

Friday 26th May Session VII (pm)

Hymn: Psalm 54 (CH4 52) How lovely is Thy dwelling place
Harington

Prayer and constitution

Reading: Mark 12:28-34

The Very Revd Dr John Chalmers, Principal Clerk

***Call for the Report anent Deceased Ministers,
Missionaries and Deacons***

Prayer – The Very Rev Dr Russell Barr

Hymn: Paraphrase 48 (CH4 425) The Saviour died, but rose
again *St Andrew (Tans'ur)*

*Draft Minutes of Sederunts not yet submitted to be read if
required*

Appointment of Committee to revise Minutes

Act Appointing Commission of Assembly

Act Appointing the next General Assembly

Presentations to the Moderator

Xxx

Principal Clerk retirement

Moderator Addresses the General Assembly

Reflection: Word of Life – Love

Mark 12:28-34

Many of you will have seen the film 'Love, Actually.'

(FIRST SLIDE)

It has many different themes running throughout. The film is about relationships, lots of relationships. Some are happy and fulfilling, some don't really get off the ground, some are tentative but suddenly blossom, some are hurtful and dishonest. Some relationships cope with bereavement. One manages to break language barriers. As in life, so with this film: not all of the relationships end happily.

At the opening of the film, and it is reprised at the end, we are taken to an airport, and we hear someone saying:

Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrival gate at Heathrow. Love is everywhere, it's not always dignified, it's not always newsworthy, but it's there. When those two planes hit the Twin Towers in New York, when people reached for

their mobile phones, the messages were not of hate, or revenge. They were all about love, actually.”

As we hear these words we see scenes from the airport arrival gate. A mother greeting a daughter, a father greeting a son; friends embrace; lovers kiss; children laugh for love; adults cry for love. When you come to look at it, there is more of love around than you would imagine or give credit.

As we approach the end of this General Assembly, has there been much love. If love is a word of life, has there been much love at this Assembly?

Examples from the week – possibly extra text

(SECOND SLIDE)

The American theologian Paul Raushenbush has said: “We have a love crisis in our country. People are literally dying for lack of love.” Jesus tells us love God with all that we have and are, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Dare we be that kind of Christian: dare we love? Love is an act of defiance. Love is the foundation of our church. It is the past, present and

future of our church. Love is not the sole property of Christianity; it has its place in all the major world religions, and to those of no faith. But Christianity is predicated on love. To paraphrase Paul, if we do not have love, we are nothing. In our sometimes unkind, unloving world, love is almost becoming counter-cultural. It is not merely a theology, it is a practice. “Orthodoxy is not enough, it must be accompanied by the practice of justice to one’s neighbour.”ⁱ

(THIRD SLIDE)

Love is what we are because of what we do and because of the One we are commanded to follow. If we have love, if we live love, then we are Kingdom people. “Knowledge of God’s love brings us close to the Kingdom, but to enter the kingdom requires something more. Loving God entails loving others and upholding justice and dignity for all...We know the Kingdom’s cost, but are often fearful of paying the price.”ⁱⁱ If we want to live up to our calling to be children of God then we must display the family likeness, the family trait – and that is love. If

we are to follow Jesus we must put God's love into practice and in ways that will challenge the world around us. To love God and God's goodness now sounds strange to the modern ear. To love God's creation, and all God's children within it, including the unlovely and the unloveable, challenges the perceived status quo of self-interest and magnified individualism that society too often endorses. To live Jesus' Kingdom love has to happen within our churches and far beyond their walls. With God's healing love, we are called to mend the world, and in the mending of the world we will find that we mend the broken places in our own lives. This is what it means to love God and to love our neighbour. It is why love is the supreme word of life. Society is judged by the way it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members. It is our task to be a blessing to the world. Our faith is called to create and sustain communities. Communities based on love. That sardonic writer Jonathan Swift wrote: "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one

another.”ⁱⁱⁱ When we give up the burdens of suspicion, envy and hate and live love out loud in our world, God’s Kingdom comes near. “It is a world where all are fed and housed, with access to clean water, health care, adequate education, and meaningful work; where none is excluded for reasons of race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation; and where young and old are cherished, as God’s family endeavours to sustain the precious resources of this fragile earth.”^{iv}

Whether we find ourselves in life as a president or a princess or a principal clerk or a preacher; whether we find ourselves in life as a shop worker or a class room assistant or a farmer or a solicitor; whether we find ourselves as a musician or a homemaker or a computer programmer or a banker, the word of life for each one of us is love. God’s love taking deep root in our very souls and changing us, and changing God’s world.

The imperative of our faith is a love that reaches out to God and to neighbour. Whether we call them parishes or hubs or communities or Presbyteries or gatherings, the dynamic of

faith is a love that stretches out to embrace. God's love is set to shatter the loneliness engulfing our society, that most depressing of diseases of the Western World. As the saying goes, 'A person wrapped up in themselves makes a very small bundle.' A Church wrapped up in itself makes a very small bundle.

It is time to unwrap the bundle, and remove the layers of doubt and fear, prejudice and ignorance, and leave, vulnerable yet invincible, the gift that is the word of life, love, and let it do its unstoppable and irresistible work in our lives and in our world. The Oasis Church in Waterloo concludes its invitation to friends and strangers with these words: "This is not a private club – it is a community open to all people of goodwill. And, though we are not yet strong and vulnerable enough to show the unconditional love of God at all times, we hope we are moving in the right direction."^v

At the close of this General Assembly, it is my hope and prayer that we will move in the right direction too. With love; in love; for love; by love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Hymn 436 Christ triumphant, ever-reigning *Guiting Power*

Address Her Grace

Her Grace addresses the General Assembly

*** NATIONAL ANTHEM**

God Save the Queen

* Dissolution of the General Assembly

Hymn: Psalm 122 (CH4 82) Pray that Jerusalem may have
St Paul (Aberdeen)

Benediction

ⁱ Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, p318

ⁱⁱ Carol L Wade, Feasting on the Gospels, Mark, p376

ⁱⁱⁱ Jonathan Swift, Thoughts on Various Subjects

^{iv} Wade, p378

^v Steve Chalke, Being Human, p241