

Sunday 13th September 2020

Rev. Jim Cowan

Introduction

Hello, people of the Braes. For those of you who don't know who I am, my name is Jim Cowan. Last year I retired from full-time ministry and my wife and I moved to the Braes area to be closer to family.

I have recently been appointed as Locum in the congregation of Laurieston l/w Redding and Westquarter. Some of you may have met me when I preached in the two churches in March, or you may have seen me on the weekly service from Brightons.

Sadly, due to the strange times we're living in, we won't be able to meet in person for the time being, but hopefully in due course we'll be able to get to know each other better. In the meantime I thought I'd let you get to know something about me from some of my favourite hymns and Bible passages:

John 9:18-25

The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?"

His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." ... So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner." "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

Thoughts

I love the simple faith of the man who met Jesus and found that his life was changed. He didn't have the answers which the sceptical Pharisees were looking for, but he knew one thing, before he met Jesus he was blind, but now he could see.

I think we often worry about having to explain to sceptical people why we are Christians, why we are members of the church; but if we have found that Christ has touched our lives and healed us or set us free, maybe that's all we need to know – that once we were blind in our sin and blind to God's work in our lives and in the world, but now we can see these things, and so we rejoice in the new life in Christ that he wants for every one of us.

Maybe all people are looking for is not a deep theological explanation of creation or redemption, maybe all they want to know is that Jesus changes people – that he loves us and sets us free, that he removes the blinkers and allows us to see what's really important.

You've probably already worked out which hymn I'm thinking of:

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

In these uncertain times, when the future for all of us and particularly for the church seems so unclear, isn't it good to know the One who has brought us safe thus far, and to know too that he will lead us home, even if the route may be unfamiliar, uncomfortable and frightening?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we come to you with hearts that need to be opened to your word and your love. There is so much around us that tears at us and causes us to tremble. Keep us ever mindful of your presence and the hope that you have given us in your Son Jesus Christ.

Guide us, we pray, as your church, struggling to spread the good news in a strange uncertain world. Keep us focused on the mission and ministry to which you have called us and lead us forward.

We know, Lord, that there will often be bumps and holes in the road along the way. Save us from dwelling on them and make us secure in the goals you have placed before us.

Hear our prayers for all who need your tender touch of healing in their lives. Be with those who mourn. May we all remember the love and grace that your faithful people have brought to our world.

These are our prayers, which we offer to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who said "not my will, but yours be done." Amen

Blessing

May the love of God the father enfold you, may the wisdom of God the Son enlighten you, may the fire of the Spirit inflame you, and may the blessing of God the almighty rest upon you and remain with you, now and for ever.
Amen.

Sunday 20th September 2020

Rev. Jim Cowan

Prayer

From our separate paths we come, Gracious God, and gather as one people before you in gratitude and praise.

Provider of all good things, we worship your Fatherly goodness throughout creation. Redeemer of all sick and lost souls, we worship your saving grace in Christ Jesus. Renewer of all hopes, we worship your Spirit who fills all things.

God of amazing love and infinite glory, please receive the praise which rises from this one congregation. We offer it with all our best love, and pray that it may be joined with the millions who worship you on earth and with the shining hosts that adore you in heaven. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Thoughts

Have you ever said to a child "come and see what I've got", with your hand clasped over some treat or other? I think sometimes we enjoy the excitement and wonder in their eyes every bit as much as they enjoy the hidden surprise.

"Come and see" is a theme in John's Gospel. Jesus said it to the followers of John the Baptist (1:39). Philip said it to Nathaniel (1:46). Andrew said it to Peter(1:41-42). "What are you looking for ... come and see." "Can any good thing come from Nazareth? Come and see."

That seems to me to be a good motto for the church, "Come and see". It's an invitation to experience. It doesn't assume that we are able to tell people what is good for them. We know that we don't have all the answers. We know that God deals with us as individuals and that he may work differently in different people. He rebukes some and encourages others. He calls some to make drastic changes in their lives and others to serve him, remaining where they are. What does God have in store for me? Come and see.

Reading: John 1:36-49

HYMN: Mission Praise 85

*Come and see, come and see,
Come and see the King of love;
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears.
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer,
As he lifts the cruel cross;
Lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill.*

*We worship at your feet,
Where wrath and mercy meet,
And a guilty world is washed
By love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin—
Oh, help me take it in.
Deep wounds of love cry out
'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship,
The Lamb who was slain.*

The idea of inviting someone to "come and see" may be frightening. It might make us apprehensive, excited, hopeful or uncomfortable. But we should bear in mind that the initiative lies with God. We don't need to have all the answers. We don't need to be perfect Christians. All we need to do is invite others to "come and see for themselves". God will do the rest. We only invite them to join us on the road to faith. Jesus Christ leads the way. In inviting others to join us on our journey, we ourselves take another step on the road.

We don't need to have all the answers to life's questions before we can bring people into the church, whether it's physical church or online church. All we need do is give the invitation, "Come and see".

Prayer

Loving God, The world can seem an overwhelming place, with so many problems we cannot begin to solve. We stand before you, hearts broken by the way things are, with only faint dreams of how things could be. Give us vision to see the world as you see it. God, we pray for the places broken by violence, where greed and selfishness, hatred and anger have erased any glimmer of hope. We pray for peace in every place, in every home, and in every heart. We pray for the places where inequality reigns, where poverty robs human beings of dignity, where people are treated as less because of age, gender, religion, race or class.

Blessing

And now I entrust you to God and the message of His grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those He has set apart for Himself. (Acts 20:32) May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you today and remain with you always. Amen