

Weekly Newsletter No 29 - Sunday 4 October 2020

General Assembly

The General Assembly of the church took place on Friday evening and all day Saturday. This was an assembly like no other. This year the Commissioners, Youth Representatives and Corresponding Members took part remotely with discussions, voting and amendments all being done online. In accordance with government advice, only a small number of people were in the Assembly Hall: those running the proceedings, those reporting to the Assembly and those livestreaming and recording the event.



Following the General Assembly, we are all invited to join in prayer with fellow Christians across Scotland at 7.00pm this Sunday in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Moderator, Rev Dr Martin Fair says, "...what better than to join with brothers and sisters from across the nation at 7pm on Sunday to pray our way through this ongoing crisis. I command it to you and look forward to being with you, in Spirit, on Sunday evening."

Big News

For some, the big news this week could be that a Scottish MP has been somewhat silly in failing to observe the rules after being tested as positive for COVID-19, or that President Donald Trump has also been similarly positively tested for the bug and is now in hospital. However, the big news for us in Bellie and Speymouth is that our preparations for reopening the church have reached the stage that we have now applied to Presbytery for permission to reopen. That meant, apart from the other work, your minister and session clerk spending part of Monday afternoon on their knees in the Sanctuary of Bellie Church – OK they were not praying this time



but marking out the position of the chairs so we don't have to measure spacings every week!

All the kit, sanitizer, gloves, emergency face masks, disposable aprons, anti-bac wipes et al are now in place. We reckon most of these will never be used and in about ten years from now someone will find a pile of about 100 disposable aprons and wonder, 'Why did they buy all of these? Let's just chuck them out!'

Dressed for church!

From Seòras



Shelter

There's a famous way of looking at what we require to survive, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs". It claims that the basic level of survival begins with air, water, food, and ... shelter. Shelter is key to not only our comfort, but our very lives. Even in very temperate regions, without proper clothing, and somewhere out of the elements to rest, none of us could last for very long.



Our need for shelter is reflected everywhere. Our houses are shaped by the need to keep out the wind, rain and cold. Places where people are required to wait outside, such as bus stops, are often covered in some fashion. I grew up in Aviemore, and every second shop there is for outdoor clothing and gear to keep safe and warm.

If you think about it, almost everything we own needs shelter. I don't think anyone's living room would be particularly nice after a few days with no roof over it. Shelter is so important, and in many places in scripture this is used to describe what God provides for us in our relationship with Him.

In Psalm 46 it says, "God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence."



The Psalmist likens God's presence in our lives to shelter. It does not claim that the world is without its storms of difficulty, what it instead promises is that God will provide us emotional and spiritual shelter when the storms do come.

It may be quite hard for us on our own to find that sort of shelter with everything going on in the world. A brief encounter with the global news is enough to make me feel quite worn down, I'm sure I'm not alone. Isaiah agrees that difficulty and opposition in life can feel like this. He says that "the breath of the ruthless is like a rain storm against a wall". But what does he say to God immediately before that? "For You have been a defence for the helpless, a defence for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat".

This is the answer to the hopelessness, desperation, or despair that we feel when the storms of life rage, when our hearts and souls feel exposed to the elements. The answer is to find our refuge in the Lord. To turn our lives over to His care, to find peace and security in the shelter of His wing, when we would find no such comfort by our own strength.

The hymn O God our help in ages past begins with these verses;
“O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home:
Beneath the shadow of thy throne,
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.”

Let us pray;

Father God, our shelter and our strength. Our refuge from the storm. Our shade from the heat. Our help in ages past and hope for years to come. Help us to turn to you in times of turmoil. Protect our hearts by your Spirit, keep safe our souls by your love. Thank you that because of Jesus, we are held safe in you, even if the mountains themselves fall into the sea.

In His name we pray, AMEN.

God bless,
Seòras

Puckle birthdays coming up.

There are of course a number of birthdays and special days in the coming week. The current regulations forbid from visiting other houses – even close relatives and friends and it doesn’t look like a week when we can visit in gardens unless you have big brollies, wellies and good waterproofs. So get phoning, Facetimeing, Zooming and sending cards all to say,



Have a special day





Things don't look great this coming week. Most of the news seems to be bad, increasing numbers with the virus, more folk in hospital and intensive care, visits in care homes being restricted, students isolated in their accommodation, it's no fun. So, it is up to us too keep our own and others spirits up. Some of the effects of the long lock-down period are only now becoming apparent. We may be wondering, 'What can I do?' Here are some suggestions:

- Keep praying for others
- Keep in touch with others – use any media available
- Meet up with others outdoors – as we said last week meet a friend for a cuppy (or lunch if you are feeling flush) in a café or garden centre restaurant.
- Take some apples round to someone who doesn't have a tree (or swap your 'cookers' for desert apples)

And please, be kind, be patient, be understanding; the person who may be a bit of a pest may not be doing well with all the restrictions just now and likely isn't aware they are not doing well. Kindness is more contagious than the virus.

Remember, there are lots of happy people out there. The sight of the kids in the school playgrounds, playing in the woods, swinging from trees laughing, running about, having fun can only bring a smile. Maybe we should follow their example but be careful swinging from trees. It's not all doom and gloom so let's be positive in our outlook for the future.



God gave us mouths to speak, to eat, to keep shut at the right time and **TO SMILE**



Blessings to all
John

