

Aig deireadh Di-dòmhaich na Pailme, fàilte ribh a chàirdean!

Celebrating Palm Sunday at my home church of Dunvegan in the parish of Bracadale, Duirinish & Snizort on the Isle of Skye was encouraging. Why? Because the last time I worshipped here the building was half empty, whereas today it was full. And there was the happy sound of children playing, where before there were none. Indeed, it was announced that Boys Brigade would be starting up again and something for the girls too. Hope was in the air.

Now I know that between Palm Sunday and Easter comes Good Friday. The crowd that welcomed Jesus into the city with cheers changed its tune to jeers, once everyone realised that Jesus wasn't about to submit to their expectations, which they had confused with God's greater purposes. We too succumb to anger when people fail to live up to our expectations. Eventually those closest to Jesus would understand that God has a bigger agenda than making one nation great again. His purpose is to redeem the whole of creation!

In the afternoon there was an inter-church gathering in the community hall. This too was a novelty. Instead of competing for the diminishing constituency of church-goers, we were all rallying around to support each other in our quest to make new disciples and to marvel at the power of God to transform lives. A local farmer spoke compellingly, yet with great humility, about what it means to be a Christian, weaving his personal story into the message.

Holy Week invites us all to reassess our lives and what following Jesus means to us. Everyone's story is unique but we are all called to weave our journey into those of myriad others on the same path. How we do that will shape Clèir Eilean I: Highlands & Hebrides. Like Holy Week our new presbytery will have its ups and downs and also like Holy Week it is a means to an end: resurrection...

Fellow presbyters, despite evidence to the contrary, we are not in the decline management business. We are about hope and faith and progress and growth. And grace and reconciliation. Gone is church life as we knew it. Instead we are confronted with a window of opportunity. There will be mourning and regret and we should face these squarely, grateful for those cherished practices and places that we are leaving behind. And then we must get on with the business of harnessing fresh resources of people and expertise and technology, applying them to the gifts we've brought with us – of scripture and prayer – in order discern how to be faithful and fruitful here and now and tomorrow.

How shall we reverse decades of decline? How shall we maintain intimacy across such a vast area? Where are all these extra resources we were promised? What can be done to recover the lost generations? Can we be salt and light in communities which no longer notice or care? I don't know. But God does. Let us seek him together and get in step with how he is already answering our deepest questions, fulfilling our profounder desires, making all things new...

From your clerk and fellow pilgrim, Rory

“Thigibh thugamsa, sibhse uile a tha ri saothair agus fo throm-eallaich, agus bheir mise fois dhuibh...”
Mata 11.28