

Let us worship God, singing to God's praise and glory.

Hymn – 'Love Divine' from New Scottish Hymns Band

*Come Almighty to deliver
Let us all Thy life receive
Suddenly return and never
Never more Thy temples leave
Thee we would be always blessing
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing
Glory in Thy perfect love*

*Finish then Thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee
Changed from glory into glory
'Til in Heaven we take our place
'Til we cast our crowns before Thee
Lost in wonder, love and praise*

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God, you are solid and sure and reliable, while at the same time being creative, adaptable and free. We change too, but not always in a good way. We catch sight of something new and lifechanging in the teaching of Jesus, and we vow to be different, to follow Him forever. Then the kaleidoscope turns, and a new picture emerges. One that involves cost and letting go. One where people do not come flocking to hear what we have to say but are hostile, or worse still, indifferent. A future that holds the real possibility of dying, and we're not ready for that.

Gentle God help us to take things a bit more slowly, to get our balance and find a way of following that is sustainable for us and honouring to you. May we neither shame ourselves by dwelling on all the mistakes we have made in the past, nor frighten ourselves by looking too far into the future.

Help us rather to take one day at a time, to keep going by putting one foot in front of the other, lifting our eyes now and then and surprising ourselves to just how far we have come. And if the way for a while is easy, let us enjoy it. And if suffering comes, give us strength to bear it. And in both, remind us that you have been there before and have promised to stay with us to the end, which may, if the impossible promises of our faith turn out to be true, not be the end at all but a glorious new beginning.

Keep us faithful, keep us hopeful, above all O God, keep us going, in Jesus name. Amen.

Scripture Reading (Mark 8:31-38)

Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed. And after three days, rise again. He said all this quite openly, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me, for those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father."

All Age Talk

Good morning, everybody. We are gonna start with some questions this morning to get us thinking, to get our brains working. Here's the first one.

Would you rather eat a bag of crisps or a bar of chocolate? Would you rather eat a bag of crisps or a bar of chocolate? Hmm, what do you prefer? This one's easy for me, chocolate all the time. I love chocolate.

Next one, would you rather go for a walk or go for a cycle? Hmm, walk or cycle, which do you prefer? Which would you rather do? This one's tricky for me. I like both, but now the snow's melted, I think I would choose a cycle today. I would love to go for a cycle.

Next question. If you're colouring in, would you rather use felt tips or crayons? Which one do you prefer? Which would you rather use, felt tips or crayons? Hmm, I'd probably choose felt tips.

It doesn't really matter, does it, the answer to those questions. That was just a bit of fun. But here are some would you rather questions that are maybe a little bit more important.

Would you rather keep watching TV or go and set the table when mum asks you to, or maybe your dad?

Would you rather keep watching TV or go and set the table when your mum or dad ask you to? Hmm, this is trickier, isn't it? Because I think we would all rather, we'd all prefer to keep watching the TV, but we know that it would help our mum and dad, and that Jesus would want us to think about them, and so we should probably be going to set the table. Hmm, it's trickier.

What about this one, would you rather, if you're at school, when we're all back at school, we can't wait, can we? When you're at school and you're playing in the playground, would you rather go and play with your best friend and a group of friends who are doing a really good game, or go and play with a person who's just stood by themselves and is quite lonely at the side of the playground? Would you rather play with your group of friends and your best friend who are doing a really cool game, or go and play with the person who looks lonely at the side of the playground? Hmm, that's tricky as well, isn't it? Because if we're being honest, I think we would all rather go and play with our friends and play with a group of friends and play that great game. But probably we know that Jesus would want us to go and talk to the person who's lonely at the side of the playground. So, if we're being honest, we know what we'd rather do, but we also know what we should do.

And here's my last one. If you were in class and your teacher said, "Oh, it's coming up to Easter, who can tell us about the Easter story?" Would you rather put your hand up and say "Yes, yes. Me, I can," and tell them all you know about Jesus and what He did for us, or would you rather keep quiet and not say anything in case people tease you a bit, or maybe laugh at you for believing in Jesus and loving Him? Hmm, that's a tough one, isn't it? What would you rather do? Put your hand up and answer the teacher's questions and tell everyone all you know about Jesus, or keep quiet in case you get teased and picked on for what you believe. That's tough, I know that question's really tough.

Do you know in the Bible Jesus says to his friends, "Whoever wants to be my disciple," that means whoever wants to be my friend, "must deny themselves," that means they must stop thinking just what they would prefer, what they would rather do, and think about other people. So, "Whoever wants to be my friend must deny themselves, must think about other people really before themselves, must stop just thinking what they want but think about what would help other people." And then Jesus keeps saying, "...and take up their cross and follow me." Take up their cross and follow me?

Hmm, take up their cross is a bit tricky to understand, but you'll know at Easter we celebrate, of course, or we remember Jesus dying on the cross and then celebrate Him coming back to life again. But anybody who was being killed on the cross had to carry that heavy cross to where it was going to happen, and that's what Jesus is referring to. He says you have to do the tough things, the tricky things, the things you don't want to. Nobody wanted to carry that cross knowing that they were gonna get killed. Jesus is saying, "If you want to be my friend, you have to stop just thinking about what you would prefer, what you'd rather do, and think about other people and also be willing to take up your cross, to do the tricky things, the tough things, the hard things, and follow Me," because that's what He did for us.

I think that sometimes we think about being a Christian means it's gonna be super easy and super fun, but Jesus is saying here, actually, it's not. There's gonna be tough things, and we are gonna have to do the things that mean we can't do what we want to do, that we have to think about other people, because that's what he wants us to do. This actually could be quite hard, but the best thing of course is that we don't have to do it by ourselves, 'cause Jesus and the Holy spirit and God are always there to help us think about other people, take up our cross, be willing to do the hard things and follow Jesus.

Let's pray together. Father God, thank you for Jesus' words in the Bible that help us learn how to be more like Jesus. Help us to be people who are willing to deny ourselves, to not just think about what we would rather do, but to think about what will help other people. Help us to be people who will take up our cross, who know that as we follow Jesus, there's gonna be tough times and tricky times and hard decisions to make, but that that is what we need to do. Help us when it comes to those times. Thank you God for listening. Amen.

Song – "I Have a Dream" - The Choir of St Magnus Cathedral

*I have a dream, a man once said
Where all is perfect peace
Where men and women, black and white
Stand hand in hand and all unite
In freedom and in love
In freedom and in love*

*So, dream the dreams and sing the songs
But never be content
For thoughts and words don't ease the pain
Unless there's action, all is vain
Faith proves itself in deeds*

*Faith proves itself in deeds
Lord, give us vision, make us strong
Help us to do Your will
Don't let us rest until we see
Your love throughout humanity
Uniting us in peace
Uniting us in peace*

Sermon – Rev Anikó Schütz Bradwell, Humbie and Yester, Bolton and Saltoun

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Just a couple of weeks ago, on the 7th of February, it was exactly one year since Dr. Li Wenliang died of COVID-19. He might be better known to you as the Wuhan whistle blower, the doctor who had tried to warn fellow medics of this new potentially deadly disease. Rather than being listened to, his warnings were played down. He was told by the authorities to stop making false comments, and even faced a police investigation for spreading rumours. Dr. Li was a doctor at a hospital in Wuhan, where the first case of the Coronavirus was detected at the end of 2019. He himself caught the illness while treating patients and died from it. Dr. Li faced the repercussions of speaking out because he wanted to help. He wanted to warn the world of this danger of which he had become aware.

Over this past year, we have also heard of many health professionals and carers who have not only worked many extra hours, but also chose to isolate themselves from their families while treating COVID patients, so as not to expose their loved ones to any danger of contracting the virus themselves. I have heard stories of people with young children or elderly parents who chose to stay in caravans or in basements, or decided to stay in the care facilities where they were working, so that they wouldn't carry any risk home to their families. They removed themselves not only from the comforts of home, but also from the support and affection of their loved ones, from just being able to share a hug, or the chance to forget all about their stressful shifts while playing with their children.

Of course, these are more extreme examples of sacrifices we have seen over the past year. In smaller and in bigger ways, we all have made sacrifices. All our lives have changed, and we all have had to do without many things. We've missed out on seeing family and friends, on celebrations together, on just everyday things like physically going to school or the office or

meeting for a service in a church building. We have faced loneliness, uncertainty and anxiety, and why? To protect ourselves, of course, and to protect others, to keep them as safe as possible. We have made sacrifices for the greater good, to help others and the world, each of us and the ways that were open to us, just as Dr. Li did, and the many carers and health professionals.

While this past year has perhaps been more sacrificial for us than any other, we can probably all think of other ways in which we have chosen to do what is right rather than what we actually might have wanted to do, when we have chosen to put the needs of others, the needs of the world before our own. Of course, this isn't always motivated by being a Christian or by another religious faith, but our faith can be a motivator for us to choose the right path. In this season of Lent, when we walk towards the cross, you remember how Jesus died, how he made the biggest sacrifice in laying down his life to save us, to save humanity. He offered us forgiveness and the chance for a fresh start, a chance to new life through his death.

In our gospel reading today, he explains this to Peter, but Peter is having none of it. Just a couple of verses earlier, Jesus had asked Peter who he thought He was. And Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the long awaited Saviour or Liberator, someone who saves and liberates. But Peter seems to have had his own ideas about what this entailed, and so he tells Jesus off for scaring them with such a bleak vision. Jesus in turn calls Peter "Satan," because he is tempting him to choose an easier path, just as Jesus experienced similar temptations in his time in the desert.

Doing what is right isn't always easy. So much of what Jesus tells the disciples and the others who come to listen to him isn't easy. Loving our enemy, forgiving people who have hurt us, welcoming the stranger, none of that is easy. They all require trust and courage and love, love above all else. Jesus turns the world upside down, just as he is a Messiah who doesn't sit on a throne covered in purple velvet, but one who will wash the feet of his disciples. He tells us that the first will be last, and the last will be first. "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it." That's not easy. That's very difficult to grasp, and more difficult still to choose to live it. Peter calls Jesus "Messiah and Christ," but finds it hard to accept what that entails. Jesus responds by talking about the cross. The cross that he will have to carry, and the cross that those who want to follow him will have to carry themselves too.

For us, the cross is a symbol of our faith, an ornament in our church buildings, something we might wear as jewellery. For his listeners then, the cross would have been an instrument of torture. Under the Roman empire, not least in Judea, it was used mainly on those seen as of lower rank, so for instance on slaves, on violent criminals, and also those considered rebels and troublemakers. So, for the disciples and the others listening to Jesus, hearing Him speak of the cross would have been shocking and frightening. And He isn't only saying that he will be crucified, but that those who want to follow Him will have to take up their cross too. Jesus invites each one of them and each one of us to follow Him and take the right path, even if that means that we need to deny ourselves and our own agendas.

Being a Christian, a follower of Christ, is not about being comfortable or complacent. It's seeing the needs of the world and responding with love, with grace and with hope. It's a call to humility, a call to put the needs of others, the needs of the world before our own needs and wants. A call to find the courage to walk on despite our fears. A call to trust God enough to walk with us. This won't always be in big heroic gestures, but in many small ways, every day.

When we are finding ourselves faced with a choice, and with every choice we make, we can decide to follow Christ, in choosing this path, in choosing to follow the teachings and example of Jesus, we might just find a fuller, more fulfilled life too. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession - The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

In these prayers for others, I'm going to leave a series of gaps. And in the silence, I want to encourage you to be praying for people and situations known to you, appropriate to each of the categories that I'll offer. Like throwing a stone into a pond, we will ripple out from the centre to the edges, and so we'll begin close at hand and finish up far afield.

Are you ready? Let's pray together.

O mighty and everlasting God, we thank You that through Jesus You hear our prayers in each and every situation, and that You answer our prayers according to Your good will and purpose. And so, hear us, first of all, as we pray for those who are our nearest and dearest.

Hear us as we pray for our congregation, for those who lead within it, for those who serve, for those folks who have struggled most through the pandemic restrictions. Bless our congregations, Lord, we pray.

We pray, Lord, for our communities, for those who serve day by day, keeping things going, for those who have leadership responsibilities, for teachers, for care home staff, for hospital workers, for shop workers, and for the so many others who serve day by day by day.

Hear us Lord as we pray for our country. Yes, for those who have leadership responsibilities, decision-makers, advisors, guiding us through the pandemic.

And we pray for our world. A world locked down, a world savaged by this virus, with people in every country mourning the loss of loved ones, struggling to cope with isolation. O Lord, we pray for our world, the world You love, the world You sent Your Son to die for. We pray that through all of this, hope will triumph over despair, that life will triumph over death. Yes, that light will prevail over darkness.

Come Lord for our world, grant us Jesus to be light of this world today, and in all the days to come. Hear these and all our prayers, for we ask them in Jesus name. Amen.

Hymn – “Jesus, You Have Called Us” – Joel Payne, Resound

*Jesus, you have called us
Come, follow me
Take up your cross
Deny yourself
and live
Jesus, I am willing
Though I am weak
I'll trust you
And I'll go where
You lead*

*I will follow
I will follow
I will follow
Where you lead*

Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

Now, go in peace and may the blessing of God Almighty. Father, Son and Holy spirit be with you and remain with you today and forever more. Amen.