

Faith, Hope and Charity – 1 Corinthians 13

Today, let us look at this beautiful stained-glass window for it has much to teach us.

It was installed by the congregation and friends of the Rev John B. Watt who served here in this parish from 1882 – 1911. 29 years of ministry in this parish.

The designer of the window was Alfred Webster, who had it installed in 1914 - a significant year, for it marked the beginning of the Great War. Tragically, Albert was to lose his life in Flanders, a year later – what a great loss.

The world, at that time was in a state of crisis, the world was at war... and this window points to a theme that the world needed at that time. Faith, Hope and Charity, three things that the Apostle Paul said would last forever.

106 years on and the world is in another crisis; this time the enemy is not human, but it is a virus which has claimed millions of lives round the world.

The theme on the window is as important today, as it was then.

So, let's look closer at the window, and see what it has to say to us today.

The first part of the window, is of a woman holding a light. The light is fixed into a crown. The crown perhaps represents the light that Christ gave to the world, but light is a theme that is found right through the bible. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light". The psalmist wrote in psalm 119 v105 – "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" and so this lady is totally focused on the light and it's burning brightly.

This gives us an insight into faith.

You see faith is not something that we muster up from within but faith is a gift from God. Our faith is in what God can do for us. The way that we discover that faith is to be focused upon the light of the world, and to live out that life with integrity and grace. This is discipleship.

We encounter the light through the Scriptures, and when we meditate on the scriptures a light shines into our hearts.

What other features do we see in this window?

Well, I think it's noticeable, that the lower down we go in the window, the darker it gets. The path looks dark ahead and that was the world that Webster was living in, but the reality is that the world is always dark and we need light to find our way through it.

Notice her beautiful garment.

It is green, the colour of life.

Embroidered on the garment, are crosses and at the centre, there is the crucified Jesus and it seems to be in a chalice. Then there are clusters of grapes and the garment points to the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus. She is literally clothed in Christ.

This is the central point of our Christian faith – this is where heaven and earth meet.

This lady symbolizes a woman of Christian faith and she holds the lamp and we know someone else, who was a lady of faith who held a lamp.

Yes, Florence Nightingale, and on Tuesday we celebrated the 200th birthday anniversary. Florence who, through the crisis of the Crimea war, was to transform the nursing profession.

At the top of the window, we have oak leaves and acorns. That perhaps suggests the seed of faith – a seed that Jesus spoke about when he said, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can move mountains,” a seed which produced the biggest plant.

So, this window points out to us the importance of faith in Christ.

Our second window, in some ways is my favourite of the three.

Webster has a young man in chains. He is handcuffed. He is a prisoner. He is held against his will. But he is looking up.

Hope looks up.

He sees beyond his present situation.

How many great Christians have been prisoners, and yet in their prison cells they were able to look up and beyond, to a God who had not deserted them, a God who was ever-present.

The Apostle Paul said, “I may be chained but the word of God is not”. Daniel was a prisoner, and he was thrown into a den of lions, and he kept believing and hoping and God rescued him.

Hope is powerful.

There in the picture you see at top an anchor, and that immediately conjures up for me the great hymn, “We have an anchor, that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love”.

1914, when this window was installed, the members of Cadder Church, lived in hope as their young men went to war and many sacrificed their

lives and people needed something to hold on to, and that was Hope, and the greatest hope that we have is that all things work together for the good, to those who love God.

God is our Hope, and without that life loses a lot of meaning. If we are only here for a short spell of time on earth and when the wind blows and we are gone.

Is that the end?

Far from it.

The hope that we have is eternal, and that hope is grounded in Christ, who triumphed over death, over hell, and who has forgiven us, and who has made it possible for us to be reconciled with God.

The third window, the largest of the three, which is at the top of the other two so it takes its stately position, and rightly so, as the largest and most important.

For Paul said that three things last forever: Faith, Hope and Charity and the greatest of the three is Charity.

Now, over the years, we've translated that word charity to mean love, and I think, in translation, we have lost the edge of its original meaning.

Charity is a beautiful word...It comes from the Greek word Charis which means Grace. Charity is the word we use today for those great organisations that reach out with charity, grace...and that is getting much closer to what the Apostle Paul originally meant; for to love, and truly love, is to reach out and beyond to help others. Charity is sacrificial, and it's done with the other person in mind, and that's what this window points to.

Yes, it's the birth of a child, but not any child, a precious child – it is the Son of God - it is the incarnation, God entering our world, taking the form of a human being, emptying himself of all but love.

Notice that Jesus is clinging to his mother Mary. He is dependent on her for everything. God made himself vulnerable, weak, fragile, small, and took all the limitations of what it is to be a human being.

So, this is the greatest example of charity; He came to this world to demonstrate the power of love. For only the love of God can ultimately bring healing and forgiveness.

Left to ourselves, we would be like animals, tearing each other apart, but when charity – Jesus – enters our world, then the world changes, and charity – grace, entered our world, in the birth of Jesus.

In the midst of the coronavirus – who are our heroes? Who are our superstars? It's our medical profession, it's our front-line workers, it's everyone who has put themselves out there for others.

Jesus said, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. What did he mean? Well, for too long we have judged the value of others by their fame, power and money, but Christian values are totally different.

Our readings today are from some of our members who are nurses, who have been working right through the pandemic, bringing hope and comfort to other people in need.

They have been showing charity – grace and mercy, at its best, and we are so rightly proud of each one of them....Janet, Jill, Kirsty, Laura, Tracy, and there are others in the church, who have gone the extra mile to serve others. On behalf of Cadder congregation thank you to you all....

Looking again to this final section of the window, if you look closely you will see birds singing, flowers blooming, and when the sun shines directly on the window, the angel's wings turn to gold. There is a sense of new life bursting into the world.

Notice also the humility of the shepherds bowing at the feet of Christ, and what I like about this window is that the shepherds are not old men, but young shepherd boys, who have heard the voice of the angels saying..."Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

And this is probably a good place for me to end the sermon.

It is a window of faith, hope and charity...a window that asks us the question...where is our faith placed? Who gives us hope? What is God's love really like?

Only you can answer that question... You see, this window is not just to be admired for its beauty and design...it is to be allowed to speak into our souls and ask the ultimate questions.

And now these three remain, Faith, Hope and Charity and the greatest of these is Charity.

Amen and thanks be to God.