

KEEPING CONNECTED AGAIN! 7

28th February 2021 2nd Sunday of Lent



THE BRAZEN ALTAR
POINTS US TO THE
WONDER AND POWER OF
THE BLOOD OF CHRIST
AND HOW THROUGH HIS
GREAT SACRIFICE HE
COVERS OUR SIN AND
CLEANSES US

READINGS:

HEBREWS

CH9 V11-28

BLOOD OF CHRIST

EXODUS CH38 V1-7

BRAZEN ALTAR



PRAYERS

'Father, thank you for the Brazen Altar, that place of sacrifice, that place of the shedding of blood, that place that points to the cross of Jesus Christ, where he paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. Help us to come again to the cross, for repentance happens there. Help us to remember the sacrifice made for our redemption and the blessing that has brought to our lives. Thank you for all that you provide for us, bless us we ask, encourage us to live in thankfulness each day for your glory, Amen'.

◆ Take a moment to pray for all those affected by coronavirus in whatever way, the NHS and frontline workers, the world and church near and far- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah ch53 v15

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

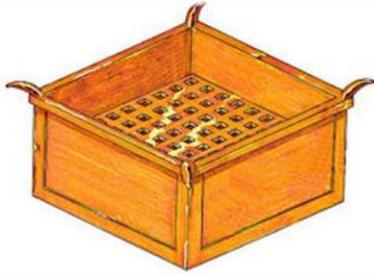
What will you give up?

Ask the children to list the five most important things they own, maybe their PlayStation, bike or favourite teddy, whatever is on their list encourage them to really think- **imagine your room was going to be emptied other than these five things!**- get them to explain why they like the things on their list as much as they do.

Now ask them a different question, **which one do they value the most?** After they have chosen, ask them to explain why it is the most important to them.

Now ask another question, **would they be willing to give it up, to give it away, to sacrifice it?**

The things we have are very special and important to us, we love and enjoy them, but we must remember how precious Jesus is to our Father God, Jesus is his only begotten Son, his most precious thing, worth more than millions and millions of the things we have and treasure. Yet God gave up his Son, who in turn gave up his life on the cross because of his love for us- how awesome is that love! God asks us to trust that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross would pay for sins and would allow us to live in God's love, now and forever- so put Jesus at the top of your list, the great thing is you'll never have to give him away, he will be yours and you will be his forever and ever! **Pray:** *'Father, we thank you that your love is very wonderful, thank you that you sent Jesus and that he was willing to die for us, help us to trust and follow Jesus with all of our hearts. Amen'*



DEVOTIONAL

The Altar Ablaze

The Brazen Altar, bronze altar, or altar of burnt offering was situated inside the courtyard of the Tabernacle. The word ‘altar’ has two central meanings ‘to slay’ or ‘slaughter’ and to do so ‘in a high place.’ The Brazen Altar was raised up unto a mound of earth, so that it was higher than its surrounding furniture, this is worth noting, as within that symbolism there

is a clear projection of the work of Christ, the sacrifice that was ‘lifted high’ unto his altar, the cross. While all the Tabernacle furniture points, in one way or another, to Jesus, the Brazen Altar does so in such a vivid and compelling way. It was made of wood and overlaid with bronze, a biblical symbol of judgement of sin, measuring 7.5 feet on all four sides and 4.5 feet deep. Four horns projected from the top four corners and a bronze grating was inside to hold the contents. The altar was the place for burning animal sacrifices. It showed the Israelites that the first step for sinful humanity to approach a holy God was to be cleansed by innocent blood. For a sin offering, a person had to bring an animal — a male one without blemish or defect from the flock or herd — to the priest at the Tabernacle gate. As Leviticus 1 describes: **“He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.”**

By laying his hand upon the head of the offering, the person was identifying with the sacrifice, their sin and guilt was being moved to the animal. The priest would then slaughter the animal, sprinkle its blood, burn the sacrifice, and pour the rest of it at the bottom of the altar. Blood is a dominant symbol and instrument of atonement in the Old Testament, in other words, the covering of sin and the cleansing of the sinner, look to Leviticus 17: **“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”** This is commented upon by the author to the Hebrews, in ch9, when he writes: **“The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”**

Pointing to Jesus, the imagery of the altar has great newness and meaning for us, for while the blood of the sacrifices covered over the sins of the Israelites, they still had to perform the sacrifices year after year, for they were not freed permanently from their guilt. However, Jesus, the Lamb of God, came as the ultimate and final sacrifice when he offered up his life. As Isaiah prophesied, he would be like a lamb that is led to slaughter and pierced for our transgressions. His blood was sprinkled and poured out at the cross for us. As Jesus says himself in Mark ch14: **“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”** And 1 Peter 1 echoes: **“For you know that ... you were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** as does Hebrews ch9: **“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”** Or as Paul simply puts it in 2 Corinthians ch5: **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

Horns were another important symbol in the Old Testament, this time meaning- power and strength. When a sacrifice was made, blood was dabbed on the horns of the altar, signifying the power of the blood to atone for sins. In the same way, there is mighty power in the blood of Christ as Jesus is the **“horn of our salvation”** as Luke declares, quoting from Psalm 18. Jesus is that ultimate sacrifice, that Passover Lamb, who died for us, and whose precious blood is strong and powerful, that when we trust in him who shed it, our sin is covered, we are cleansed, and we have the right to stand before our holy God who delights in us, as if we were his Son.

**Would you be free from your burden of sin?
There’s power in the blood, power in the blood;
Would you o’er evil a victory win?
There’s wonderful power in the blood.**

**There is power, power, wonder-working power,
In the blood of the Lamb;
There is power, power, wonder-working power,
In the precious blood of the Lamb.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

KEEPING CONNECTED AGAIN!

An update, like this one, will be emailed out each Friday and delivered to folk who don't have internet connection or an easy way of accessing it. Please feel free to share around!

'PREACHING TO THE CHOIR'

Each Thursday evening at 6:30pm, while we are closed for services, we will upload a recording of a little midweek- '*Preaching to the Choir*'. This will include a few musical items, prayer, reading and devotion. This is not a replacement of our Sunday service, yet is accessed the same way via the website or YouTube, but an additional opportunity to share in for the next while.

OPEN CHURCH

The church building is open for private prayer on Fridays 10am-12noon. There is also the facility to drop off offering envelopes.

PRAYER LINK

While Morning Watch cannot meet at the moment the Prayer Link will still be circulated, if you have any prayer requests please pass them along and if you would like a copy of the Prayer Link emailed or delivered please ask

ZOOM BIBLE STUDY

The Zoom Bible study meets on Monday evenings at 7pm, this season we are exploring the Gospel of Luke together, everyone is very welcome!

BIBLE CLASS

Bible Class will continue on Zoom on Sunday mornings at 11:30am, all p7s and up are welcome- if there is anyone who hasn't joined in yet it would be great to have you, please get in touch.

CHURCH FLOWERS

We would thank those members of the congregation who provide church flowers each Sunday. Unfortunately, since Sunday 10th January and until church services can resume church flowers are not required. We are aware that some of the flowers are in memory of a loved one or to mark an occasion and this is regretted but hopefully these dates can be honoured next year. As soon as we have a confirmed date when services can again be held a member of our Flower Arranging team will be in touch.

Church flowers on Sunday 28th February would have been:

(Pedestal) Mr & Mrs A McCluskey, Downshire Park North - 'In Memory'

(Sanctuary) Miss L Maxwell, Rathmore Park, Seahill and Miss S Maxwell, Muskett Park, Carryduff.

FINANCE UPDATE

Please find, attached to this update, the Treasurer 's report for 2020. Many thanks to Gordon Dunlop for putting it together. Next week's update will include a report from the Building Fund.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

PCI has released the following statement to be shared with members:

'The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) encourages all of its members to actively consider receiving vaccination against Covid-19 when it is offered to them. While recognising that this is ultimately a matter of personal judgement, PCI neither discourages its members from taking up the vaccine offer nor is it supportive of those who seek to discourage the take-up of the vaccine.'

RECOMMENCEMENT OF IN PERSON SERVICES OF WORSHIP

PCI have announced the provisional date for the recommencement of in person services of worship as Good Friday 2nd April. This will hopefully be confirmed on 18th March. More information will follow in the coming weeks.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

The annual World Day of Prayer is this year lead by the women of Vanuatu and is happening virtually on Friday 5th March. Details on the World Day of Prayer website. Copies of the programme are available in the Welcome Centre. If anyone would like a booklet dropped through their door, please contact Barbara Dunlop on 028 90 453829.

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch:

Rev. Edward McKenzie

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Treasurer's Report 2020

General Fund

The General Fund finished the year with a surplus of £4,640 (as compared to a surplus of £1,097 in 2019). Total income in 2020 was £112,580 and total expenditure was £107,940. Given that 2020 has been such a difficult year for all our members, this is a very welcome outcome. However, it is important to explain and stress the very significant influence that this year of pandemic has had on our financial position. In particular, and perhaps surprisingly, a number of factors, which will not be prevalent in future years, have had a major positive effect.

In the year under report, we saw a further reduction in Weekly Freewill Offering (WFO). Total WFO decreased from £91,804 in 2019 to £89,633 in 2020, or 2.4%. In total, from a peak figure of £100,727 in 2017, we have experienced year on year reductions in this key source of income amounting to 11%. The most recent annual decrease should not be attributed to the pandemic but rather viewed in the context of this downward trend which itself reflects a reduction in membership in recent years.

The reason for the improved "bottom line" is a large reduction in General Fund spend in 2020. Although there was no significant change in our main cost item - the stipend and General Assembly assessment paid to PCI - there were large reductions in expenditure in other key cost areas. Our other payroll-

related costs fell by £1,953, and, additionally, on the income side, the HMRC Job Retention Scheme contributed £2,801. Regarding "Other Expenses" (see Appendix 1 of the Annual Accounts) there was a very large decrease in General Fund spending, from £26,901 in 2019 to £18,677 in 2020 (31%). However, it is important to point out that £4,477 of this £8,224 difference is accounted for by the transfer of property related costs in 2020 (insurance and rates) from the General Fund to the Building Fund. "Lockdown" also ensured that our annual spend on gas and electricity reduced very considerably (by £2,517).

The key point to note from the above analysis is that, whilst very considerable cost reductions were made in 2020, "normality" will eventually return, and with it a much increased expenditure budget!

Gift Aid and Charitable Giving

The proceeds from Gift Aid continue to provide a vital source of income and, in the year under report, the General Fund benefited by £16,602. I would like to thank those members who have already signed a Gift Aid Declaration form and encourage those who have not to consider doing so.

Collections for missions and charities, supplemented by Gift Aid, enabled us to support a substantial number of charitable causes. Donations from our Mission & Charities Fund totalled £25,321, details of which are recorded separately in Appendix 3 of the Annual Accounts. Included in this total is our contribution of £11,900 to PCI's United Appeal (meeting the set "target of honour"). In addition, our Malawi Fund raised £9,976 for this most needy cause.

Covid-related restrictions drastically curtailed our charitable fund-raising activities in 2020. Consequently, Kirk Session decided that the proceeds of the 2020 Christmas Offering should go to our Mission & Charities Fund, and not to the Building Fund as would be the case normally. This decision on behalf of our Church, supported generously by the congregation, raised £2,783.

Building Project

Whilst the building project completed in June 2018, we still await Martin & Hamilton's final bill. In 2020, no further project expenditure was incurred and the agreed final contract valuation figure remains unchanged. An estimated £39,149 + Vat is still to be paid to the main contractor and our design team. Project expenditure to date is £1,715,181. During the year, excellent progress was made in reducing our loan balance to £129,565 (see Building Fund Report).

Presbyterian Mutual Society

A letter from the Joint Supervisors of the Scheme of Arrangement, dated 27 January 2021, has confirmed that we will receive no further repayment from the Scheme. Our total losses amount to £96,068 or 20% of total funds invested. Whilst this development is very regrettable, it was not unexpected, and we should take some comfort from the fact that we still retain substantial cash reserves.

Financial Administration

The Covid 19 pandemic affected our financial operations in a number of ways. We were unable to use our count teams after lockdown was declared in March. Heather Sharpe carried out the task of counting collections and making bank lodgements during the first lockdown, and from July onwards this responsibility fell to Karen and Jim McCurry. Our grateful thanks are due to all three for taking on these additional responsibilities and discharging them so efficiently.

During the year under report, it has again been my privilege to work with Heather Sharpe (Gift Aid and Charitable Giving) and Elaine and Richard Molyneaux (Building Fund) - three key members of the finance team at Cregagh who do a magnificent job each and every year. I am also grateful to Leslie and Carol Ferguson (United Appeal) and to Leslie Ferguson, Karen McCurry and Robert McNair for ensuring the church records are maintained and updated. Dawn Johnston audited the accounts of the organisations, a responsibility she has carried out over many years - there is absolutely no better person for that job and we are much in Dawn's debt.

Sadly, 29 December 2020 saw the passing of Bobby Irvine, a former WFO Secretary and member of Finance Committee and a true Cregagh stalwart! Bobby was held in great affection by the congregation, not only for his dedicated service to Cregagh over many areas of Church work, but also for his humble and unassuming manner which was an example we all should follow.

Summary

We are all only too aware of what a difficult year 2020 has been for so many. From a pure financial perspective, CPC has emerged from it well but we must be mindful of the significant financial challenges that lie ahead, notably when we return to normal operation and the significantly increased expenditure budget that is an inevitable consequence. As I complete this report, a further period of church closure has been declared. Even when the church is closed, we still incur fixed costs which represent a very large part of our expenditure budget. Consequently, I would ask all members to keep their contributions to church funds up to date (not forgetting United Appeal) and I would commend to all members the use of Standing Orders as a simple and straightforward way of doing so.

In conclusion, I am pleased to affirm, for the year ended 31 December 2020, that Cregagh's finances are in good standing. Thank you for all the support you have given in 2020, which I trust you will continue to give as we strive to meet the considerable financial challenges ahead of us in 2021.

Gordon Dunlop

Church Treasurer