

Thursday Worship—General Assembly 2023

Call to Worship

My days, these days have flown and here we are. The General Assembly of 2023 will soon be dissolved. Deliverances moved, decisions made, amended, countered, debated, done. Finished off with a full stop at the end. And even now, new work has begun. One day is over, but another is on the horizon – it may be the end of a chapter, but the story is still being written. So, maybe we should settle for a comma. Let us worship God.

Song

360 CH4 'Jesus Christ is waiting'

Prayer

Brand new, blank sheet, clean slate, twinkle-in-the-eye idea not yet formed. A new day will always dawn and it will be informed and impacted by our yesterdays and today's. As you gaze over the vista that stretches before you, remember the steps that brought you here. As the light plays on the horizon of new insight, revisit the paths that have led you, the voices who have called you, the hands you've held. Carry them on, not as a burden to bear but as guardians to guide you. God of stretching eternity and this very second, as your Church of Scotland General Assembly 2023 closes, keep our hearts and minds, spirits and imaginations wide open ... stoke the fires of our determination, purpose, passion and hope ... as we walk into your new day dawning, help us to remember who we are and what is required – that we do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with you and our sisters and brothers. Amen.

Reading

John 21:24 – 25

Reflection

I wonder what other things he did. I wonder, as they sat in the sun with the waves gently rocking the boat, or as they walked the roads or sat together around the table, or gathered close around the fire, I wonder what stories he told that we don't know? Were there lots of Good Samaritans, searching women, prodigal sons? What other lessons might he have taught them – pearls of wisdom they alone were privy to? The last words from the gospel of John begin our supposing's/encourage our imaginations, tell us that he did so many other

things that if they were all written down, the world itself would not be able to contain the books they would fill. And these things are lost forever to us, blown away in the mist. I wonder what they were? I mean you've got to wonder – what happened to all those people after their stories ended? Did the rich young ruler ever come back and finish the conversation? Did the sick ones he healed and the sorry ones he forgave go on to make a difference? Did the couple at the wedding in Cana live happily ever after and what in the world did they do with all that wine? How many other sick people were healed, guilty folk forgiven, self-righteous folk got their comeuppance? Hmm ...

We are left with extraordinary snatches of wisdom and insight – Blessed are the peacemakers, love one another – this way everyone will know that you are my disciples. Father, forgive them, my peace I leave with you. Go, therefore, and make disciples of every nation. Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age ... then, he's gone. It makes me wonder, it leaves me guessing, it stirs my spirit and it continues to write my story.

Musical Break 'Come with me, for the journey is long'

Do you think they could fathom the other things he would do? I wonder, as they sat in the sun with the waves gently rocking the boat, or they walked the roads or sat around the table or gathered close by the fire, I wonder if they knew there would be other stories they would never hear? Other people throughout time, learning lesson, discovering truths, letting the spirit move them on? The last words from the gospel of John begin our supposing's/encourage our imaginations, call us to hear and understand that the stories and life of Jesus do not end in this book, only begin here. It tells us that he did so many other things that if they were all written down, the world itself would not be able to contain the books they would fill. And these things are not lost forever to us, blown away in the mist, but are still happening in the hearts and lives of those forever changed because of the life and love and lessons he poured into the world. And rich young rulers will come on their various guises to continue the conversation, sick ones will be healed, and sorry ones forgiven; there will be good Samaritans and searching women and prodigal sons returning. The stories will write themselves anew on our hearts and in our world and nothing will be able to contain them!

I'm sure he talked about things that aren't mentioned in any of our stories about him. I wonder if he ever said the thing that would have ended the argument, erased all our doubts?

But then, what more is there to say, really? Blessed are the peacemakers, love one another – this way, everyone will know that you are my disciples. Forgive your enemies, my peace I leave with you. Remember, I am with you always – even to the end of the age.

Friends, we stand on the shoulders of giants and tread on the dreams of angels, as yet unborn. Yes, the church is going through turbulent, difficult times – the church has always gone through turbulent, difficult times. But we will work and walk and pray and praise together because the world God loves is going through turbulent, difficult times and needs all the love we can muster! Body of Christ, remember who you are and why you have been called and go out and live his story today.

Hymn

Here and now we're bound together (to HYFRYDOL / 8787D trochaic)

Here and now we're bound together: held in one divine embrace.
Help us see, in one another, difference as a gift of grace.
As each passing generation worships you in fresh new ways,
join our songs with all creation, lift our voice to sing your praise.

Lord, affirm our shared vocation: may we bring your plans to birth,
build your church on sure foundations, fit to serve a troubled earth.
Growing, praying, sharing, learning, deep in wisdom, broad in scope,
love-revealing, truth-discerning, living out the gospel hope.

In your work of transformation you are making all things new.
Stir our hearts' imagination, call us now to work with you.
Send us out to share your mission; show us each our part to play
as we live the Great Commission joyful in the world today

Benediction