

Scripture: Isaiah 5: 1-7 / Luke 12: 49-56

Text: *Jesus said, Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is that you don't know how to interpret this present time?* (Luke 12: 56)

IN THE NAME OF GOD, FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN

One of the joys of being Moderator is the opportunity to share in worship with congregations the length and breadth of Scotland and beyond.

As you know with its great vision of a church and school in every parish, the reformation in Scotland was always very local in its outlook.

It remains so to this day and since my appointment in May it has been a delight to discover that the health and vitality of the church does not lie in its Moderator or its General Assembly – or even dare I say its Bishops and its General Synod, the various courts, committees and councils of our respective denominations - but in the worshipping life and activity of congregations as they keep alight the flame of the gospel and bear witness and service to Christ in their local communities.

And so it is a privilege for Margaret and me to join you this morning, to thank you for the kind invitation to preach, and as Moderator to bring you the greetings, prayers and good wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

With a joint working group meeting later this autumn, joint training opportunities and with plans being made to share in the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the reformation in Scotland, the relationship between our respective denominations has never been stronger.

What is evident at a national level finds many echoes at a local level, not least with Fresh Start, the charity I founded in 1999 to help people who have been homeless make a home for themselves.

Christ's command to seek the kingdom of God by being a good neighbour and not walking past on the other side of human need is one all Christian people share and, from its inception, Fresh Start has been an ecumenical initiative.

Michael Green is the current representative director from the Scottish Episcopal Church on Fresh Start's board and I am glad the work continues to be supported by congregations from all the Christian denominations across Edinburgh.

However, given this is your Edinburgh Festival service, and keeping the theme of homelessness in mind, let me ask if the name of Iain Campbell is familiar to you?

Iain Campbell is an artist and, as well as being the guest artist at our General Assembly in May where he created a painting of people attending the Assembly, he is Artist-in-Residence at St George's Tron Church of Scotland in the centre of Glasgow.



As part of a social enterprise project between St George's Tron and Glasgow City Mission, Iain was commissioned to paint a contemporary version of the Last Supper.

The Last Supper, the meal Jesus shared with his disciples shortly before his arrest, has been an inspiration to many artists, notably Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century masterpiece, and as he planned his interpretation of this most fateful of evenings in our Lord's life, Iain wondered if his Last Supper might feature well-known faces from Scottish public life.

Instead, and given Jesus' concern for some of the most vulnerable people of his day, Iain decided to use the faces of some of the most vulnerable people of our day, men who attend Glasgow City Mission and who have personal experience of poverty, alcoholism and homelessness.

And so Iain's painting features the face of Arthur Curtis who lives in housing association accommodation in Govan and attends the Mission twice a week, and John Wallace who has been involved with the Mission over many years, real men with real names and real and sometimes difficult stories to tell.



The result is dramatic and as you look down the length of the table with the men - the disciples - seated on either side you sense a raw energy in the faces looking back at you.

There is nothing soft focus, slushy and sentimental about this depiction of the Lord's Supper.

Rather in the tired eyes and haggard faces staring back, you sense some brutally painful human stories behind the faces you see.

If there is a raw intensity to Campbell's painting, it is surely a raw intensity which captures something important about the occasion it depicts, the last evening Jesus spent with his disciples, the ones in whom he had invested so much of his time, effort and love, the same ones who were about to betray, deny and abandon him .

However else it has been depicted, there is nothing soft focus, slushy and sentimental about the Biblical description of the Last Supper and Iain's Campbell's painting captures its mood perfectly.

And there is nothing soft focus, slushy and sentimental about the Jesus of the gospels

*Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth
and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?*

As we read about him in this section of the gospel, the picture Luke paints is not of Jesus meek and mild, kind to children and sweet to old people.

Instead we are confronted with a passionate Christ, passionate in his repudiation of the false teaching of the Pharisees, passionate in his desire to see justice and truth prevail in public life, passionate in his shaping of the disciples and passionate in his commitment to the kingdom of God.

A crisis was approaching, one in which his own fate would be the central feature, and to his dismay neither the disciples nor anyone else could see it.

As farmers and fishermen these were men who were good at judging the weather conditions.

They knew clouds rolling in from the Mediterranean meant rain and a south wind from the dusty Negev desert meant it would be hot.

They knew when it was safe to fish and when it wasn't.

So why couldn't they read the signs of the times with its Roman occupation, the oppressive regime of Herod, the wealthy, arrogant high priests and the false agendas of so many of the Pharisees?

Why couldn't they discern that in his acts of healing, feeding a great crowd, raising Lazarus to life and stilling a storm the kingdom of God was near?

Why couldn't they see Jesus for who he really was, the son of Mary but also the Son of God?

And why can't we see him either?

Of course there was a profoundly pastoral aspect to Jesus' ministry, something so evident in his extraordinary capacity to hear the cry of the blind beggar Bartimaeus above the clamour of the crowd, to feel someone tug his cloak and realise it was someone needing his help, his willingness to stop what he was doing to help a centurion whose servant was very ill.

There was also a deeply spiritual aspect to Jesus' personality, something equally evident in the quiet and lonely places he sought to meditate and pray.

And over the years so much of the church's ministry has been pastoral and spiritual – and rightly so.

This morning's gospel confronts us with something else, something much less comforting and comfortable, the prophetic aspect of Jesus' ministry and his passion for justice.

We live in one of the richest countries in the world.

We live in one of the richest cities in the world.

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL

14 AUGUST 2016

And last year in one of the world's richest countries and in one of the world's wealthiest cities, Fresh Start handed out over 13,000 starter packs to some 2000 families in Edinburgh who were homeless.

Meanwhile in the year to March 2016 another Christian charity, the Trussell Trust, handed out over 133,000 food parcels to people in Scotland, many of whom were people in work but such was the poverty of their income they could not afford to feed themselves and their families.

Last winter Glasgow City Mission and Bethany Christian Trust recorded record numbers of people attending their night shelters.

And you only need to use your eyes as you walk around the streets of Edinburgh to know that after years of things getting better, things are starting to get worse again.

On this Festival Sunday whether it is music or literature, sculpture, dance or paint, one of the enduring powers of art is not just to help us see the world but to help us see it differently.

By using the faces of the men attending Glasgow City Mission, Iain Campbell's powerful depiction of the Last Supper draws us from the pastoral and spiritual to see the prophetic Christ, the angry and passionate Christ who despises hypocrisy and who, then or now, calls disciples to use their eyes, to use their ears, to discern the signs of the times – and not to walk past on the other side.

Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen

