

Should I put my watch back ?

A committed church-goer persuaded his somewhat sceptical friend to go to church with him. As they arrived at the church door, his friend stopped to look at his watch and said, 'Before I go in, I believe I have to turn my watch back – about one hundred years'.

Is this really the image folk have of the Kirk – that it's out of date and about a hundred years behind the times?

How much has changed in your church – let's say in the last fifty years?

Because of the average age of church folk in Argyll, many will actually be able to consider this.

Has the sanctuary changed? Have the hymns changed? Has the format changed? Have you changed?

Hymns? Well, that's a bone of contention, is it not?

It seems only very recently that some churches have actually got CH4.

But still we have folk who will just not sing some of the new hymns – yet, you know, 'Love Divine' was once a new hymn!....about 200 years ago!

Is your weekly service still what is known as, the 'five hymn sandwich'?

Do you still sit in the same pew?

If the answer to these questions is 'yes', then should the stranger at the door, at least just put his watch back fifty years?

I ask again - how much has changed in the last fifty years?

I'll tell you what has changed in the last fifty years – the number of folk sitting in the pews Sunday by Sunday.

I'll tell you what else has changed – there are no children, or guy few, in most of our churches.

I'll tell you what else – there are fewer and fewer ministers to minister to us.

The numbers entering the ministry are decreasing year by year. Why is this?

The average age of ministers in 2015, was as follows:

76.5% of ministers are aged *over 50*

18.7% of ministers are aged *between 40-50.*

4.8% of ministers are aged *under 40.*

I don't think we have one in the whole of our Presbytery.

Where are the young ministers?

Maybe they don't want to come into an organisation that hasn't changed since before they were born.

Maybe there is too much holding on to the past, to the way things '*have aye been done*' that there is no scope for change and renewal.

Maybe, I don't know.

But I do know that some certainly feel this way. Some ministers feel that their vision and ideas to attract people into the church are being stifled.

Some feel that they are just called to keep the status-quo and not rock the old familiar boat.....to be caretakers for the way things have '*aye ways been*'.....because new ways.....'*ach, that'll no work here*'....they are told. '*We're just fine as we are.*'

Well, are we?

Much has been written, debated, argued, and anguished over about what to do.

This is one of the main conclusions which a major listening exercise has confirmed, '*The Kirk must widen its reach, deepen its commitment and become more flexible in its approach if it is to meet the needs of 21st Century Scotland.*'

But what are the needs of 21st century Scotland?

Many people tell us that they have no time for organised religion, but that they are spiritual people.

The people of Scotland certainly do have spiritual needs. The question is – how does the Church meet these needs?

In the sadness that has haunted our friends in Tarbert since the loss of the Nancy Glen, people have turned to the church for answers.

And whether they are church-goers or not, the Church is here for them unconditionally.

The message of the Gospel is still that life saving message that is relevant to every age and time.

Let me pose a question – can you recall a time when you had a meaningful experience of God – a real feeling of God's presence?

Now let me ask you this: was that experience in church during a service?.....

Or was it out there on the hills on a day when all of creation sang her song of peace, or was it when the sun set over the Western Isles to just remind you that there is something far bigger than you are, or was it when you held your first grandchild?

If it was in church, can you remember why?

What uplifts you in worship?

What disappoints you in worship?

What is worship for you?

What is your expectation for your faith journey?

And it is a journey - and has been so since God first whispered to Abraham so long ago - and the first thing he told Abraham to do was to move on.

God is a god of movement, from generation to generation.

God moves with the times, and his church must too.

God urges us to seek new ways to touch the hearts of all.

Within the next couple of months, 15 of our 30 charges will be without a minister, and that will probably involve at least 45 congregations.

We are at crisis point, as we are nationally too.

People say, usually to Presbytery...'What are you going to do about it?'

Well for years we have wondered just what on earth we can do about it.

Ministries Council at 121 initiated discussions with every Presbytery.

From these discussions, Road Shows were organised throughout Scotland to give folk their say and ask for ideas, suggestions, opportunities.

From all this came the idea of Hub Ministry. Now I know many are not thrilled to the name, but there we have it.

This idea began to develop and evolve until we have the structure we have right here in Argyll.

On Saturday we welcomed Catriona as Hub Minister for South Argyll and tonight we welcome Alison as Hub Ministries Co-ordinator for North and East Argyll. And we welcome Roderick who will integrate Parish ministry with Hub ministry

Hub Ministry is an experiment to see if it addresses some of the difficulties of so many vacant charges.

I am delighted that David Mitchell is here as David has been the one with the vision and the drive to pursue this, and get Argyll in the driving seat.

In this Hub, Alison will ensure that the administration and business of the churches runs smoothly and will liaise with Roderick to ensure that worship continues, the courts are organised and the sacraments observed.

Roderick will continue to be Parish Minister for his own folk in Glenaray, Cumlodden and Lochgair and extend ministry to the people of Glenorchy and Innishael, Strathfillan, Kilchrenan and Dalavich and Muckairn, till their minister is inducted.

You are still able to search for your own minister while you are in the Hub, and if or when that minister is called, then these churches simply drop out of the Hub.

So here we stand on the threshold of something new, something innovative, something different, and I think, something exciting.

I refer again to all these books about the future of the Kirk and it reminds me of a story – a true story of my wee pal Campbell.

Campbell was five at the time, and was a boy for the questions. He asked questions about everything and kept me on my toes.

We had some wonderful discussions.

He wanted to know who made God and how old the stars were.

He asked how fish in my fish tank needed bubbles to make air in the tank when fish could live in the ocean without a filter.

He asked me how old the world was and what kept the stars in place.

Often when I was trying to answer his questions, he would say to me, 'Marilyn stop talking, you're giving me a headache!'

I wonder if we give God a headache as he listens to all our deliberations about his church.

I wonder if the answer is just at the end of a prayer, but we're just not ready to accept it yet.

I wonder if we think that moving forward was OK for Moses and Abraham and the disciples and Paul, and Calvin and Knox – but feel that – well, we've arrived, have we not?

We're here – we are the Kirk.....and we've been here since 1560, and it's done us fine since then – has it not?

Well, of course it has and precious our Kirk is to us.

Aye, but it's getting kind of lonely in some of the churches.

Our Lord moves us on – the Spirit is like a scurgy wind that blows in every corner of our lives calling us on to where she leads.

In Arduine Gardens there is a line of tall, strong trees which have given shelter and pleasure to many for hundreds of years.
They are now beginning to show signs of their age and may not last much longer.
People asked the gardeners, 'What are you going to do about it?'
So the gardeners have planted a row of new trees right beside them – fledgeling trees which will grow in the shelter of these mature ones, and when the old trees die away the young trees will take their place.
I like to think of this as an image of the Church.

We are not just the church of the past – and we refuse to be the church left in the past, because we are the church of every age.
We are a pilgrim people. We are not human beings on a spiritual journey – we are spiritual beings on a brief human journey.
God has called his people since the beginning of time and will do so forever and his Church will last forever – for even the gates of Hell will not prevail against her.
But ...that Church will be different and has to be or we will fail her and fail the one who is the King and Head of the Church, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

He said to Peter, 'I'm going Peter, are you coming with me?'.
He calls each one of us by name to go with him.
He has the plan and it might just be a prayer away - and until then we seek vision and faith, adventure and trust, to find our place in it all.
And just as our church today is nothing like that of Andrew and James and John and Peter – neither will this one of today be like the one of God's tomorrow.

What is worship for you?
Hub Ministry is an opportunity to do something different, to do something positive as we wait for God's prompting and promise.
So please give Alison and Roderick your support, give them your encouragement, lend them your ideas, share their dreams, expand their vision, hold them in prayer. Be creative.
What do we say to the man at the door?
Should he put his watch back fifty years and come in and sit down?
Or should we tell him that might not be necessary for we are walking to the tune of a different drum, that takes us into the future where we are led by our God of the past.
Jesus says, 'I'm going, people of Argyll – come with me.'

Amen.

Sermon preached by Ms Marilyn Shedden, Business Committee Convenor and past Moderator of Presbytery, at the Service of Introduction for Mrs Alison Hay as Hub-Style Ministries Coordinator for North and East Argyll, in Inveraray Church, on Tuesday 13th February 2018