

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8: 1-10 / Matthew 4: 1-11

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

It is a great honour for the visitors from the Church of Scotland to come to Kiambu Town Church this morning and to join you in worship.

Whether in Scotland or in Kenya we worship the one God, we put our hope and trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and we live each day in the love and grace of the Holy Spirit.

To God be all glory and praise.

Let me introduce ourselves.

Valerie McNiven is an elder and Session Clerk at Greenbank Church in Edinburgh and she is also the Convener of the Africa and Caribbean Committee of the Church of Scotland's World Mission Council.

Jennie Chinembiri is the Secretary of the Africa and Caribbean Committee of the World Mission Council.

Cameron Brooks is also a member of staff and works for the Church of Scotland's Communication Department.

The last person in the Church of Scotland team is Margaret Barr, a scientist and a retired school teacher and a member of Cramond Kirk in Edinburgh.

Margaret is also my wife, Mrs Moderator.

My name is Russell Barr, the Rt. Rev Dr Russell Barr, and as Moderator it is my privilege to bring you the greetings, prayers and warm good wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The Church of Scotland has deep roots in Africa and our visit to Kenya is a sign of how much we value our long standing partnership with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

It is a partnership which dates from 1891.

As I understand it a group of Scottish merchants working in East Africa raised funds to establish a mission and the first Scottish mission was at Kibwezi, some 260 miles inland from Mombasa.

The group of seven was led by the Reverend Thomas Watson from Dundee and they were successful in their tasks of establishing agricultural, irrigation and other projects.

Sadly poor health led to several deaths, Thomas Watson suffered smallpox, and he was the sole survivor at the mission station.

In 1897 it was decided to abandon Kibwezi and re-establish the mission at Kikuyu.

Thomas Watson was joined by Minnie Cumming and they were married in December 1899 at the Church Missionary Society Station at Freretown near Mombasa.

Minnie Cumming was also from Dundee, the daughter of a ship's captain, and she was to become the first woman Church of Scotland missionary.

When the Watsons arrived in Kikuyu they were greeted by devastation.

A plague of locusts had destroyed the crops and people were dying from starvation.

Minnie Watson set to work, tended the sick, cooked and fed as many people as possible.

Unfortunately, within a year of her marriage, Minnie's husband Thomas died.

Minnie continued at Kikuyu and worked among the Kikuyu people where she established a system of Christian schools.

Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first President, began his education at the Kikuyu Mission in one of her classes and he described his experiences at a speech delivered at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of the Mission.

When Minnie Watson retired she returned to Scotland but, following her death, her ashes were brought back to Kikuyu to be buried beside her husband.

The inscription on their grave reads as follows:

*IN REMEMBRANCE OF THOMAS AND MINNIE WATSON*

*THEY BROUGHT THE LIGHT OF GOD TO THE KIKUYU PEOPLE*

*THOMAS WATSON DIED 4<sup>TH</sup> DEC 1900*

*MINNIE WATSON DIED 12<sup>TH</sup> DEC 1949*

*BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD*

By 1909 there were eleven missionaries based at Kikuyu and the following year a second mission was opened at Tumutumu while a third followed at Chogoria in 1921 including a hospital.

Today many Church of Scotland congregations enjoy twinning partnerships with congregations in the PCEA allowing Scots and Kenyans to enjoy sharing faith and friendship.

The Church of Scotland continues to partner the PCEA with their work at Chogoria Hospital as well some of their HIV programme at Kiberia and elsewhere.

And in April 2015 I had the privilege of attending the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

The Assembly was held in St Andrew's Church, Nairobi, a congregation with strong Scottish connections where one of its former ministers, the Reverend David Steel, would later become Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

As well as bringing the greetings of our General Assembly and World Mission Council to your General Assembly, the purpose of my visit in April 2015 was to meet the newly appointed PCEA leadership team, the Moderator, the Reverend Julius Mwamba, and the Secretary General, the Reverend Peter Kaniah.

At that time Kenya was still reeling from the dreadful events which occurred during Holy Week at Garissa University in the north of the county where Al Shabaab gunmen killed 148 Christian students and injured many more.

Several of the ministers I met had known students who had been injured or killed, and I recall there was a widespread sense of shock at the atrocity as the country mourned the loss of its young life.

In a letter to the nation the retiring PCEA Moderator, the Right Reverend David Gathanju, described the event as one of the darkest moments in Kenya's history and said the atrocity had pierced the nation's heart causing immense pain.

*As a church we are praying and mourning with the families affected and with the whole nation during these trying moments when there are more questions than answers.<sup>1</sup>*

It was clear that everyone's faith, love and compassion was being tested and so it was good when your Moderator spoke about it being important for the Christian church to do what was right, to seek justice but not to look for revenge, and to place the need for reconciliation over the desire for retaliation.

Your Moderator also encouraged all Kenyans of whatever faith never to let religion become a source of division and conflict.

When I returned to Scotland I told people of the wonderful witness being shown by the people of Kenya, especially the Moderator and leadership of the PCEA.

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<sup>1</sup> PCEA statement about University of Garissa massacre

With faith being tested by such a terrible atrocity, the PCEA gave heart and voice to Jesus' command to walk the second mile, turn the other cheek and love those who would seek to persecute you.

Faith being tested.....whether in Kenya, in Scotland, or in many other parts of the world, our faith is still being put to the test.

Our faith is tested by some of the injustices we witness worldwide between people who are far too rich and people who are far too poor.

Our faith is tested by acts of conflict and violence which leave a trail of death, destruction and misery in their wake.

Our faith is tested by illness and accident and also in some of the circumstances of home and family life, the life experiences of people we live beside and the people we work beside.

And what better Sunday to speak about faith being tested than today, the first Sunday in the season of Lent, when we read and hear about Jesus being tempted and put to the test in the wilderness.

Matthew tells us that following his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for forty days and nights he was tempted and tested by the devil.

***'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'***

As the story unfolds it becomes clear these 40 wilderness days and nights will reveal what lay in Jesus' heart.

How would he use the powers with which he had been blessed?

How would he respond to his special calling as the Son of God?

Would he remain faithful to God calling him to serve rather than be served, forgive not seven but seventy times seven, love God with heart and mind and strength and soul and his neighbour as himself?

Matthew takes us on a journey, a spiritual journey of discovery and identity.

*If you are the Son of God turn this stone into bread.....* famished at the end of his fasting, the issue is not whether Jesus has the power to turn stone into bread but whether he will use his God given power to satisfy his own needs.

The scene moves to Jerusalem's Temple, the centre of Israel's political, economic and religious power, the visible symbol of God's presence among God's people, the meeting place of heaven and earth.

*If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from the highest point.....again the issue is not whether God would send angels to catch Jesus but whether the strength of Jesus' vocation is such that he feels the need to put God to the test.*

And the journey culminates on a mountain with a panoramic view over the kingdoms of the world.

*If you are the Son of God.....once again with all the kingdoms of the world set before him, his to control and order as he pleases, Jesus' vocation is put to the test, his faithfulness to God's will and ways and not his own.*

Here is the heart of the matter for as each testing has opened new and broader horizons across the landscape of Israel's hopes and aspirations, power is on offer, the power to dominate, manipulate, exploit and control.

However rather than the power to dominate and control, Jesus' ministry of preaching and teaching, his death on Calvary's cross and his rising to new life on Easter dawn, brings to birth the power of God's healing, renewing and life-giving love.

Some 2000 years have passed since Jesus' time in the wilderness of the Judean desert but the temptations are as strong today as they were then.

Whoever we are, and wherever we have come from, whether we are Kenyan or Scottish, members of the PCEA or of the Church of Scotland, we all exercise and experience power in a whole variety of ways.

We all have it within our power to help someone or to hurt someone.

We all have it within our power to be a good neighbour or to be a bad neighbour.

We all have it within our power to speak kindly and be truthful or to speak unkindly and tell lies.

We all have it within our power to be generous and hospitable or to be mean and unkind.

We all have it within our power to turn an opportunity to our own advantage or to use it to help someone else.

Coming to Nairobi and the General Assembly of April 2015, the Moderator and the people of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa showed me what the healing, reconciling loving power of God looks like when faith is being sorely tested.

Faced with a horrific incident, the killing and wounding of hundreds of young Christian students, the church stood up for justice and not revenge, spoke up for reconciliation and not retaliation, and showed what it means to walk the second mile.

And in the face of considerable adversity, Thomas and Minnie Watson also set an example of Christian love, compassion and loyalty to encourage and inspire.

In this season of Lent as we remember Jesus tempted and tested in the desert, I pray that when our faith is tested we will all use our power and influence to do what is right and to justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

*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*