

Address – 13/6/21**“A Work in Progress: The Active Spirit”****Introduction to the Reading**

Before we have our Bible reading this morning I want to put it in context to help you make more of it as it is read. When Moses received the Law from God we are told that he met with the Lord in person on Mount Sinai. And when he came back to the people of Israel at the foot of the mountain we are told that his face was so radiant that the people were afraid to come near him and so he covered his face with a veil. Every time Moses spoke with the Lord his face shone and the people were in awe of him.

In our reading this morning, the apostle Paul is reflecting on that episode from the Old Testament and comparing it with the opportunity that is open to anyone under the new covenant to meet in person with the Lord through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

Listen out as the passage is read now and listen for what God is teaching you.

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

“All of us then reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces, and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into His likeness in an ever greater degree of glory.” (2 Cor.3:18)

You will have come across a sign at times in your life which proclaims that there is Work in Progress – it might be road works that mean a delay to your journey, it might be building work that involves you in some upheaval, it might be work on a website that means you can't access what you went looking for – and we are all impatient for such things to be brought to a conclusion so that we can get on. You and I as individuals and we together as a church are a work in progress in God's hands – we may be impatient (and how painful it must be for God watching how slowly we succumb to improvements!) In today's service we are pausing to take stock of our life as a church and I invite each one of you to do so also in regard to your own journey of faith.

This morning's sermon has actually already been preached to us by the apostle Paul. Our reading from 2 Corinthians is in fact a sermon on the

account that is given in Exodus chapters 33 and 34 highlighting the way Moses' face shone following his encounters with the living God at Mount Sinai and the way that the Holy Spirit does something similar in Christian believers today.

We have a lot to do today so I don't intend to say much this morning other than to highlight the way that Paul's message here contributes to the understanding we are seeking during these weeks of Pentecost of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. We have so far encountered the Holy Spirit as the *Advocate*, the One who comes alongside us, the Helper, the Comforter, the Counsellor, the Friend; we have considered how by the Holy Spirit we may be *adopted* into God's family and given the privilege and security of knowing God as a perfectly loving parent; last week we saw how the Holy Spirit *anoints* people and equips each of us for specific ministries and acts of Christian service. This morning's A-word is '*active*' or '*activating*' and the activity of the Holy Spirit – Paul's word in Greek (*diakonia*) could also be translated the '*service*' of the Holy Spirit or the '*ministry*' of the Holy Spirit – is what the apostle speaks about in comparison to what Moses and the people of Israel experienced at Mount Sinai.

Paul makes three straightforward comparisons in relation to the glory of God shining from Moses' face:

Firstly, if the Law of Moses (which brings death when it is enforced) came with such glory, how much greater is the glory that belongs to the activity of the Spirit.

Secondly, if the [Old Testament] system which brings condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the activity which brings salvation.

And thirdly, if there was glory in that which lasted for a while (that is to say Moses' shining face), how much more glory is there in that which lasts forever – that is to say what *we* are given to enjoy in Christ by the Holy Spirit today.

You and I are a work in progress. Has that work of God truly begun in you or has it perhaps got bogged down and delayed? Paul reminds us here that the veil that hid the glory in Old Testament times is removed for us in Christ and that through the presence of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, there is freedom. In the work in progress that is Kinross Parish Church, let the veil be removed and the glory of the Lord be revealed so that through the

activity of the Spirit of the Lord we (and many others with us) may be set truly free and in Charles Wesley's words with which we will end the service we may be 'changed from glory into glory'

“All of us then reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces, and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into His likeness in an ever greater degree of glory.”

We are a work in progress but by the activity of the Spirit that work is progressing to a glorious conclusion.

Let's pray:

“Changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.”

Stated Annual Meeting

The following verbal reports were given as part of today's service which should be read in conjunction with the Trustees Annual Report and Accounts which is available from the Church Office.

Growing Young Update

Growing Young is a process that has been underway in our congregation over the last 9 months, a process of reflection and prayer, of dreaming and of conversation. It is not about a small group presenting a blueprint for rubber-stamping by the powers-that-be but about getting the whole congregation to think and act differently, to say No to an earthly process of inevitable ageing and decline and to embrace a culture of openness and interaction that will enable everyone in our congregation and increasingly people who are currently outwith it to find and enjoy the new life that Christ holds out to us.

The Growing Young Team has spent a long time *listening* and we are conscious that many of you are now wanting to *hear* from us. There is too much to try and squeeze in to today's service when there is a lot going on so for now, just an appetiser. What we will be offering is a threefold strategy – it will be for all of *you* to put flesh on the bones and make it happen in the most appropriate way.

The first prong of the strategy is the inward dimension which we are calling 'Celebrating Family' – just as our human family consists of a wide variety of people, so it must be for our church family. At the heart of our congregational life we want to see a weekly gathering that brings everyone together for perhaps a 45-minute service, around which a whole variety of smaller fringe gatherings will happen at different times of the day and during the week, many of them focussed around the sharing of hospitality.

Secondly there is the outward thrust, the 'Community Focus' – intentionally taking church out into everyday life through things like litter-picking and other Eco-Church initiatives and a regular presence at the Farmers' Market, and through online engagement, to be a church without walls that is much more visible and accessible out there and not just in here.

And thirdly there is the forward movement which will focus on a more effective and flexible use and development of our property and resources to enable us to do the kind of things that will emerge through the inward and outward strands of the strategy.

The Growing Young team has lots of ideas but it none of them will come to fruition without the engagement and enthusiasm of the whole congregation and groups within it, so the conversation goes on. We hope to come back to you with a fuller presentation perhaps even next week that will stimulate informal conversations over the summer and more formal discussions into the autumn.

We know where growing old will lead us but the exciting thing about growing young is that it could take us anywhere. Let's keep in step with the Holy Spirit and allow God's purpose among us to emerge.

Feedback from the Congregation

A big thank you to those who took time to submit comments and questions. Actually there were only 2 questions and I will come to them in a moment. But 23 people got in touch with me and I want to give you a whistle-stop tour of the things they mentioned.

Appropriately, since we are fundamentally a church family, most people who contacted me mentioned specific names of people they wanted to

thank, so I want to begin by simply reading those names (they are in no particular order).

Tina and Bill, Jane, Valerie, Jaffrey, Jim, Linda, Myra, Helena, Margaret (four were mentioned – Michie, Clark, Hamblin, Sikora – but other Margarets are available! Christine, Alex, Alice, Ann, Alison, Moira, Ruth, Lynn, David, Flora, Robert, Isobel, Hilda, Lammie, Heather, Shona, Eleanor, Alisdair, Enid, Tim, Rob, Ewan, Nick, Kathy, Alan.

One person wrote: “To single any one person out is virtually impossible, the seen and the unseen have all continued to support in whatever way they can, sometimes in a small way or sometimes in a larger regular way but all important in keeping our church alive and showing the Church is more than just a building.”

Another person wrote, “I feel very blessed to be a part of such a vibrant church who have risen (above and beyond) the challenges that COVID has thrown at us for more than a year. I know that, if I need to talk to someone, have a laugh, or pray with someone, then there are a lot of people I could just pick up the phone to, or text, or email and that would help me to cope.”

Another person said: “During all of lockdown. I have never felt alone.”

If you think someone's name has been missed, pick up the phone today sometime and say thank you to them.

People also wanted to express gratitude for the variety of things that have been taking place under the church's umbrella over the past 15 months and there was a lot of overlap in what people said so all of you will probably find something in the following list that echoes your thoughts and feelings. Again they are in no particular order (apart from the first one - services online – which was mentioned by the majority).

People wrote about their thankfulness for church friends, housegroup, prayer times, preaching, online technology (including Zoom, Facebook and the new website), music, the church office and communication, practical help and support over the months, phone calls, magazine deliveries; specific mention was made of the Craft Group, the Guild, Cafe Church, Traidcraft, the online Alpha Course last summer, virtual coffee and chat after services, All Friends Together, Growing Young, the Choir, Kythe, WuWuW. the Eco-Team and particularly the litter picks, the Rainbow

window, the Outreach Group, Family week, Easter flowers and Christmas angels.

We could hear today from somebody on virtually all these topics and we would be here till the cows come home but let me read a wee bit of the report that came in from All Friends Together:

Early on in the pandemic, we decided that we wanted to try and keep All Friends Together going, but switch to online meetings. We checked that our usual members would be able to access computers to use Zoom, then went ahead on that platform. A bit of a steep learning curve for all of us, but it was worth it. We want to try and keep the Gatherings fun, so, whilst we have been meeting virtually, as well as our usual Bible story (which has been focused on Biblical characters, as well as how to live our lives for God) we have been asking people to source jokes on our theme and we share a fun time sharing the jokes – good and bad ones. We try to keep the virtual format close to the one we would normally have when we meet face-to-face. We share news, celebrate birthdays, and sing. We also managed to have a Christmas celebration, although Santa’s wife did get a bit lost and ended up at Lindsay’s house! Still, we managed to help her get the presents distributed later that day. Until we can get back together safely, we will continue to enjoy our time together virtually each month.

And by way of a flavour of some of the other things that were said let me give you a few direct quotations:

One person told me: “I loved hearing the bell ring, seeing the rainbow in the kirk window, and seeing weel kent faces. But mostly it was the reassurance that God was in charge and would see us through. I know that we are supposed to know that anyway but hearing you say it made such a difference so my thanks go firstly to you (would do a hug but acknowledge that is maybe a step too far!!!)

Another person wrote: “I am sad for those we have lost over the past year – Anna Graham, George Drysdale, Helen Scott, Mary Halkett, Keith Green, Geoff Douglas – and many others. The grief of families has been even more painful in the Covid restrictions.” And this person continued: “Despite job insecurity and job loss and people’s myriad worries, the gift of giving was not neglected and so our finances, carefully stewarded, remained in a strong position, allowing us to commit and invest some £6,000 in technology. A shout-out to all the AV team behind the cameras!

Few people realise the painstaking, lengthy process required to produce each hymn that we sing along to on a Sunday that combines a previous recording of our congregation with words and images – thank you, volunteers!”

One person pointed out that “The Christian outreach that the pandemic has offered has been amazing for our congregation and for others that might not physically be able or want to cross the Church threshold.”

Another person put into words the oddness of what we have done these past months: “It felt rather strange to set up for communion in our own house in front of the computer but we were happy to give it a try. As you are probably aware I do not attend the communion services in church so I was unsure how it would feel being on our own. Much to my surprise I found it a very spiritual experience.”

There remain anxieties of course and probably more than people are willing to commit to writing. Here's one that was expressed: “I am concerned about our Church Family and how it will evolve in having folks back in the Church and the fellowship we all had before Lockdown. I fear the convenience of [watching services at home] may mean folks 'stay away.' I would hope not but, looking forward to how we carry things forward, it may have to be done sympathetically although this is also a chance to make change...it maybe a difficult balance.”

Of course it's always a difficult balance but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to find better ways. One thing that struck me repeatedly as I listened through hours of CDs of services to find hymns for us to use was that we often sing very slowly, so perhaps as we start to sing live again I could put in a plea for a bit more pace and vigour. You will all have different ideas for improvements and I hope that we will all be open to the journey of discovery that lies ahead of us. Let's have healthy conversations about it.

Now, Growing Young has taught us the benefits of conversation and I hope that we can continue today's conversation after the service over coffee on Zoom. Please come along especially if you don't normally come – the link is in the weekly email. Get yourself a cup of coffee after the service and there will be some informal chat, then when those who have been here at the church have got home we can have a wee bit of discussion time.

We need to be talking to each other as we move forward and it can't all be channelled through the office or me or the elders. As an example, a few people in their comments said that they weren't sure when they would be comfortable coming back to the church building again, but another person made this comment: "I would encourage folk who haven't yet been back to a Sunday service to feel confident to do so – there will be a warm welcome and they will be looked after by expert stewards. And a request to folk to think about how they can play a part in church life. We are already blessed with a huge number of volunteers whose commitment allows us to serve the Lord and our community but we can only continue to do what we do – and expand what we do – with the energy and input of more people with fresh ideas. Lots of folk taking on small roles is healthier than a few folk doing lots of roles. Whatever people's skills: practical, pastoral, educational, spiritual, digital, organisational, environmental, their input will make a difference. We are missing the informal chats that might spark the conversation that matches the person with the need, so we need folk to take that bold step forward."

But I mentioned earlier that there had been two specific questions so now is a good time to address these:

Firstly, one person asked when we will be able to put more chairs out in the church and be more together. The answer to that is in the hands of the government – they make the rules and we follow them. At the moment people from different households need to sit 2m apart.

And the other question concerned difficulty in seeing the words on the videos of hymns in church last Sunday. The answer to that is that the videos were made for people to be able to see on computers and tablets and phones at home. Now that we can sing again in the church we won't be using videos any more and the words will be as they have been this morning on slides very similar to what we used to use before lockdown.

Finally, I just want to echo the thanks that have been expressed by so many people. We are all privileged to be part of this church family. Let's keep up what we are doing well and improve on those things where we are falling short.