

Look Up! Look in! Look Out!

A harassed mum shouts up the stairs. *This is the last time I'm calling you. We'll be late for church – Get up!*

A sleepy voice floats from under the duvet; *I don't want to go. I don't like church. No one talks to me and it's boring.*

Mum replies, *I am not discussing this with you, get cracking.*

Give me three good reasons why I should go comes a muffled response.

Ok, said mum, Number one, the service starts in 15 minutes. Number 2, you're 47 years old. Number 3, you're the minister. Now move it!

Why do we come to church?

There must be mornings when you have felt like hiding under the duvet.

Well today I want to give you three good reasons for coming to church.

When I go for a walk in the Campsies I usually set three goals.

Firstly, to look up... and that's not too difficult considering the steepness of the hill. But when I look up and consider the beauty of God's creation, I immediately feel Him closer. So, in climbing I am praising the Lord.

Secondly, when I get to the top, I look in, and I have a good conversation with God about my personal life.

Thirdly, on my descent, I look out... and this an opportunity to bring to God the needs of others and to pray for our world, nation and community.

So, it turns my walk into a spiritual experience by doing three things...look up, look in, look out!

This is something that we all can do, whatever pursuit that we are doing during the day, we can look up, look in and look out.

It is said that when we are in Glasgow we should look up.

Why?

Because there is so much about Glasgow's history and heritage above us, in the buildings and monuments, that are simply astounding, and we will only appreciate this if we take time to slow down and look up!

Why do we come to church on a Sunday?

Well, one of the big reasons must be to slow down and look up!

One minister said that he goes to church on a Sunday to get a bigger perspective of God and a smaller perception of himself. He wrote, "it gives him time for putting the universe back into a proper perspective."

The great missionary, Albert Schweitzer once wrote, "Do not let Sunday be taken from you. If your soul has no Sunday, it becomes an orphan."

Whatever reason, you come on a Sunday, we can all be blessed by an upward look.

In Psalm 8, the psalmist writes, "When I consider the works of your fingers, the moon and stars that you have set in place." He looks up and considers what God has done.

On Tuesday, I had P4/5 in the church from Meadowburn School and rather than giving them a lecture about the church. I asked them to take time while sitting in their pew, to look up and around and tell me what they saw, and what they liked, and for the next 45 minutes, until the teacher had to stop them, they asked question after question about the church, our practices and its faith and even the teacher and her parent helpers came away saying, *that was really interesting, so much I didn't know about what goes on.*

The children took time for an upward look. By looking up, they were even amazed with the inscription on the beams of the rafters of the church.

Looking up, is a good place to begin.

In our reading today, Jesus tells us what he sees when he looks up...

V25, "He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your father is merciful."

God is kind. This is how Jesus described His Heavenly Father...He is kind, and kind to those who don't deserve it.

The psalmist explains it further..

Psalm 103 says

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

⁹ *He will not always accuse,*

nor will he harbour his anger forever;
¹⁰ *he does not treat us as our sins deserve*
or repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ *For as high as the Heavens are above the earth,*
so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹² *as far as the east is from the west,*
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ *As a father has compassion on his children,*
So, the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
¹⁴ *for he knows how we are formed;”*

Here is our upward look today. A God who does not treat us as we deserve; a God who has removed our transgressions from us and as a Father who has compassion on his children.

Take a moment to have that upward look this morning and to marvel about those words, that God the Creator of Heaven and Earth is kind and merciful.

A moment of silence!

Then it is good for us to have an inward look.

Looking inward is not an excuse for ignoring needs around us – far from it. If we listen hard to God, we pick up his deep compassion for a hurt world. Dorothy L Sayers once wrote, “When we come home like the Prodigal Son, God sends us out again as the Good Samaritan.”

The philosopher Francis Shaeffer wrote in one of his many books, “He is there and He is not silent”.

The God we look up to is not a God of the past but a God of the present. He is not a God of tradition, but a God who is very much with us in our lives today and that is why listening to Jesus' teachings is incredibly important for our faith, because his words transcend time.

Our passage begins, “But to you who are listening I say...”v27

This is key to looking in! To discipleship; this is key to being a Christian; are we listening – are we listening to Jesus – because if we are not, then what he has to say will not apply to us – so the key to discipleship, is simple, are we listening, are we looking in and if we are then we will grow as Christians. This is the inward look.

One of our beautiful stained glass windows in this church, has Jesus sitting and teaching his disciples. Please look at this window when you are in the church. It's beautiful.

One wee boy from P4/5, said *is that Jesus speaking to slaves*, and if you look closely, you can understand why he said that. But you know, the little boy was onto something because Jesus is speaking to servants, servants of God, who belong to God, and who want to do what God instructs them to do.

But Jesus' words are not always easy....So, here comes the bombshell...This is what he says to us today!

“Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you!” V27 This is the inward look!

This is the ethical standard for following Jesus; loving your enemies. Fundamental to ethics is love – not a love like the world's, but a unique love that endures; a love that demonstrates itself in concrete action.

In a nutshell, the disciples should do good to those who hate them, they should bless those who curse them, and they should pray for those who abuse them. The disciples are called to reflect such love continually.

Then Jesus illustrates what that might look like.

Firstly...Love involves turning the other cheek. Don't retaliate.

Secondly...love involves vulnerability. Being prepared to sacrifice.

Thirdly...love involves giving to others in need.

It is said that the greatest challenge the Christian life is to turn an enemy into a friend of God through the example of love.

What was it that turned Saul of Tarsus into the Apostle Paul? Of course it was God working in his life, and he did this through the example of Stephen, whom Saul saw being martyred for his faith in Jesus – Saul supported the stoning of Stephen, and he was to be transformed through the power of God in answer to Stephen's prayer that those who were stoning him should be forgiven.

The call of a disciple is to a greater love than that of the world, than that of simply loving someone back for the love that they have given us; a Christian's love is unique.

Then finally, we come to the outward look.

Every Sunday, I finish with the Benediction, the last Good Word, a sending out into the world, to do God's work. We have gathered, we have looked up, we have looked in and now we look out. That is the structure of the service.

What difference will our time together make to the world in this coming week?

We are in the world, as his agents to transform the world, to make a difference, to make this world a better place.

Looking out is vitally important for us. Looking out to how we treat others and how we love them – even those we find it difficult to love.

So, today, and every day, make time take time to look up, to look in, and then to look out. It is something that we all can do and this is what makes our faith come alive!

Remember the story of Zachaeus, he did three things, He looked up to Jesus, so much so that he wanted to find a tree so he could see Jesus. Jesus met with Him and then Zachaeus looked in and saw how much of his life was far from God and so he looked out and gave away all that was preventing him from walking with Jesus.

Look up, Look in and Look out!