior to the problem with the window arising, the Kirk Session had agreed that it would be desirable that the legacy be used for sanctuary refurbishment and this is something which was discussed and recorded about a year ago when the first instalment of £20,000 from the legacy was received. Fabrics Convener, Mr Jim Hendry, had given consideration to this and presented the meeting with a 'wish-list' of improvements which in due time could also become essential works.

Clearly, the Kirk Session is delighted to have received such a timely bequest and, following due consideration, agreed that it should be set aside for the window and sanctuary improvements.

Whilst the funds provide the financial security to progress the urgent window repairs, the Kirk Session felt that it was also prudent to continue to explore the possibility of grant funding. The General Trustees of the Church of Scotland have already allocated a provisional sum of £10,000 and recommended that we make a full application once full costing estimates are available. Some donations have also been gratefully received from the congregation but it is not the intention of the Kirk Session to undertake a specific fundraising campaign at this time. Anyone who feels that they would like to contribute to the window restoration is of course very welcome to do so. Despite other funding that may be available, it is likely that a significant proportion of the legacy will be used for the window and any balance will be held for sanctuary improvements.

The Kirk Session would once again like to acknowledge this very significant bequest and give thanks to God for the generosity of the late Mrs Jean Wadsworth.

Ronnie Birnie
Session Clerk

The Twenty Third Psalm

The Almightys my shepherd, I winna be wantin;
He gaur's me lie doon in the girse that's sae green,
He taks me tae faur caum waters await me,
He soothes my sair hairt wi' the love in His een.
If I gang wi' Him, then stacht forrit He'll tak me,
In the mirk o' the valley nae feartie I'll be,
Nae matter hoo daurk or stormy the nicht is,
Yon rod and yon staff will aye comfort me.
He gies me my meat richt here in the mids,
O' folk whas delyt wid be my doon faa,
But richt roon about me are great muckle airms,
He poors in the ile tae cover it a'.

Noo guidness and mercy are aye richt ahin me,

2

Gin it is daurk or the heat o' the day,
Nae maitter hoo lang in this world I'll be traiket,
My hame's in the Hoose o' the Dear Lord for aye.



Scottish Government consultative paper on Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages An opportunity for everyone to have their say

What is the consultative paper about?

As many of you will know newspapers including the Press and Journal, Scotsman and Glasgow Herald are printing articles and letters on this subject.

In September the Government produced a paper and the Ministerial foreword to this, signed by Nicola Sturgeon MSP, is printed as part of this article. I strongly recommend that you read the foreword in full.

In her foreword Ms Sturgeon states that the government 'tend towards the view that religious ceremonies for civil partnerships should no longer be prohibited and that same sex marriage should be introduced so that same sex couples have the option of getting married'. She also makes it clear that "we believe that no religious body or its celebrants should be required to carry out same sex marriages or civil partnership ceremonies."

The Government are keen that organisations and individuals across the Nation have the opportunity to contribute and have confirmed that all views will be listened to. Responses are invited either by completing a questionnaire either online or manually. The online contacts are familylaw@scotland.gsi.gov.uk and www.scotland.gov.uk. Hard copies of the questionnaire can be obtained if required from our Church secretary

The deadline for completion and return of the questionnaire is 9th December 2011 and I encourage everyone reading this article to take part in the democratic process and consider completing a questionnaire.

What have the religious responses been to date?

Media reports suggest that some religious groups have already indicated their support for the government. We also know that the Roman Catholic Church, Free Church and a large Muslim mosque have stated their strong objections to the proposals.

The National Church of Scotland has to date not publicised whether it has made a response; although a letter from the Principal Clerk to the Assembly published in the Scotsman and Herald in late October stated that, after meeting with Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and government officials; the Kirk will make "a properly considered response well within the 14 week consultation process". I assume the Kirk response will stress the official Church of Scotland policy that marriage is between a man and a woman and ideally for life. However in light of the current debate within the Kirk concerning same sex relationships and the ministry I suspect there may well be some reference to the General Assembly deliverance of May 2011 concerning the possible introduction of a Church liturgy to recognise and celebrate civil partnerships.

On Tuesday 1st November Buchan Presbytery (of which we are part) debated this matter and agreed (by a majority of 2:1) the following motion:

"Presbytery deplore the views of the Scottish Government on the possibility of allowing religious ceremonies and the possible introduction of same sex marriage and:

- 1) Instruct the clerk to register our views with the Scottish Government by 9th December 2011 and inform the Principal Clerk's office (at the Church's administration offices in Edinburgh) of our response.
- 2) Urge all presbyters to respond personally to the Consultative paper by 9th December 2011-

In coming to this decision the Presbytery heard many arguments both for and against and came firmly down against the Government views.

The paper sets out the Government views

and I urge those of you who support these to register your support by completing the questionnaire. The Government argument is well rehearsed in the paper and needs no further comment from me.

However many people, including me, are against the Government views?

It is important that dissenters should register their concerns by completing the questionnaire.

Why am I against the proposals?

As many of you know I am very much against the Government proposals and the Presbytery motion was in fact proposed by me.

I want to share some of the arguments for dissenting:

- To change the law redefines marriage. In its current state the term marriage implies a union between opposite sexes. Same sex marriage is a contradiction in terms.
- The Government are attempting to redefine marriage, which has served Scotland well for centuries. There are concerns about the implications if marriage is redefined. It stands to reason a redefinition will be promoted as standard by public bodies. This has significant implications across society, not least for what children will be taught in schools.
- Marriage, although undermined in recent decades, remains a universal institution that has benefitted Scottish Society. The marriage of one man to one woman, for life, for the rearing of children in a stable environment, is a cornerstone of our society. It is embedded in history and in cultures throughout the world.
- Marriage is also rooted in nature. The opposite sexes of men and women are integral to its character and to its success.
- The Scottish Government did not invent marriage; Holy Scripture did. It is astonishing that it is seeking to legally redefine it at the behest of a small minority. During 2008/ 10 there were 1500 civil partnerships registered in Scotland. In the same period there were 85000 marriages. Where is the demand coming from for same sex marriages?
- In redefining marriage there is a very real danger of definition-creep. What is to stop it being redefined further? Is there a likelihood that in course polygamy could also be legalised?
- In supporting traditional heterosexual marriage we are not removing rights from anyone. Redefining marriage is not an issue of equality or fairness, as argued by those calling for change. Equality does not mean sameness but recognises diversity. In the Government consultation paper it is abundantly clear that homosexual couples already have the legal rights of marriage available through civil partnerships.
- Despite the sincere promises to protect those who disagree with redefining marriage there are many misgivings about the religious liberty implications.
- The former SNLP leader Gordon Wilson (1979-90) is quoted in the Scotsman October 29th as saying the “proposals could have destructive consequences for Scotland” and are an assault on Christian values”
- Holy Scripture makes it clear that marriage is between one man and one woman. For example Genesis 2 tells us that woman is made as God’s provision for man’s need of relationship

The Church of Scotland acknowledges the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the supreme rule of faith and life.

It is fitting therefore that we listen to, and take heed of, the words of Jesus in relation to marriage. In Matthew chapter 19 he is speaking to the disciples about marriage and divorce. After hearing what the Lord has to say about this the disciples respond by saying “if this is how it is between a man and his wife, it is better not to marry”. The Lord replies “this teaching (on marriage and divorce) does not apply to everyone, but only to those to whom God has given it. For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some because they were born that way; others because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him who can accept this teaching do so”

If anyone wants to discuss either side of the current debate please let me know and we can arrange to meet and talk this over.

In closing I urge as many of you as possible to complete the questionnaire and let the Government know of your views ... by the closing date of 9th December.

Peter Park
Parish Minister
10th November 2011

Ministerial foreword

This consultation paper seeks views on the possibility of allowing religious ceremonies for civil partnerships and the possible introduction of same sex marriage.

This Government believes in religious tolerance and the freedom to worship. We also believe in equality and diversity.

There are a variety of views on religious ceremonies for civil partnerships and on same sex marriage. We hope that everyone will use this consultation to express their views and opinions. However, as the debate unfolds, we also hope that everyone will treat those with different or opposing views with courtesy and respect, in accordance with the very highest standards of democratic discourse.

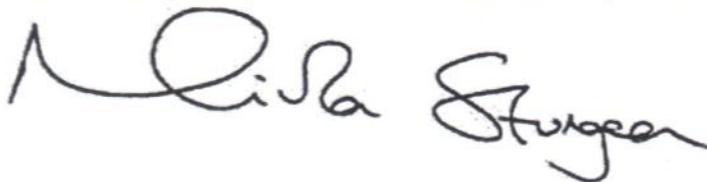
The Scottish Government is choosing to make its initial views clear at the outset of this consultation. We tend towards the view that religious ceremonies for civil partnerships should no longer be prohibited and that same sex marriage should be introduced so that same sex couples have the option of getting married if that is how they wish to demonstrate their commitment to each other. We also believe that no religious body or its celebrants should be required to carry out same sex marriages or civil partnership ceremonies.

The Scottish Government is committed to detailed and thorough consultation in this area, and to further careful consideration of the implications of equality and human rights law for any proposals. We recognise the variety of views. We want to hear from all sections of Scottish society. As well as this written consultation, we will also meet face to face with religious bodies and other key organisations during the consultation period.

And although we have expressed our initial view, we give an assurance that all views will be listened to. No final views have been reached and no decisions have been taken.

The detail, in addition to the general principles, is also very important in this area. Therefore, if, after this consultation, the Scottish Government should decide to introduce a Bill into Parliament, we will consult on the detail of the draft Bill before it is introduced.

I urge everybody with an interest to respond to this consultation.



Nicola Sturgeon MSP

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy

Where do people go when their earthly life is over?

I am writing this letter on All Saints Day, the day on which the Church remembers the saints of the Church. The saints being those people who have lived lives worthy in God's eyes, whose earthly time is over and whom God considers suitable to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You can read a bit about the 'enormous crowd in Heaven' in Revelation 7.

As I read this passage over again for the day I find myself reflecting on the question, the subject of this article, which I am often challenged with, either implicitly or explicitly, in the course of my ministry. I want to share some of my thoughts on this with you. If anyone wants to meet me to allow me to develop my thinking I will be delighted to do so.

As a Church of Scotland Minister who believes in the authority of scripture the answer to the Question is straightforward; the Bible makes it plain that when our earthly time is over some people go to Heaven to be with God and the saints, others go to Hell. (cf. Matthew 25:31ff)

This leads on to another question... Who goes where?

My favourite passage from scripture answers this question. In John 3:16 we read '*For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone **who believes in him** may not die, but have eternal life*'. In this context the key phrase is '**who believes in him**'. This belief is seen in the shouts of the 'enormous crowds' of Revelation 7:10 who are calling out 'salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb (Jesus Christ)' The Bible makes it clear that it is God, and God alone, who determines who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The divide is between those who have come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and those who have not. Between those who are saved from sin and its consequences in Hell by the grace of a Sovereign electing God, and those who are not. (Other biblical evidence can be read in Matthew 10:32, Romans 6 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Believers know through scriptural teachings that when we 'fall asleep' to our earthly life we will awake to the resurrection glory and follow our Lord and Saviour into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. On this All Saints Day I urge us all to continue to honour in our hearts and lives the 'enormous crowds' who have gone before us in faith and give thanks that our loved ones who died in Christ are now safe in God's hands. To those who share my belief I suggest you pause reading now and pray to the Lord giving thanks for this comforting knowledge and also rejoice in the Christian assurance that in Heaven the people of God will one day be reunited with those who have gone before.

My belief is not shared by many in our society today, who prefer to believe that when we die, irrespective of faith or absence of it, we all succeed to life after death in a place called Heaven but who often have little or no understanding of how the Bible describes Heaven and its inhabitants. Sadly this opinion is often promulgated by some Christian ministers who, it seems to me, water down the Gospel. Some of the messages proclaimed from our pulpits today have moved a long way from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, albeit that some of the proponents of such teaching claim human wisdom is divine. I often come across beliefs, honestly if erroneously held when tested against the benchmark of scripture, that the decision as to whether we go to Heaven or Hell is one that humans, and not God, may take. The human decision often based on some variations on a morality scale which suggests for example that if you have led a reasonably good life by not murdering your Grannie or constantly kicking the cat you will be OK for the heavenly afterlife.

One of my colleagues came across this view recently and has kindly allowed me to share his experience with you

Only a few weeks ago I was asked the most direct of questions. I was making a funeral visit to a family whose son had just died. It became evident over a short period of time that they had some knowledge and involvement with the Spiritualist "Church". That did not seem to have mattered as they had, up till that point, been happy to have the local parish minister take their son's funeral service. It was a difficult visit which highlighted, in so many ways, their

total ignorance of the church and of the gospel. It did afford me an opportunity to offer a very basic and gentle sharing of the truths of the Christian faith. To my shame, as I was about to leave, I was aware that I had almost made it. At the very point that I was standing to leave the question came. "So where is he now?" I then spent the next 10 minutes trying to avoid answering the question. All my years of experience in the ministry knew that this was not the time for what I tried to convince myself was a theological discussion. I actually said that to them, "now is not the time for such questions". They would however not give up. "Is he here in the room with us?" ---- "No" --- Well where is he? I finally sat down and answered the question the way I have done in times past. Here is what the bible says. They were astonished with what the bible said. "We thought everyone went to heaven, after all he wasn't a bad lad". On my return home an awkward undertaker was on the phone trying to find a nice way to tell me that the family no longer wishes me to officiate at their son's funeral service and that another minister was going to be asked.

Most people (there are notable exceptions including atheists, agnostics, humanists and other religions) I come across are happy to think that when they themselves die they will automatically go to Heaven. As against this the concept that they might go elsewhere and experience 'eternal punishment' (Matthew 25:46) is something most people today strive to avoid. For example when people (such as those my colleague encountered) speak of a departed loved one we oft hear phrases along the following used to describe the aftermath of death: "He's with us in spirit". "He's gone upstairs". "She's watching over us" ... and many other expressions of this understanding of the reality of life after death. I know that these statements often arise through pain; the pain of relationships broken, the pain of the true reality of death the great enemy, the pain of the devastation that death often brings.

Hell is a difficult subject to ponder. Like many Christians a large part of me doesn't want to believe in Hell....because I have friends and family, who based on what I believe through scripture, will end up in Hell if their lives don't change in a fundamental encounter with the Gospel. So there are times when part of me wants to join the 'dinnae worry campaign, "we'll all end up in Heaven anyway ". Another option is to join what some describe as the 'fluffy message' Group; invent a "God" in my mind whom I wish to believe in, and then give a human message that people might like to hear. Going down this route would make it very easy to answer questions such as "How can a God of love (we're back to John 3:16) send anyone to Hell? If I followed this route I could respond with a 'comforting' answer saying that in my estimation that's not the case, because I believe that everyone goes to Heaven.

But when I think this way I realise it is a step too far; it might ingratiate me with lots of people but it is not true to biblical teaching and is in fact a form of idolatry. You see the purpose of the Bible is not just to make us feel better but ultimately to give us a deeper and more challenging understanding of God and who he reveals himself to be. The Bible tells me that God is a God of love even though I at times struggle to see this love in action. Space and time preclude me developing this argument here ; suffice it to say that I take comfort on what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13; *what we see today is like a dim image in a mirror, one day we will see face to face" then all will be revealed.* In telling people about the difference between Heaven and Hell I realise I don't need to apologise for God sending some either way; rather, like my friend at the funeral visit, I might need to apologise to God for any lack of boldness in proclaiming the Gospel in a world that wants to hear little or nothing of its reality.

And what is that reality?

As I see it the Biblical message on salvation and God's mercy is crystal clear and could be summarised as follows:

- God knows that we are by nature sinful people and throughout the Old Testament calls people to change their ways
- In New Testament times God felt the time was right that God himself again walked on earth in the form of Jesus Christ
 - Jesus' mission was to offer salvation to the world (John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its Saviour)
 - Jesus starts his ministry by announcing that "the right time has come, the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the good News" (Mark 1:15)
 - Other passages in New Testament tell us how to live lives pleasing to God (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, God wants you to be holy and completely free from sexual immorality)
 - And God's plan one day is to bring all God's people together. Paul gives us a pointer to this in Ephesians 1: 10, "This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in Heaven and on earth, with Christ as Head"

With Christ as Head is central to the message of salvation for us today and as we approach the seasons of Advent and Christmas we prepare ourselves again to celebrate the earthly birth of Jesus Christ. God came to earth that humanity could be saved from the shackles of sin. The baby boy born in the manger would grow into the man who went to the cross to atone for the sins of the world, **the resurrected Jesus is the only one who can offer salvation to individuals**(John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me").

Jesus is the way to Heaven, Jesus is the doorway, Jesus decides on our eternal future.
The third verse of one of my favourite Christmas carols (Away in a manger) reminds us

*Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
close by for ever, and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and fit us for Heaven, to live with you there.*

Jesus tells us that we are all (regardless of our earth age) children of God

Scripture tells us that God wants all his children to be with him

Scripture tells us that God will take back with Jesus those who have died believing in him

- So let me finish with an assurance to believers, keep walking with Christ and 'all will be well'
- And an offer to anyone who does not yet believe, who is unsure what will happen when your time on earth is over.
- God extends mercy to all. He wants us all to know Him now. He urges all of us to be reconciled to Him through his son the Lord Jesus Christ. The door is open now to all who would prefer to spend eternity in the Heavenly Kingdom .. But it won't stay open forever (Matthew 25: 10) . So please make a decision now to put your trust in the Lord, to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, rather than rely on human wisdom.

Have an enjoyable festive time and remember please that

"Jesus is the reason for the season" and that "Jesus isn't only for Christmas"

Peter B Park
Parish Minister