

## Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair

Saturday 3 October 2020, Afternoon

Matthew 16:13-28

### Reflection

When we opened on Friday evening, the sharp-witted among you might just remember that I referred to a blog I'd read and that I said the author suggested four "attitudes" that were common among those organisations that were set to thrive. The really sharp-witted among you would have noticed that I only dealt with three of them!

So here's the fourth, and of course it relates specifically to churches: those churches that are not only surviving but are best placed to thrive are those which believe "God's not finished with us yet."

I was struck by the phrase because it's exactly the one I used myself when talking to *Life & Work* back at the time of my being announced as Moderator Designate.

"God's not finished with us yet." What might it mean?

It means, for starters, that we needn't read the half-time score as if it was the end of the matter. I stood in this very hall on the morning of the 26th May 2005 - the morning after Liverpool had staged one of the most incredible comebacks of all time to win the Champions League over AC Milan - and suggested that, 'where there's life, there's hope.'

Six weeks ago, the Austrian tennis star, Dominic Thiem, was two sets to love down in the final of the US Open, staring down the barrel of another grand slam defeat, when from somewhere deep inside he pulled himself up, won the third set, and went on to claim victory in an absolute epic of a match.

At the same tournament, the 20-year-old Russian woman, Varvara Gracheva, fought back from 6-1 and 5-1 down to snatch victory in one of the most incredible tennis turnarounds ever witnessed!

You see: sometimes, it's not over.

Now for us, that's not because we might have some masterplan up our sleeves, or some new programme churned out by the latest snappily-dressed mega-church preacher.

It's not over because God hasn't given up on us yet - because God's not done with us yet. "I will build my Church," and not even the gates of hell - or the covid pandemic, or the headlong rush to church-free, western secularism, or the lack of cash, or the shortage of ministers, or our ageing congregations - not even these shall prevail against it.

So "Our hope is in the Lord, maker of heaven and earth."

"Behold, I am the Lord; is anything too hard for me?" God asks.

I don't think God's finished with us yet, and the eyes of faith will detect that, here and there - quietly, as seeds peeping up through the soil - there are causes for hope.

Of course there are! We may have lost the first set and be 5-1 down in the second but we're not beat because God still longs for Scotland and wherever our congregations are, and in God's inestimable wisdom - and despite us rather than because of us - we're still part of the plan.

"Faith, HOPE and love - these three shall remain."

Continuing my sporting theme, this Sunday sees the 40th running of the London marathon. Four-time winner and world record holder, Eliud Kipchoge, the incredible Kenyan... he said on Wednesday that by running the race, 'We can bring hope to the world again.'

People: if the running of the London marathon can bring hope to the world, how much more so should the Church have hope - and be able to offer hope in these dark days when many despair?

Is it not enough for us that the Saviour died but rose again, triumphant from the grave? Right there, are there not sufficient grounds for hoping?

Yes, we're going to have to do more with less. No, we're not nearly there yet in terms of restructuring. Yes, there's pruning still to be done and, yes, we still lack clarity of vision concerning our next steps.

But God's not finished with us yet.

In his victory speech, tennis star, Dominic Thiem, held the trophy aloft and announced, 'I dedicated my whole life to winning this.'

You know, if God has given everything for us and is not yet finished with us - might it be that we'd be ready to dedicate OUR whole lives to God? To going into all the world? To be, and speak, good news?

"For every day I have on earth  
Is given by the King.  
So I will give my life, my all,  
To love and follow Him."

There's got to be something in that.