

The last online service the Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair conducted as Moderator of the General Assembly

Hi everybody, and welcome to Worship. I guess I've got some mixed emotions today. This is the last of these services that I will be collating as Moderator of the General Assembly. Next weekend sees the installation of our new Moderator, Jim, Lord Wallace. And I know that you will give him all the support that I've enjoyed during this last year. In terms of digital worship, and so on, it was my predecessor Colin, who got things started during that first lockdown. Colin produced messages every day, including on Sundays, and what a fantastic job he did.

Song 1 – Rejoice the Lord is King

Rejoice, the Lord is King! your Lord and King adore;
mortals give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the saviour, reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains he took his seat above;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail, he rules both earth and heaven,
the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

He sits at God's right hand till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command, and fall beneath his feet:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope! Jesus the Judge shall come,
and take his servants up to their eternal home.
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
God's trumpet call shall sound, rejoice!

Prayer of Approach

Let's pray together. Let's praise our God for his amazing gift of love, in Jesus, a perfect love that casts out all fear. Lord for love which liberates us to ask questions and explore, to express our doubts, and welcome new ideas, and to live with ambition as we build kingdom. Thank you, God of adventurous love, for the love that enables us to respect our own existence, to reflect and remember to recognise our own needs, and reaffirm the purpose of our life of faith. We thank you.

God, of determined love. For love that helps us to communicate with one another, to express trust and respect, share heartaches and vision, to convey love and mercy. We thank you God, of reconciling love, for love that inspires us to cheer on those around us to build up, to comfort and grow in faith together we thank you God of nurturing love, for love that encourages us to express

our faith for scripture and prayers, for hymns and stories told and retold, for Bible studies and sermons.

We thank you God, of fulfilling love. And above all, we thank you for the love, which we cannot wholly capture in words. And yet, it speaks of our trust in Jesus, of our reason to worship our Heavenly Father, and to be grateful for the inward work of the Holy Spirit. Lord God, we thank you for the words that Jesus gave us that we might speak of love's effect in our lives, as we become salt, and light in his name in this world that needs his love, amen.

Song 2 – We seek Your Kingdom

We seek your kingdom throughout every sphere
We long for heaven's demonstration here
Jesus your light shine bright for all to see
Transform, revive, and heal society

Before all things, in him all things were made
Inspiring culture, media, and trade
May all our work serve your economy
Transform, revive, and heal society

Peace, truth, and justice reigning everywhere
With us be present in our public square
Fill all who lead with your integrity
Transform, revive, and heal society

Forgive us Lord, when we have not engaged
Failing to scribe your heart on history's page
Make us again what we were made to be
Transform, revive, and heal society

Faithful to govern ever may we be
Selfless in service, loving constantly
In everything may your authority
Transform, revive, and heal society
Transform, revive, and heal society

Scripture Reading (John 17:6-19)

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out to the world. They were yours, you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I give them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you. And they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours. And all you have is mine and glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name he gave me. None has been lost, except the one doomed to destruction, so that scripture would be

fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word, and the world has hated me, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take me out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them, I sanctify myself that they too may be truly sanctified, amen.

Sermon

Let the church never be an escape from the world, and from all its challenges. How could we think that it might be when Jesus in his prayer specifically says, my prayer is not that you take them, that is his followers, out of the world. So, if not out of the world, then very certainly in it, in all of its complexity, and confusion, corruption and chaos, in its weariness, and wanting, it's waiting and wilting and, in its wonder, and joy, its blessings and delights. Yes, the life of the Christian, the one who would follow in the way of Jesus is to live in the world. This world, to never be afraid of getting our hands dirty, or to imagine that our calling means that we've to keep ourselves apart from the lepers and tax collectors and sinners of our day. We have a gospel to proclaim, as the old hymn puts it. There's good news for the poor, to announce and to enact. There's the whole business of sight to the blind, liberty to the captives and Jubilee. And I'm guessing that to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly required of us that we be in the world where people are.

Each morning, I use the Lectio 365 devotional app, and the closing prayer each day says this, Father help me to live this day to the full, being true to you in every way. Jesus, help me to give myself to others, being kind to everyone I meet. Spirit help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. I can't do any of that if I'm removed from the real life of the world. That's where we're meant to be, in the world. But for as long as life is in the world, Jesus prays for us. And the whole of John chapter 17 is given over to such a prayer. Friends, I really hope you'll let that truth sink in and not skip by it. Because here's the thing, as Jesus prayed for that first group of his followers, so he still prays for us now.

The 20th verse of the chapter says as much, my prayer is not for them alone, I pray for those who will believe in them through their message, that's us. And in the letter to the Hebrews, it's put this way, that Jesus lives forever to intercede with God on our behalf as his children, his followers. Can you just let that sink in for a moment? That Jesus is at the father's side, praying for

you right now, without ceasing, in your situation, in the circumstances you're wrestling with right now, Jesus is praying for you according to your needs, and knowing these, better than you yourself do. Doesn't that fill you with a deep and comforting sense of peace, that Jesus is praying for you, as he did for his first followers? But see that specifically, Jesus prays for two things. Firstly, that the father would keep us safe from the evil one. And secondly, that we might be sanctified.

Look, folks, I'm not sure of what you make of this kind of language, whether it be the evil one, or the devil or Satan or whatever. Of course, some want to dismiss it altogether, superstitious nonsense, belonging to a bygone age when people believed pretty much anything and everything. If that's you, let me point you to CS Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters". A warning against dismissal. And yes, C.S Lewis, one of the great philosophical minds of the 20th century, always worth listening to. I think of it this way, if there is an up, there is a down. If there is warm, then there's cold. If there is in, then there is out. If there is good, then there is evil. If there is love, there is hatred. If there is light, then there is darkness. It seems to me there not to be at a ridiculous leap, that those of us who acknowledged God, we do at the same time recognise the reality of the evil one of whom Jesus spoke of in the prayer. But let's strike the right balance here.

I was once in a Bible study group, and a member of the group confessed that she often fell asleep while reading the Bible. And it was the devil to blame. She was asked, when do you do your Bible reading? To which she replied, late at night, once I've gone to bed. It was then gently pointed out to her that maybe she was falling asleep because she was overly tired, and that reading the Bible

earlier in the day, might be more profitable. Let's be on our guard against the evil one, as Peter's first epistle advises, but let's not blame the evil one for all that which is our responsibility. Well, for me, I'm going to hold on to Jesus' prayer, that he prays for protection from the evil one. And the second part of what Jesus prays, that we be sanctified, as we are sent into and are living in the world.

One of my favourite bands in my late teens was the Glasgow outfit Simple Minds. One of their hits was a song called "Sanctify Yourself". Can you do that? Can you sanctify yourself? Jesus prays that the father would sanctify us by the truth of his word. The meaning I think, is this, that we be holy. Now, it's a crying shame that the word holy has become pretty much an insult. Be that as it may, the meaning of it is that we be different. That we be prepared to march to a different drumbeat that we

be ready to choose the right thing when it might not be the most popular option. That we'd be willing to choose the path less travelled. And that alternative, often counter-cultural way is shaped by the truth of the father's word. Jesus prayed, sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. So to be sanctified, to be a follower of Jesus, in the world, where we're called to be, is to live a life shaped by the word of the Father, or we might say is to look at Jesus life and say, Lord, by your amazing grace, help me to live that way.

As Jesus gave thanks for his first followers, he did so saying - for I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them. Brothers and sisters, as Jesus prays for us, even now, let it be, that he will be praying as he did for Peter and Andrew and James and John and Thomas and Philip and Nathaniel, and Mary, and Martha and Mary, and Joanna and Susanna, "father, I gave them your word, And they accepted it". Let it be so, amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Loving and living God, hear our prayers. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that in your faithfulness to us, you overwhelm us with grace, with mercy, love and all that we need. We pray that we always would return to you and give you our thanks and praise. So, for the gift of faith in all of its power, in its simplicity, and in its complexity, we thank you. For the gift of faith bestowed on us we simply come with hearts open in humility, we give you our thanks.

Loving and living God for the church that bears your name, that the world may know we are your disciples, for the love we have for one another, hear our prayers today. For leaders of nations and all in positions of authority, may their lives be marked by love, and Christ like service.

For all who are living in any form of oppression, may they find freedom in you. And in all that you have promised Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers for those who will go to bed hungry tonight.

And for those of us who have so much, that we would learn to share your generous gifts. For those who are bereaved, and for those who mourn, that the presence of Christ would bless them and keep them.

In your mercy we give you thanks for all your goodness to us, sanctify us through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, today and always, amen.

Martin Fair

Friends, let me be really contentious and suggest that there will be nobody sharing in this service who loves Scotland, more than I do. Well how's that for a way to start an argument?

I don't mean it. I know that many of you will. Here's the thing, I'm so convinced that God loves Scotland, its places, its people and everything that makes up our nation. And so, given that this is the last of these shared services, I thought it would be very apt to finish with the brilliant Fischy music song, "Jesus Walks Beside Us In Scotland". Let's remember that and hold on to that. And believe in it and live it out.

Song 3 – Jesus walks beside us in Scotland

By the banks and the braes
By the machair and the bogs
On the roads and the paths, of Scotland
On the islands and the hills
In the forests and the fields
In the crannies and the nooks, of Scotland
Wherever we come from, wherever we're going
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
Whatever we're facing, whatever we're feeling
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
In the schools and the jails
In the castles and the crofts
In the shops and the schemes, of Scotland
In the stadiums and kirks
In the villages and towns
In the bingos and the chip shops, of Scotland
Wherever we come from, wherever we're going
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
Whatever we're facing, whatever we're feeling
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
In the ups and the downs
In the yeses and the noes
In the twists and the turns, of Scotland
In the old and the new
In the haves and the nots
In the dreich and the dry, of Scotland
Wherever we come from, wherever we're going
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
Whatever we're facing, whatever we're feeling
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
Wherever we come from, wherever we're going
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland
Whatever we're facing, whatever we're feeling
Jesus walks beside us in Scotland

Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly Well, that's us, folks. So, it's over and out. Or, more importantly, go in peace and may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you all, this day and forevermore, amen. Thank you for being with us.