

APC ASSEMBLY 2007

ON WEDNESDAY 16th MAY the APC Assembly met in Inverness and the retiring moderator Mr R W M MacKenzie, (Tain) preached a warm and comforting sermon to all who gathered.

We were pleased to have amongst us friends from many other denominations and from abroad. The several other ministers and elders present were all associated with the court.

After the assembly sermon and the court was constituted, the retiring moderator welcomed the newly nominated moderator Mr Kenneth MacLean elder in our Poolewe congregation. Mr MacLean is a long established and faithful member of the court and has served as treasurer for many years and also amongst many other responsibilities edits our web-site. The court thanked the retiring moderator for his work and wished the new moderator every blessing in his new additional role in the church.

Representatives from most of the reformed churches addressed us. Revd John Ross from the Free Church, and Revd John MacLeod from the Free Church Continuing, and Revd Andrew Quigley from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and Revd Richard Holst from the Evangelical Presbyterian

Church in England and Wales.

Mr John McGill an elder from Toronto who originally hails from Glasgow, gave the Canadian report (printed elsewhere in this magazine). He outlined the needs of each of our congregations in Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton, especially mentioning the need for a settled ministry in Vancouver.

Representatives from other Christian organisations also brought their greetings to us. Mr Jeremy Ross from Blythswood, who is the son of one of the founders, the late Revd John Ross, Lochcarron. Mr Willie MacKenzie Jnr, representative for Christian Focus Publications, reminded us of our need to keep reading and suggested several books and Mr Les Dowie of Christian Literature Crusade added weight to the wisdom of spending time reading good literature and assuring us it was a great means of blessing.

Revd Alex Murray spoke on the importance of having good theological training for ministers as he gave a report of the work of the Highland Theological College. The new chief executive of The Scottish Bible Society, Elaine Duncan, sent a letter giving her apologies for not being able to attend.

We ask for the prayers of our readers as we continue to press on 'Always Preaching Christ'.

Assembly Sermon

“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak” [Acts 13:15]

Retiring Moderator Mr Roderick W M MacKenzie

IT IS NOT A SIMPLE matter to have to contemplate preaching a sermon to this audience many of whom have been preaching for years but then to remember that I am speaking in the presence of the Triune God puts an added solemnity on to the occasion.

I am pleased to remember that so many before me have recognised and acknowledged that *“without me you can do nothing”* and there is also the thought that the congregation is much bigger than we think when we remember the words in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 *“an innumerable company of angels”*.

The book of Acts is a most exciting book as it gives details of the way in which the church grew and prospered in the days immediately following Christ's resurrection and ascension. And it is a question for us all, 'Do we want the Church of Christ and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ to grow?' And 'Do we expect that to happen?' 'Do we want people to be encouraged to seek and come to believe in Jesus?' 'Do we need to be encouraged to follow Jesus?' 'Do we need to be encouraged to stand up

and be counted for Jesus?' 'Do we stand up for Jesus?' When we are in a corner do we remember Jesus? Is Jesus in our memory in our mind? in our focus? in our sight? And in our hearts?

Not long ago I visited a man who was depressed and discovered that much of his depression was because he focussed on himself rather than on Jesus and when he began to focus on Jesus a smile came on his face again *“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* [Heb 12:3] and also *“Towards the Lord my waiting eyes continually are set, for he it is who shall bring forth my feet out of the net”* [Psa 25:15].

So encouragement? Do we want it? Do we know it? Can we give it? How can we give it? Well, these questions and more may well, under God's blessing, be answered as we now proceed to look at this incident of which verse 15 forms a part.

The preparation of the hearers' hearts came after and in connection with their attendance at church [v14] and the reading of the Law and the Prophets [v15]. Here is due

emphasis on the Word and worship. It may at first seem of little significance, but we avoid the bible and the worship of God's house and the 'means of grace' at our peril . Remember David in Psa 122: 1 *"I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me"* How many of us here can say the same? And that same David learnt to say *"This word of Thine my comfort is in mine affliction and in my straits I am revived by this thy word alone"* Once again, How many of us here today can say the same?

There was a willingness to hear, indicated by the words *"Please speak"* or *"Say on"* [v 15] Who made them willing? Not Paul – but God. If you are not willing to listen I cannot make you or change you , although I would like to! It is God who changes the heart and what an encouragement that is! Remember the words of Psa110:3 *" A willing people in the day of thy power shall come to thee"* So now we have a further point of challenge; If I were able to hear what you are actually thinking just now would I hear the words "say on" or "please speak"?

From verse 16 we read that Paul stood up and beckoned or motioned with his hand and responded and made the most of the opportunity which is what he recommended to the Galatians in chapter 5 verse 10 *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers"*. Clearly we should do the same! We should encourage people to come and hear.

We should declare our own enthusiasm for and joy in the message of the Gospel.

We should not be shy, because we preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ and him crucified, we are not pointing to ourselves but to Jesus Christ. Then we should say what we mean and mean what we say as Paul said *"give audience"* or *"listen to me"* [v 16]

Having got the opportunity and taken it and recognising that the preparation of the heart is from the Lord [Pro 16:19] Paul proceeded to recount important facts (not theories) for the people who listened to recall and to enjoy and this forms a useful outline of how we too should present the Gospel. You cannot imagine Paul preaching this sermon with a mournful or sad face but rather with real enthusiasm, excitement, joy and clarity, which is a further lesson that needs to be learnt by us.

The sermon he preached is in Acts chapter 13 verses 17 to 41 which we have already read together so rather than refer to each verse I shall just refer to the main issues.

Paul first recounted the history of God's dealings with the people he was addressing and his choice of them. For our own encouragement it is surely worth recounting and remembering the history of God's dealings with ourselves, what has happened in the past both before we had a being and before we were born, which gives me the opportunity to quote from Isaiah chapter 25 verse 1 *"you have done*

wonderful things. Things planned long ago" and then also in our own lifetime. I often recall the words of Psalm 103 verse 2 "Bless oh my soul the Lord thy God and not forgetful be of all His gracious benefits He hath bestowed on thee". And the blessings he has bestowed on us are more than we can number and if we count them it will surprise us to how many there are.

Then in verse 22 and 23 he points at and to the promised Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Two main points arise here: first an emphasis on Jesus, do we like that emphasis? Is He music to your ears? and second a strong reminder of the fact that the Saviour Jesus was promised and that He is indeed the fulfillment of the promise. Remember that 29 prophecies concerning Jesus were fulfilled in 24 hours! Does this encourage us? Is it important to us? Do we value the promises and remember the words in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 23 "for He is faithful that promised".

Paul then makes his message very personal: "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God – fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent" [v26]. Now do we take that on board? This message is actually for you and for me! Let's not make excuses for making his message personal for it is personal and it needs to be personal for it is as individuals that we shall all have to face God.

Paul then reminds us of the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross and his subsequent resurrection in

verses 28 to 30. What encouragement there! Remember the comment by an old saint 'a sermon without Christ is no sermon!' and we cannot rightly speak of Christ without recalling his death and resurrection and ascension. Paul in 1st Corinthians chapter 2 verse 2 wrote "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified". Does the recalling of these facts thrill our soul or are they like water off a duck's back? You can know the state of our soul before God in the light of our answer to that last question.

Then in verses 38 and 39 he emphasises the core of the message of the gospel which is "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins and by him all that believe are justified of all things". That must continue to be the message, always preaching Christ. The everlasting Gospel is the forgiveness of sins only through the man Christ Jesus who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him. Is this an encouragement to us? Is it the message we want to proclaim? Is this news the joy of our heart today? Our answer to these questions should be yes! yes!

Then in verse 30 he told his audience "But God raised him from the dead" followed by the resounding words of verses 32 and 33 "We tell you the good news; what God has promised to our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus." The life, death and resurrection of Jesus all central

to the salvation of sinners, and vital for our encouragement were before the Apostle's mind and we need to set them before us continually as we read in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 "*running with patience the race set before us looking unto Jesus*".

The effect of this sermon is told us in verse 42 "*As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue the people invited them to speak further about these things the next Sabbath*" and after the service discussions continued with those who were already committed and the Apostles "*talked with them*

and urged them to continue in the grace of God". This was a necessary emphasis on the need for perseverance. We need to remember the words in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 38 "*Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him*".

Then there was further fruit for in verse 44 we read that on the next Lord's day "almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord " Would we like to see that happen again? Can we believe that it could happen again? Surely we are encouraged that there is this record of the power of the Lord to bless the

The Spiritual State of Scotland

THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF SCOTLAND is in a very serious condition. Many Christians now feel it is time to set aside all Party political allegiances and vote for the candidate that is most likely to stand up for Christian values and ideals. While there may be many Christians already holding political power and authority in government, it has to be said that not many appear to be standing up against their Party policies in order to vote for the principles of God's Word. If "*righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to any people*" [Pro 14:334], then the time has come for us to put national Christian interests before personal political preferences. Our nation is heading for real judgment and unless a radical change towards moral and spiritual issues take place, it will be too late. It was therefore encouraging that throughout the country various groups of Christians met to pray, some in public (see back cover) to ask God to give us godly politicians.

The very important judicial review on the Sexual Orientation Regulations (SOR) in Northern Ireland, takes place in Belfast on 4, 5, 6 June. This will have implications for the rest of the UK. We ask our readers to pray earnestly for the success of this review. Please pray that freedom to practice Christian beliefs, which have been enjoyed since centuries, would be upheld. If this case is lost then teaching God's Law will become an offence. For more details on the seriousness of this review, please contact info@christian.org.uk

ministry of the Word!

However, there was opposition. In verse 45 we learn that the Jews" were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying ". Nothing has changed! There are still those who will contradict the message of the Gospel but their end will be confusion and destruction.

Paul and Barnabas then turned to the Gentiles (all according to what God had promised and planned a long time ago (verse 47 and Isaiah 25 verse 1). Then we read in verse 48 "*When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and honoured the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed to eternal life believed.*"

Notice, they honoured the Word of the Lord, and let us do the same. Are we encouraged by the preaching of the Word? Have we known and do we continue to know the power of the Word in our hearts?

Once again there was opposition for the evil one is like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour but the the gospel flourished reaching even to us and from verse 52 we discover that "*The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost*" There you have it friends, see how the Lord worked and He is the same yesterday today and forever . Surely we are encouraged as we look to Jesus and although we are a small part of His Church let us remember the notice taken of "*the little flock*". Let us remember the words of Psalm 31 verse 24 "*Be of good courage and He strength unto your hearts shall send, all ye whose hope and*

confidence doth on the Lord depend." Just think of the encouragement there is in His promises to us!

It would be an interesting exercise to hear from each person here this evening as to which promise they have recently found especially helpful, but of course this might be seen as an innovation!! However I would be surprised if you would not point me to "*My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*" [2 Cor 2:9] or perhaps "*That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoicing shall return*" [Psa 126:6], or perhaps "*I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also*" [John 14:3] or perhaps "*His large and great dominion shall from sea to sea extend, it from the river shall reach forth unto earth's utmost end*" [Psa 72:8].

Finally, how do we give encouragement? We are to share what the Lord has done for us in the language of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 3 and 4 "*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God*"

Thank you all for your attention and support and may God in His mercy bless us all, and to His name be all the glory and the Praise

Canadian Presbytery

Annual Report - May 2007

TORONTO

Congregation

The past twelve months have been eventful albeit somewhat disheartening. During the month of August Mrs Jack a faithful member for numerous years passed on into glory. Regardless of failing health, Mrs Jack was diligent in her attendance of the public means of grace. She is now we believe, 'dwelling in the House of the Lord forevermore.'

As far as growth is concerned with the exception of the odd visitor who is primarily of Chinese origin, our numbers are static. The visitor who does come in may return for one more week but then we do not see them again. This is a result of cultural difference, whether it is language or our form of worship.

Evangelism

The Children's club continued over the year which took place every second Sunday. This club consists of children from both Victoria Park and the Free Church from Sheppard Ave. We extend our thanks to the leaders for teaching and the children for their enthusiasm.

Past, Present, Future

Transition would be the appropriate

word to explain what has transpired over the past twelve months. Prior to our last annual congregational meeting, the United Reformed Church - the Denomination which meets on the Lord's Day afternoon in the facility - expressed an interest in purchasing the church building.

In the light of this development the prospect of a new church plant - most likely in the Markham area - seemed promising. However as time progressed it became obvious that we were not adequately equipped for this task. A location change was not ideal for all and the level of commitment required could not be guaranteed thus enthusiasm for such an undertaking waned relatively quickly.

Towards the end of 2006 the Chinese Evangelical Church of Canada expressed an interest in purchasing the church building with the objective of developing their ministry in the community. Our Pastor Revd Malcolm Macleod was resigned to returning to the UK at the end of his three year visa term unless the Lord chose to open another door.

Malcolm believed the Lord did open a door through an opportunity to serve the Suffering Church with The Voice of The Martyrs Canada. Malcolm accepted

a full time position on April 1, 2007.

He continued serving the pulpit due to a hiccup in the immigration process and his last service with us occurred on the evening of April 29. This service was conducted by Revd John Bodner who served the pulpit during Victoria Park's time without a minister, Student Bob Hackett, Elder John McGill and the Revd Malcolm MacLeod. The evening was a blessing.

On Friday, April 27, in the presence of the Canadian Presbytery the congregation confirmed the decision they had come to earlier in the year to discontinue.

It should be noted, the congregation was delighted for Malcolm and his family. The

congregation perceived Malcolm's new position as a confirmation that they should no longer continue.

Concerning the facility, two offers were received from the URC and CECC for the building. A formal appraisal was requested to be done by Presbytery. This was completed on January 4, 2007.

The congregation favoured the CECC's offer primarily for demographics. The decision to sell the facility lies with Presbytery. Presbytery reconvenes in September 2007.

EDMONTON

Congregational News

On Sunday, May 4, 2007 the Neumann family - Kevin & Janet

Praise to our God

THE PSALM-SINGING group *Highland Harmony Singers* met in Greyfriars Church in Inverness on 31st March this year (see back cover) to lead the praise at an Inverness and North Mission Support Group event. That day eighty two members travelled from various parts of the Highlands - from Wick to Fort William to Skye - to gather together to sing Psalms in four-part harmony to the praise of the One to whom all praise belongs. Highland Harmony Singers is made up of old and younger members and, amazingly, represents six different denominations. The congregation, which numbered almost 100, joined with the choir in singing five of the twelve portions of Psalms sung, including Psalm 24:7-10 to the tune *St George's, Edinburgh*.

Among old and new versions of the Psalms sung was Psalm 107:28-32 to the recently composed tune *Lochbroom*. The singing was recorded and is available on CD or cassette tape at £9 or £6 respectively. These are available from the CLC Bookshop in Church Street, Inverness. Any person who has difficulty obtaining a copy of either should contact Kenny MacLean on email kendunedin@aol.com or Tel 01445-712050.

KM

were accepted into membership and their five children: Benjamin (11), Samuel (9), Madison (7), Trista (4), and Elijah (2) were baptized by Revd Malcolm MacIness. This has been a blessing for the congregation given the low mark as a result of two members leaving last year when it was decided to move from the Seven Day Adventist Church to the Orange Hall. To have the Neumann family attend and express the desire for membership is a blessing. In addition Kevin is beginning studies at Haddington House in May.

Another family from Prince Edward Island are in the process of selling their home and making arrangements to move to Edmonton. Once moved they plan on attending the services.

Evangelism

Venta Manor services are doing well. There is a solid core group that join every Lord's Day and visitors come and go. The Orange Hall location gives the congregation the opportunity to minister to the homeless. This coming Summer the congregation will be holding Friday night meetings in the parks and conducting open air preaching services.

Future

A Fall conference is scheduled for

October 12 - 14. Dr. Richard Ganz from the Ottawa Reformed Church is the guest speaker.

VANCOUVER

Congregation News

Drainage problems at 3052 Fraser St. resulted in the congregation moving. In April worship services took place at Faith Presbyterian for several weeks. In May a move was made to Olivet Baptist Church where the congregation continues to meet.

Revd Jerrold Lewis left at the end of June/early July to take a charge with the Free Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta. Rev. Malcolm MacLeod preached the pulpit vacant on Lord's Day July 16. During the months of August through December various men have taken services; Justin Hoke in August, Revd Ross MacFarlane at the end of August and September, Student David Belanger on alternate weeks through October and November - David's supply schedule is presently being reviewed given his work and study schedule - Rev. Tom Aicken in November and Revd Mark Jones in December.

In November, Deacon William Matheson passed away. At present the congregation is waiting on a response from a call to the Rev. Ross MacFarlane.

THE PSALMS

"...there is no emotion anyone will experience whose image is not reflected in [the Psalms]. Fear, praise, anxiety, anger, love, sorrow, despair, gratitude, grief, doubt, suffering, joy, vengeance, repentance - every human emotion and experience surges to the surface in the prayer-poems of Psalms". *Calvin*

*To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty
The loyal and dutiful address of the
General Assembly of the
Associated Presbyterian Churches
of Scotland & Canada*

May it please your Majesty

We the General Assembly of the Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Canada, met at Inverness this 16th day of May 2007, desire once again to make known our sincere devotion to your Majesty's person and throne. Being subject to the supreme authority of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we gladly and wholeheartedly express our loyalty to your Majesty as Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

We remember, with thanksgiving, the many blessings bestowed on your Majesty's person and our nation over many years. Immediately the words of Psalm 103 verse 2 - 5, spring to mind.

*"Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits
who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases
who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and
compassion who satisfies your desires with good things"*

We continue to derive real pleasure and much encouragement from your Majesty's example in your acknowledgement of God and regular attendance on the Lord's day and on other occasions at public worship. We are persuaded that this is accompanied by your private prayer, reading and meditation on His word. Such meditation will, we are fully

persuaded continue to bring God's blessing to you and enable you more and more to appreciate the words of Psalm 103 verse 8

*"The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love"*

We pray that as you continue to discover the wonder of God's mercy, which is manifested for us in the person and work of his son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that you, your family and multitudes will be able to join together in understanding the words of Psalm 103 verse 11 and 12

*"For as high as the heavens are above the earth
So great is his love for those who fear him,
As far as the east is from the west
So far has he removed our transgressions from us"*

We are bound, however, to assure you that we are deeply concerned with the evidence that confronts us of so many people refusing the rightful claims of the only living and true God of the Bible and the authority of His word. We wish to assure you that we will continue to pray that God will in his mercy turn our land, as well as all the nations of the world, to Himself. As we believe his promises we will, with his people in all ages be able to join hands with the Psalmist in Psalm 103 verses 21 and 22 and say

*"Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will,
Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the Lord, O my soul"*

On behalf of the General Assembly

*Mr Roderick William MacAngus MacKenzie
Moderator
16th May 2007*

Congregational News

LAIRG/ROGART

Our numbers have been somewhat depleted of late due to poor health and other reasons but we are nevertheless encouraged by recent developments. Not only does our joint prayer meeting with the Free Church in Rogart continue to be a source of blessing but recently we have enjoyed a couple of joint prayer meetings with the Free Church in Bonar Bridge which have been excellent.

Our study group in Migdale is going very well. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays in the month and I am using the Westminster Confession of Faith as the basis for teaching. We have worship and fellowship and there is plenty opportunity for questions and discussion which is proving most helpful.

I was afforded the privilege of preaching to the children, teachers, staff, parents and friends alike at the Lairg Primary School Easter Service which I pray might bear fruit. Moreover it was my turn (as APC minister) to minister in the school for the month of April. It is a welcome opportunity to sow the seed of the word to the children in this locality.

We had 26 at the second meeting of the Northern Reformed

Fellowship which I am very keen to see established and growing. Numbers were pretty good given it coincided with the lambing season and I received a number of apologies from brethren who had prior engagements. Our next meeting, DV, will be in Brora on Friday 22 June when Revd Maurice Roberts will address us on the vital subject of Justification in light of recent developments.

The aims and basis of the Fellowship are as follows: 'The Northern Reformed Fellowship was inaugurated in Lairg on 23 February 2007 to foster fellowship between Reformed Evangelicals throughout the North of Scotland, to bear witness to the great Biblical and Reformed principles and to help formulate policy on matters of mutual concern.

Basis 1. The full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures; their authority and sufficiency as not only containing, but in themselves, the Word of God, and the supreme standard for the rule of faith and practice. 2. A cordial acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as embodying the substance of the Christian Faith.

Aims 1. Doctrinal: to explain, expound, uphold, defend and promote the Biblical Reformed Faith

and Heritage. 2. Practical: to stimulate prayer, to strengthen fellowship and to propagate Reformed Truth by means of literature, meetings and conferences.' Please do support the work: the need has never been greater!

It was a privilege to minister at the Kinlochbervie Communion season. The services on Friday, Saturday and Lord's Day were reasonably well attended with a number of visitors present. Sadly bad weather led to the cancellation of the Sabbath evening service. From 2008 we are hoping to move the Kinlochbervie communion season to the third in August when better weather and longer days will hopefully encourage more folks to travel north to join us for worship and fellowship. Here in Lairg/Rogart we are looking forward to the visit of Revd George Macaskill for the Lairg communion. *Wayne Pearce*

DUNDEE

Over the last few months our attendances have improved slightly as far as numbers are concerned. We have seen some new faces - some coming back again.

At Easter time we leafleted the area announcing our Special Service for the community and we had good numbers coming although not many from the immediate area. Our mid-week meeting is better attended also and the spiritual interest and fellowship amongst us has been strengthened.

The congregation has been blessed with another new baby -

Amelia Lee Murray. We congratulate Iain and Susan on their first child and praise the Lord for the safe and healthy arrival of Amelia. At time of writing we hope to have the baptism at the end of May when Susan's parents are over from America.

We hope to have the congregational barbecue in the manse on Friday 29 June, and another leaflet distribution is planned for mid-July. Please continue to bring our congregation before the Lord and ask Him to bless us so that He would be glorified.

STORNOWAY

The congregation has had visits from several Missionary organisations over the last few weeks including: Worldwide Evangelisation for Christ; Slavic Gospel Association; Society for the Distribution of Hebrew Scriptures.

The congregation is blessed with having several members who are able to preach, but they are kept busy supplying other pulpits.

Please remember Thomas Parkes from the congregation who has taken a year out to work with 'Youth for Christ' with 'KICK' (an organisation that uses sporting talents to present the gospel). Thomas is coming up to the heaviest part of the course as he teaches in London schools. Please pray for the Harris congregation as there continues to be a lot of illness in the congregation and numbers are becoming very small.

APC Identity!

Recently people have been asking about our identity as a denomination. We like the APC to represent 'Always Preaching Christ' but we also agreed to publish the suggestions made by Revd John Ross below.

ON 23 JANUARY, at Presbytery, we were having a discussion on how we would like to be identified as a church. The following are points that I thought would be helpful. While members of Presbytery could easily enlarge and improve on these points, they graciously suggested that I should forward them to the Editor for publication.

May we be identified as:

A bible believing Church.

This draws a very important distinction between us and all who do not believe the bible.

A biblically balanced Church. To hold each doctrine and practice, with the same emphasis as Scripture, is what all of us have to aim at. Predestination, free offer of the gospel, the second coming, good works, hell, and God is love (to name but a few), are all doctrines that if they are overplayed can give a completely wrong and crippling understanding of Christianity.

Then the practices of: Sabbath Keeping, extra church services, modesty in dress, good works and so on, can be a blessing, but bondage if there is no biblical balance.

A bible loving Church.

The bible is a living book, sometimes described as a love letter from Christ to His Bride. A church that does not love the bible, is in deep trouble, however much it claims to believe the bible or love God.

A biblical authority Church. What the bible says has to be the final word on that subject. To go further or not go as far as the bible, is never helpful in the long run.

The above four, by God's grace, should lead to these further and most essential identifying characteristics.

A Christ centred Church. Not man centred, not denomination centred, not academia centred, not reform centred, not the latest ecclesiastical trend centred. If our eye isn't fixed on Christ, then spiritual death approaches rapidly.

A God honouring Church. All has to be for God's glory.

A church that is dependant on the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we have a church that is born of the flesh.

A Church that believes "love is the supreme and crowning fruit of the Spirit." A "pure church" without love, has to get back to its first works and first love.

A church that counts the cost, and is fully prepared to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ. *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* [2 Tim 3:12]. *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."* [Acts 14:22].

A Church that abounds in good works. This is fundamental to: being a blessing to others; our witness in the world and glorifying God.

A warm welcoming Church. If we fail here, even the most stalwart will loose heart and the outsiders will take it that they are not wanted.

A caring Church. Shepherding, pastoring, encouraging, comforting, strengthening but not lording it over God's people. Wanting every believer to grow, so that they develop Christian character in their own right, and go on to care for others.

A Church that has, 'A heart for the Lost'. This is one of the main characteristics of the church at its best in all ages and across the denominations. *"I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* [Luke 15:10].

A worst of sinners Church. Sinners at their worst and their lowest can expect: a welcome, help, hope and acceptance.

A Church that is as broad as the weakest believer. That we accept into fellowship the weakest and most stumbling of believers. You don't need a big heart to want the outstanding and exemplary in your fellowship, even the most censorious will welcome them.

A church that is not afraid of change. Where would we be if the reformers were afraid of change? We are romancing if we think there is no need for change, or if we set the heroes of the past on too high a pedestal. They wouldn't thank us, if we use them to cast a shadow between true Christians and their Saviour or between true Christians and God's word. *"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi', for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and He is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ."* [Mat 23:8 -10]. The only occasion on which change should be avoided is, if it's for the worst.

Probably all of us find it much easier not to bother changing things, but that is not the answer. Since men begun to call on God, they have had to strive reverently and at great cost, to try and be in agreement with what God required of them in their day. The aim must always be, to whole heartedly love

and obey God regardless of whether men love us or loathe us. If we can honestly and humbly say that this is what we are seeking to do, then we must trust God to graciously keep us.

An all nationalities

Church. This could be misconstrued as pompous, but is totally in keeping with old testament prophecy and New testament teaching. The church is *"all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours."* [1 Cor 1:2]. Not just Highland or Scottish however much we love these. We have, 'a common inheritance in Christ' with every nationality and region that will follow Him, and we can do no other than, welcome all nationalities and do our utmost to be relevant in serving them. "Take us as you find us" does not sit well with Paul's becoming all things to all men. We do aim to please, not to be obnoxious. "More are won with honey than with vinegar."

A church that, *"salutes every saint in Christ Jesus"*.

[Phil 4:21]. Probably, if we are candid, there are saints and sections of the church that each of us find very difficult to salute with real Christian warmth. Diotrephes, [3 John 9] is an example to be avoided. He, *"loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.....gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church."* Is their any part of

Christ's church that we couldn't see something good in and enjoy some mutual blessing with?

An 'all social classes'

Church. Rich, poor, educated, uneducated, employed or unemployed. *"There is neither bond nor free."*

A "no other gospel"

Church. If we fall by the way here, we no longer serve one of the great purposes of the church's existence.

A church that differs respectfully and lovingly with fellow believers. Sometimes more harm has been done by the way Christians have differed, than by the original 'error'. May we be able to see grace in the *"stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."* [Mark 4:29].

A Church that can work with a broad theological spectrum of fellow believers.

If we only work with a narrow spectrum, we inevitably misjudge and misrepresent those we do not work with and mutual help is non existent. Moreover, if we exclude fellow believers they will end up looking in the wrong direction for help and fellowship. In the final analyses, we must have some responsibility towards every single believer that crosses our path. There surely can't be any part of the 'Church of Christ' of which we can say, that is no concern of mine. Time and place will limit what we do

A disciplined and

disciplining Church. Discipline is meant to correct the offender and save the church from scandal. It

should not be administered in such a way that; the real scandal is what has been said and done in the name of discipline.

May we continue to lament the fragmentation of the Church of Christ and aim to play our small part towards uniting all who love the Lord. Genuine Christianity is by nature confessional. We are called to speak out what we really believe regarding Christ and His teaching. Sadly, some by their confession give little reason for anyone to think that they are Christian, and others thankfully give every reason. Our testimony should help non believers to see that they are not Christians. The smaller the church, the more personalised the identity will be, but we should try to demonstrate how we can have communion with the Church of Christ world wide. It is a

very serious thing, but sometimes necessary, to say that we can't have communion with a group or an individual. That said, we should aim at being inclusive towards all, who in truth, "Love the Lord."

Highlighting what all true believers are agreed on, is very important in the face of: militant atheism, rampant immorality, pleasure mania, constant belittling of Christianity, multi faith culture and last but not least confusion of doctrine and of practice within Christendom. No doubt others will want to emphasise different aspects of our identity but the above points are ones that I think would be very helpful. May God graciously bless our united effort as a Presbytery, and may it eventually have a unifying effect that is greater than any of us presently imagine. •

CELL PHONE v BIBLE

I wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our cell phone?

- What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?
- What if we flipped through it several times a day?
- What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?
- What if we used it to receive messages from the text?
- What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?
- What if we gave it to kids as gifts?
- What if we used it when we travelled?
- What if we used it in case of emergency?

One more thing... unlike our cell phone, we don't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected, because Jesus already paid the bill.

Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

By Wayne Pearce

IN HIS DEFINITIVE work on the Doctrine of Justification, James Buchanan once rightly and uncompromisingly stated that 'the revival of the gospel doctrine of justification was the chief means of effecting the Reformation of religion in Europe in the sixteenth century.'

John Calvin, the great theologian of the Reformation and a contemporary of Martin Luther's refers to the doctrine of Justification in his famous 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' as the 'main hinge on which religion turns.'

Similarly the Puritan, Thomas Watson in his well-known and much blessed work, 'A Body of Doctrine' says that 'Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable.'

He goes on to note that it was a saying of Luther, that after his death the doctrine of justification would be corrupted. 'In these latter

times, the Arminians and Socinians have cast a dead fly into this precious ointment.' Watson was rightly recognising not only the centrality of the doctrine but also the church's indebtedness to Luther, the great trailblazer of the Reformation, who by God's grace was responsible for first heralding those glad tidings of great joy after literally centuries of darkness and despair had eclipsed and obscured this foundational truth.

Justification by faith alone in Christ alone is the priceless jewel that Luther through the illumination of the Holy Spirit came to fully comprehend and apprehend in the Word of God. Consequently, he could dispense with the vast heap of religious ceremonies and rituals, good works and devotions that testified and continue to testify to fallen man's ingenuity in manufacturing rituals, rules and regulations in an altogether fruitless and hopeless quest to merit salvation.

Luther, like the prophet Isaiah, came to understand that "*we are all as an unclean thing, and all*

our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” [Isa.64:6]. He could say along with the apostle Paul, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” [Rom 7:18, 24].

God declares that “*There is none righteous, no, not one*”. He teaches us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and that the wages of sin is death. Luther came to truly grasp that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of sinners, for there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

As he was to astutely remind those privileged hearers of his celebrated ‘Table Talks’, ‘Adam received the promise of the woman’s seed before he had done any work or sacrifice, to the end God’s truth might stand fast - namely, that we are justified before God altogether without works, and obtain forgiveness of sins merely by grace.’ Only the imputed righteousness of the One who knew no sin and was obedient unto death - even that accursed death of the cross, could propitiate God the Father and make atonement for the sins of all those who are called and equipped to place their faith and trust firmly and squarely in Him. The believer, in other words, as the apostle Paul assures us in his Letter to the

Ephesians, is accepted **only** in the Beloved. When God the Father looks down upon His adopted children He sees the reflected glory of Christ in their persons because they are clothed in His perfect righteousness.

Luther came to recognise that a correct understanding and acceptance of the teaching of Scripture on this subject is absolutely vital to the spiritual well being of Christ’s church here in the world. He was to unambiguously state that justification by faith, ‘is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour. For no one who does not hold this article - or, to use Paul’s expression, this ‘sound doctrine’ [Titus 2:1] - is able to teach aright in the church or successfully to resist any adversary - this is the heel of the Seed that opposes the old serpent and crushes its head. That is why Satan, in turn, cannot but persecute it.’

On another occasion he was equally adamant that ‘whoever departs from the article of justification does not know God and is an idolater - for when this article has been taken away, nothing remains but error, hypocrisy, godlessness, and idolatry, although it may seem to be the height of truth, worship of God, holiness, etc.’

Luther was surely correct in his conviction that in order to proclaim the Gospel it is crucial that we fully understand and believe what the Scripture teaches

concerning justification. He warned the church in his day that 'All heretics have continually failed in this one point, that they do not rightly understand or know the article of justification. If we had not this article certain and clear, it were impossible we could criticise the pope's false doctrine of indulgences and other abominable errors, much less be able to overcome greater spiritual errors and vexations. If we only permit Christ to be our Saviour, then we have won, for he is the only girdle which clasps the whole body together, as St. Paul excellently teaches.'

He further humbly notes, in the introduction to his commentary on Galatians, 'Yet I am compelled to forget my shame and be quite shameless in view of the horrible profanation and abomination which have always raged in the Church of God, and still rages to-day, against this, one solid rock which we call the doctrine of justification. I mean the doctrine that we are redeemed from sin, death and the devil, and made partakers of eternal life, not by ourselves (and certainly not by our works, which are less than ourselves), but by the help of another, the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.'

Before we briefly examine Luther's definition of justification, let us consider how he came to discover this priceless truth and note the extent to which the professing church in his day had deviated from it. Roland Bainton begins his popular biography of Luther in the

following dramatic way. He writes: 'On a sultry day in July of the year 1505 a lonely traveller was trudging over a parched road on the outskirts of the Saxon village of Stotternheim. He was a young man, short but sturdy, and wore the dress of a university student. As he approached the village, the sky became overcast. Suddenly there was a shower, then a crashing storm. A bolt of lightening rived the gloom and knocked the man to the ground. Struggling to rise, he cried in terror, 'St Anne help me! I will become a monk.'

The man who thus called upon a saint was later to repudiate the cult of the saints. He who vowed to become a monk was later to renounce monasticism. A loyal son of the [Roman] Catholic Church he was later to shatter the structure of medieval Catholicism. A devoted servant of the pope, he was later to identify the popes with Antichrist. For this young man was Martin Luther.'

Luther's upbringing, education and vocation were typical of many clergy of his day and age. He was born on 10 November 1483 into a relatively poor but nevertheless pious German family. His parents raised him in the nurture and admonition of the Lord but his faith was largely distinguished by a vast array of superstitious beliefs and practices that found acceptance and commendation in the visible church of his day. It was for this very reason that he cried out to St Anne, the so-

called patron saint of miners, which was his father's profession, when he thought his life was threatened and when in fear and ignorance he vowed to become a monk.

Up until that time there is nothing to suggest that Luther had contemplated renouncing life, as we are called to live it in the world, for the unbiblical asceticism and rigorous rounds of religious observances and works that were characteristic - at least in theory, of the monastic vocation. He attended a school at Magdeburg run by the Brethren of the Common Life as a boy and had matriculated at the University of Erfurt in 1501 with a view to studying Law on the recommendation of his father, Hans.

Nevertheless Luther was a conscientious monk, true to his monastic vows and meticulous in keeping the due ceremonial observances of his order, erroneously but sincerely believing that this was the sure path to reconciliation with God and eternal life. Reflecting on his monastic experience he later noted, 'I was a good monk and kept my order so strictly that I could claim that if ever a monk were able to reach heaven by monkish discipline I should have found my way there. All my fellows in the house, who knew me, would bear me out on this. For if it had continued much longer I would, what with vigils, prayers, readings and other such works, have done myself to death.'

Nevertheless in spite of his incessant labours, confessions and

penance's he found no peace with God. He says, 'The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak and afflicted conscience with the traditions of men, the more each day I found it uncertain, weaker, the more troubled.' His notion that man had to earn his salvation through meritorious works was all but universal and was rigorously reinforced inside the confines of the institutional church.

It was particularly emphasised on his entry into the monastic life. Had Luther known the Bible's teaching on justification that salvation is all of grace then he would have understood the futility and barrenness of such beliefs and practices. As the apostle so forcefully reminds us in his Letter to the Galatians: *"a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ"* [Gal.2:16].

While we should appreciate that Luther's involvement in the famous Indulgence controversy helped focus and crystallise his thought on the vital question of how one's sins are forgiven, we must appreciate that it was in the God-breathed Word alone that he grasped the solution to man's greatest and most basic need - which is to be reconciled to God - to be declared just before an infinitely holy and just God.

Luther was without question first and foremost a student and devotee of Scripture. He taught biblical theology at Wittenburg and it was his lectures on the Psalms, 1513-14; Romans in 1515-16;

Galatians, 1516-17 and Hebrews in 1517-18 that truly bore fruit through the germination in his mind of this foundational doctrine that Justification is by faith alone without the works of the Law.

He came to truly grasp this priceless jewel through the illumination of the Spirit who shed His light on God's Word at Romans 1:17. *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"*. Later reflecting on that wonderful awakening when the light of the gospel cast away all doubt, despair, darkness and frustration, he wrote, 'I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the justice of God', because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the 'just shall live by faith'. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone

through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven'.

He went on to add, 'If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his Fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.'

Luther renounced his own righteousness recognising it was but filthy rags in God's sight, and through faith found himself robed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ alone and assured of eternal life in the Beloved.

Luther once pertinently said that 'the Roman Catholics and Anabaptists are to-day agreed on this one point against the Church of God (even if their words disguise it), namely, that the work of God depends on the worthiness of the person.' Sadly there are many today - even professing evangelicals, who share these ill-conceived notions. They wrongly take the view that justification is not by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to guilty

sinner but instead that it is by infusion of grace which enables the believer to earn his own salvation through doing good works. This is not the gospel but instead it is its antithesis. Moreover we must take heed and duly recognise that this false teaching of infusion was the grave error and poison that paved the way for sacerdotalism, sacramentalism and many other forms of idolatry and superstition.

How are you and I to judge in these matters? How can we be sure that Luther and his Reformed contemporaries and successors were/are correct on this vital issue of a sinner's justification? Surely we must go to the bar of Scripture which can be the only true authority in all matters of faith and practice. God says that believers are *"justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we*

conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" [Rom 3:24-28]. Ephesians 2:8-9 similarly assures us: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"*.

Do we believe in the Word of the sovereign God, the omnipotent and omniscient One, the One who is all-wise and perfect in all His ways? Or are we to trust in the manifold inventions and machinations of fallen man? Let us declare, along with the apostle: let God be true and every man a liar!

Augustus Toplady once memorably and accurately stated that 'Christ's sheep do not contribute any part of their wool to their own clothing. They wear, and are justified by, the fine linen of Christ's obedience only.' We too must hold firmly to this doctrine and boldly proclaim it come what may. It alone can give comfort, peace and rest to our souls. Let me conclude by quoting the poignant words of the 18th century English Baptist pastor, J. C. Ryland, who once said that 'Justification by Christ's imputed righteousness is the centre arch of the bridge by which we pass out of time into blissful eternity.' May each of us say amen to that!

Prayer - a Relationship with God

MARTHA COMPLAINED about Mary wasting time at Jesus' feet while work piled up in the kitchen. Mary wasted expensive perfume by pouring it on Jesus' feet. Indeed any time spent on prayer seems wasted to someone who has other priorities that a relationship with God. But for one who loves God, there is nothing more productive and necessary.

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