

Ascension 24.5.20

Thank you Laura and Hannah, for our first reading today, and the verse that I would like us to focus on is Jesus words, “The greatest love that a person can show is to die for his friends”.

These words are fitting for our first reflection, and the first scene in our window today, because we are looking at a war scene.

It depicts the First World War, and there in the picture you can see signs of battle: a chariot, a tank, and crosses representing the graves of those brave individuals who had died.

This window was dedicated by Rev Woodside Robinson, Minister of this church at this time. During his ministry here, he himself served as a chaplain in the trenches, during the Great War.

He left Cadder Parish Church, for a year, to go to the front line to be with the troops, and so one can imagine his emotions when unveiling this window in 1921 – almost 100 years ago - and as he read out the list of names.

He would have been familiar with people he would have known, for by this time he had been in this parish for ten years. He perhaps even said Farewell to these boys, as they headed from Bishopbriggs to go to war, and the verse that I read may have been on his lips.

The greatest love that a person can show is to die for his friends.

The first scene in the window is of tragedy and sadness, and the names that are on it may well be names that are still familiar in Bishopbriggs today and, as an honour to these young men, I would like to read their names out today.

For I'm sure that the congregation of 1921 would have been delighted to think that, 100 years later, the present congregation of Cadder Church hadn't forgotten their brave men.

So here goes: On the window, it is inscribed, “To the glory of God in grateful memory of the members and adherents of Cadder Parish Church who fought and died in the Great War 1914-1919 whose names are inscribed on this window, their name liveth for evermore.

J. Anderson, T. Brown, J. Baird, R. Calder, D. Conoly, W. Dick, W. Glencross, J. Glencross, D. Gray, J. M. Garlick, T. Kee, J. Kemp, J. Laird, J.B. Murray, D. Muir, W. MacArthur, A. McAllister, R.F McLelland, T. McLaren, R. McMillan, D. McWhinnie, A. McNeil, A.Y. Miller, D.C. Nash, J. Pettigrew, J.Patrick, K.

Patrick, T. Paterson, J. Reid, D.R. Sillars, D. Scott, M.M. Stocks, J. Shorthouse, G. Walker, H. Walker, H.R. Walker, T. White.

Each name represented a grieving family of that generation, and each name represents a brave soul who laid down his life for our freedom.

But this window is only a part of the whole window, for the artist doesn't want us to linger too long here. Of course we remember and we say thank you, but the artist has more to teach us, and so he wants us to lift our eyes to the next part of the window, which is about a story from the bible, and Laura and Ella are now going to read for us.

Thank you Laura and Ella for your reading.

On the left-hand side we have a spectacular depiction of the harrowing story, in the bible of Abraham, who was called the Father of Faith. In it, he is about to sacrifice his only son Isaac. There are some stories in the bible that are hard to understand. This is one of them.

I'm sure that we are familiar with the story: Abraham was promised a child who would be a great blessing, and from this child a nation would come, but now his dream seems to be crushed, for he believes that he hears God telling him to sacrifice the child.

Such practices were common in the religions of Abraham's days, so, as shocking as it is to us, it was part of some religious practices then, and even today child sacrifice happens in some countries.

A horrendous practice, one that has no place in the Christian faith, and was to have no place in the Jewish faith, because as Abraham lifted his knife, a voice came from an angel and told him to stop, and that he was not to kill or hurt his son, and that this proved that he trusted God, and God was first in his life.

God provided a ram caught in the thicket and he was to sacrifice this, instead of his son.

What came out of this challenging story was Abraham's total trust in God.

God intervenes at the 11th hour and stops Abraham and he knows that Abraham is indeed a man of faith, in whom he could trust and build a nation, who would become his faithful people. This was Abraham's test.

So, this window speaks of sacrifice and also trust, and it speaks of God's promise and covenant to us that we can trust him, even in the darkest hour, even when we seem to be going through a difficult time and tempted to do something which is not right.

We must trust in God and do the right.

But notice Abraham's face, it is looking upwards to God, and if you follow his eye trajectory you see that he is looking at the ascended Christ - he is a man of faith, he believes in resurrection – he believes in eternal life – he believes that God gives life and not death.

On the right-hand side window we have what looks like a soldier, sitting on his shield – a soldier who may have been in a battle, a soldier who is perhaps ready to give up, and he looks across at Abraham's sacrifice, and he learns from it that God will come through, and that, even at the eleventh hour, God will make a way for us.

The Christian life can be a tough way, it can be challenging, it is a way of sacrifice and not of ease and so the Christian can find the way tough, but the verse that is on the window is from Revelations and it says “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of Life”. There the angel stands above the soldier, and she holds in her hand the crown, the reward that is awaiting him.

So, we started at the bottom window in war, darkness, suffering and death, and sacrifice, and then we moved to the next level, the challenges of life, the difficult decisions we have to make, choices, and it speaks of faithfulness and trust and belief that all things will work to the good for those who love God.

But there is another window which makes up the big picture, and this is where ultimately the artist wants to take us. As I said, he doesn't want to keep us in grief and in darkness as in the first scene; of course grief is the natural reaction when we lose someone we love, and grief is common to us all, but in the bigger picture of the window there are stages, and these stages take us beyond grief to look out and up, and this takes us to our final scenes today.

Wendy and Cameron are now going to share with us, the story of the final scene.

Thank you Wendy and Cameron.

This window is the scene of the ascension – Jesus departing from the disciples and going to heaven. Today is called Ascension Sunday, so a fitting window for us to reflect on.

Notice the hands of Christ. They have the nail prints on them. This is the resurrected Jesus who showed the disciples his nail prints. He is now ready to return to His Father. His work has been accomplished. He has triumphed over sin and death and he has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all who will follow Him.

The window on the left-hand side is of the resurrection, and both windows are connected, for they speak of Easter and Ascension – they speak of Christ victorious. There would be no Ascension without the risen Christ and the empty tomb.

But what I would like us to focus on for a few moments is the reaction of the disciples, or, as they became known, the Apostles, to Jesus ascending to heaven.

We are told that the angels said to them, “Why are you looking into the sky, he will come back in the same way that you saw him going?”

This is what we look forward to us as Christians, the return of our Lord, but in the meantime he has given us his Spirit to continue the work on earth. Next Sunday is Pentecost, and we will consider why God gave us the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

But today let us pause, and remember that Jesus had to go: his time had come, his work had been done and now he was passing on the baton, the flame, to his disciples and this torch would be passed on from generation to generation.

It is interesting to stand back and study the whole window.

For, to be truly appreciated, this is not a window that is disconnected but it is supremely connected, for it tells a great story. It speaks on different levels.

It speaks about the soldiers who from this church went into battle and died...it speaks of their sacrifice, their faith, and their eternal destination beyond the grave.

But it tells so many other stories: stories of challenge and sacrifice, stories of perseverance and fortitude, stories of victory and ultimately eternal life. Stories that we all face as human beings.

When this church re-opens, I invite you to come and get lost in these magnificent stories and please don't just admire the windows for their historic and artistic value, but treasure the deep stories and significance for our lives, that speak and resonate into our situations and contexts.

Finally, when the sun shines directly onto the ascended Christ, his garment lights up and it is filled with glorious light.

Our Saviour and Friend Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of Almighty God. He is there, we are told in the bible, that he takes our prayers and he presents them to his Father.

He speaks on our behalf. He stands in God's presence for us. In Heaven, he is there preparing a place for us and ready to welcome us to himself.

Why did he have to leave?

That's why, and one day we will meet him again, and through faith in him, he will be there to meet us, and to guide us, and to lead us into our eternal homes.

Until then we continue his work on earth.

Amen and thanks be to God.