

Communion Service : Margarita Williams

Testimony

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Preacher: Margarita Williams

[0 : 00] Margarita, thanks for agreeing to this and I'll hand over to you for a few minutes. That's water for you, if you need it. I've been told by Angus Alec not to take too long.

So you'll have to set your watches and tell me if I'm going on too long. So just to give a little bit of my history, because our family moved away when I was very young to live on the mainland in Oban.

So I don't know everybody in Harris, though I've been back since 2001. But I was born in Quedonish, second youngest of five children.

And we lived in a croft house where boat was the only access. And things got quite difficult to run the croft. Our grandmother lived with us as well, and an aunt and great uncle.

So we were quite a big household. My father had been in the Merchant Navy and had travelled the world. And when my older sister was about to have to leave the island to go to Inverness or Poetry to study, my family decided to move to Oban and my father got a job of the light tail service.

[1 : 30] And that's where we were a free Presbyterian family. And in Oban we joined the free Presbyterian church, a little church in Campbell Street.

And quite a few Harris families were there as well. And it was a lovely fellowship to be in. My parents were adherents, but very interested and always made sure we were in church twice on Sundays and at the prayer meeting and at the monthly Gaelic service as well.

It was a once a month Gaelic service. And that's where I learned to keep the Gaelic psalm tunes going. And we had a service in the morning.

And then we had Sunday school immediately afterwards. And the minister and his wife took Sunday school. And we learned all the Sunday school was about was prayer, praise. And then we learned verses of scripture.

So we memorised in all the Sunday school from an early age. We learned the words of the Psalms and words of scripture as well.

[2 : 46] And these didn't really have any impact on me apart from, they didn't have meaning for me at that time. We also learned the catechism. And I think it was only when I was a bit older, I remember being at a communion like this, a prayer meeting before a communion.

And two young people had gone forward for communion. And I felt for the first time that something, I was lacking something. And I wanted what they had.

But it took quite a while for me to act on that or for me to make any sort of progress.

And at school, we had assemblies and we learned hymns. And I was interested in art always from a young age and was encouraged in my art.

And I went eventually to the Glasgow School of Art. Before that, we used to come to holiday in Harris, of course, a lot.

[3 : 55] So I had a lot of aunties and uncles and cousins and we came up on holiday. But I also spent time in Leid in Westeros, where I had an aunt and uncle and cousins.

And communion times there would be full. Our house in Oban as well would be full. But there particularly, they would have a full house and people would sleep out in the byre.

And they would be singing. And the minibus going to church would be full of people singing. And that all just made an impression on me. And one of the communities when I was there, when I was quite young, I think I must have been under 10, I think.

There was an elderly Presbyterian missionary called Alec. This is interesting or is it? I mustn't go on too long.

Alec MacLennan. And he used to come and stay at my aunt and aunt and uncle's. And I was wearing a red dress to church.

[5 : 03] And it had a white bib. And this missionary stopped and said, he saw two little girls playing. And he stopped and he said, Jesus can make the, your sins are as red as that dress.

But Jesus can make them as clean as the white bodice which was on the dress. So this made some sort of impression on me.

And I really loved that man. And I actually wrote to him when I was, I think, age 10. And I asked him to come to the communion in Oven. When he was about 75, wasn't he?

And I have a letter here from him which was written to see that he was sorry he couldn't come. But maybe next time. But there's a lovely letter. And he was actually the first person to give me a commission to, for my first painting, was a painting of the island of Rona, where he had been born. And I wrote, must have written to him to say that the painting had been finished. And he wrote me back this wonderful letter, which I think one or two people have actually seen.

[6 : 21] Because I've taken it out of, I've picked it. It was very precious. And I'll read it to you if it's time. Thank you, Alex. Hello, me too. And I've missed out a lot that I was going to say.

But anyway, I'll carry on. So this is from Alex Lennon. So he says, My dear Margarita, how kind of you to write informing me that the painting is now finished.

It has not arrived yet. But I am not impatient, as I feel you have given of your best. And that will please me. It seems you have an aptitude for that work.

Some might say, what is the good of it? Will not materially benefit any. So I will say a little more on both sides. For and against.

First, for it. There were many things in Solomon's temple, purely ornamental. Such as flowers, pomegranates, palm trees. Which had a deep spiritual significance to a spiritual mind.

[7 : 29] To one heaven taught. Also, the Lord raised up skilful men, able to do such work. On the other hand, some will say there is no material substantial benefit to be derived from painting, apart from the sentimental.

Pictures have no place in the gospel church. All is to be avoided. Which draws the mind away from worshipping God in spirit and in truth. He talks about the Church of Rome have their places of worship full of idols, images, pictures, etc.

Now that is the two sides of the matter. And my opinion is, you may be spiritually minded even in painting. Anything that leads your mind to God is good.

And all that tends to make you forget him is not good. When you are painting the sky, should lead you to think of God's greatness and glory. His immensity, his power, the work of his fingers.

Where you will one day dwell if you love and serve Christ. Also teach you your own nothingness. Psalm 8. Psalm 8.

[8 : 40] When you are painting the clouds, think of God's chariots, the dust of his feet, the blessing that they contain for the parched ground, giving the promise of rain.

Think also of the pillar of cloud which screened Israel in the wilderness from the blazing sun. Also think of their contrast to the sun behind, which never alters from her course.

Also may we be reminded by the clouds, the transitory changeable nature of all things below. Our frames, feelings and circumstances.

And be led to the one who like the sun behind never changes. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. When you are painting the trees, desire that you may be a tree of God's planting, planted by his grace.

A tree planted by a river. That you be seeking to be a fruitful tree in the garden of God. Otherwise, one will be cut down, a scumbler of the ground.

[10 : 00] Seek to be a palm tree, noted for the straightness, beauty and fruitfulness, etc. When you paint the rivers, think of the value and how they beautify the landscape.

Also necessary for cleanliness and fertility. How they all make for the ocean. May it teach you to seek and be restless till you find rest in God.

For your mind, reason, understanding, will and affections. I refer you to Matthew 11, verse 8.

I think that's... Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you.

I think that's what that ends. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. It ends and my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Also, do think of the river of water of life.

[11 : 06] When you drink out of it, you will never thirst again with the satisfaction it gives. Rivers continued. I also think, as young people love pleasures, there are rivers of it with God.

The river stands for fullness, freeness, perpetuity. You can take a drink out of this river if you are thirsty and desire to drink.

If you don't drink, drink from the river. If you don't drink from the river, you will die with thirst in the other world. In the sense that you will be cut off from God and all happiness.

When you are painting the roads, may you think of the way to heaven through Jesus Christ. I refer you to John 14. There is no bridge across the great gulf between us and God, but this one, Jesus Christ.

If you miss this bridge, you will fall in and you will never reach the bottom. It is pitch dark in it and full of devils and hissing serpents. So, dear Margarita, when you are painting the highway, do think of what it cost our Saviour to provide the road to heaven and to God.

[12 : 24] I can't read that, a bridge across the skull. I would say much more on the subject of painting. But if you are exercised along the lines mentioned above, you may be living to God's glory.

Anything you are engaged in, work or recreation, see to it that it does not spoil your appetite for the spiritual or impair your efficiency in serving God and keeping your latter end in mind.

With my love to you and all your family. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Alec and Clemens. So, that was a letter that I kept all that time and it's been quite precious to me.

I think I didn't take this advice right away. I think I was always seeking, even after I left home and went to art school, I was interested and wanting to know more.

I married when I was in art school, actually. I married a lecturer, one of the lecturers in the art school and he wasn't a Christian. I wasn't really a Christian at that time either.

[13 : 38] So, I remember at one time when I was going through quite a bad time and I was reading the Bible and I was reading, I knew that there were these promises that him that come and done to me, I will in no wise cast out, but I couldn't take hold of that for me personally.

I thought that I couldn't hold on to that. And then when I was reading Isaiah 53, I was reading the word, when I read the words, and there is no deceit in his mouth, it made me think, well, Jesus is not trying to deceive us, what he says is true and we have to believe that that is true.

And I remember the room actually filled with, it was filled with what I can only describe as light and love. And I don't know how long that feeling lasted, but it was an amazing experience that I've never had again.

But I was aware that God loved me. And that he was there, and that he was almighty and powerful. And I think from then on, though times were quite difficult, I did keep going.

And we moved out to near North Lomanside and I joined a church there, which was quite Pentecostal looking back, but had the gospel as well.

[15 : 08] Having been brought up with the gospel and knowing it, I knew that this church was teaching the gospel, but it was also quite Pentecostal. And I remained in that church until I came up to Harris.

But I don't know that I'm living up to. I think we're all, we're all, I suppose, feel that we're failing Christ and that we're not being the best Christians, but we could be.

There's a book that, I had a book at Christmas time from one of my sisters, an older sister who lives in the area where Alec McClellan preached.

And there's a book written about this man, Alec McClellan. And he does actually mention, I did get a mention in his book, but he did, I don't, my name is not attached. There were just two little girls playing.

And the story about the red dress and that's there. But this, he was an amazing character. he said that the two little girls who came, one of whom wore a red dress with a white band in it.

[16 : 18] Alec came up to them and said, your sins are as star as that dress, but Christ can make them as white as that braid. And it goes on now, just to explain a little bit about this man. He was a character with a slight strain of eccentricity.

He would cycle to church wearing his suit, coat and hat, but with his hands in his pockets. And he cycled along he once left the elder's seat at a question meeting to hand a suite to the man who had just finished speaking.

So pleased with me with the man's contribution. He had, he became progressively, as he became progressively deaf, it was not unknown for a person leading in prayer at church to finish and open

their eyes only to find Alec standing beside him in order to hear him.

Every morning, he told me, he would throw open the window and sing Psalm 117. And just over the page, I was reading another little bit about him and how this man of God who had spent all his life as a Christian and evangelist and travelling around and was an amazing man.

He, at the end of a year, he writes, here I am at the end of the year. The question is, what have I gained? To be honest, all I can say that I am dearly sinking into humiliation and self-loathing for the sins and errors of my youth.

[17 : 50] What a slothful servant I am in the master's service. Feeling hardness of heart, the Bible is a sealed book clad with the armour of Diabolus.

Having a dumb and prayerless spirit and oppressed with spiritual poverty, I am thirsting after the sense of assurance. I feel I must be praying in such a condition.

I must keep praying in such a condition. I can, however, say that Christ is rising in my estimation as the years pass.

And I think that's what I've found myself. I think as you go on in the Christian life, things are difficult things and I've had very difficult things in my life, but that God is faithful even in our very trying circumstances and leads us through and gives us beauty for ashes.

I think of that phrase, beauty for ashes, and God has certainly given me that in abundance. And also, I think that Christ does become, you see your own sin more possibly as you go on.

[19 : 09] You're not becoming more and more perfect. You are seeing your own sin, but you are seeing the beauty of Christ more and more.

That's what I found. I think that's my time up perhaps. Thank you, Margarita. Thank you very much, Margarita.

Margarita painted what's behind us. And we can be thankful tonight that we do see Jesus and hear Christ through her testimony.

The thought that just struck me as Margarita was sharing was because of the courage and the life in one man who was determined that he would speak of the reason for the hope that he had.

Margarita is able to share her testimony this evening to speak about the hope that she has. And our prayer should be that through what she said there may be some here who will take hold of the hope of Christ and may be used in passing that hope on through the generations.

[20 : 25] So thank you.