

Avoch Linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland

Newsletter 17

September 2023

Welcome!

As we move to a union of the parishes of Avoch, Fortrose & Rosemarkie and Cromarty, we welcome parishioners from Avoch who join us for worship in Rosemarkie on the first Sunday of each month and now parishioners of Cromarty every Sunday following the closure of their church building. We trust all feel welcomed and at home within our shared worshipping community.

This newsletter belongs to everyone. Please feel free to contribute or to suggest ideas for articles that you would like to read. More details on the back page.

Rosemarkie Wedding

All eyes turn to welcome the bride. But who is getting married? Answer on the back page.



One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of the disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’

He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

Father,

*hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.*

Give us each day our daily bread.

*Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone*

who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.’ Luke 11:1-4

Familiar words as an appropriate introduction

to a theme of prayer as requested by a reader. Throughout this edition you will find a range of articles on prayer starting with this extract from a David Adam poem:

*Take my hands
and work through me.*

*Touch my mouth
and speak through me.*

*Warm my heart
and love through me.*

*Lord as you abide in us,
may we reveal you to others
and see you in others. Amen*



Clèir Eilean Ì- our new presbytery

As we consider the implications of changes in parishes locally, it might be helpful to summarise changes at Presbytery level.

The General Assembly back in May is a good starting point. It was agreed there that the **Presbytery of 'Clèir Eilean Ì: the Church of Scotland in the Highlands and Hebrides'** will come into being on 1st January 2024. The Gaelic name, Clèir Eilean Ì, phonetically Claire Aylan Ee, simply means Presbytery of the Island of Iona.

This new Presbytery will bring together current presbyteries covering Argyll, Lochaber, Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh, Caithness and Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness and Speyside.

The new Presbytery will meet four times a year. It is expected that one of these will be 'in-person', albeit with an online option. The other three will be online.

Meetings of sub-groups and committees are expected to be online or hybrid but it is hoped that there will be other more local groups to allow people to meet with colleagues in the same geographical area. The quality of IT provision will be critical – work is ongoing with IT specialists to ensure that this is professionally handled. It is hoped that a Presbytery website will go live in October.

Interviews for a full time Clerk will be held this month in the hope that the post holder will be in place well before the January 1st changeover. The other key post is that of Presbytery Moderator and work is ongoing to ensure a suitable candidate is identified before the end of the year.

An initial seven embryo committees have been formed: Mission Planning; Ministry Support; Finance; Property; Safeguarding; Superintendence and a Business Committee to oversee the business of Presbytery.

In each committee, a representative from all the existing presbyteries will bring their experience and expertise together to ensure committees bed in quickly. The expectation is that full-time specialists in Mission, Finance and Buildings will be appointed in due course as financial resources become available.

Clèir Eilean Ì undoubtedly covers a large geographical area and mirrors an area impacted by the Columban mission more than fourteen hundred years ago. That should be both a challenge and an inspiration to the church in the 21st century with all the human and technological resources at our disposal.



Prayer and the people of God

Reflecting on the "new heavens and a new earth" Isaiah 65:24 makes the following point: "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." It's a reminder that God seeks to engage and interact with his people: even "before we call," God is responding and answering us. This verse sheds light on the way in which prayer is not just a dialogue or conversation but forms part of our relationship with God - a relationship which God initiates and one in which he plays an active role.

We will consider the topic of prayer (in this edition and the next) from two perspectives: 1) the individual and prayer and 2) corporate prayer. We begin today with the latter as it allows us to think about different kinds of responses or kinds of prayer.

John Witvliet makes the point that "Reformed worship is built on the conviction that congregational worship is essentially a corporate conversation with God." In the same way that congregational singing is the "people's song", congregational prayer is the "people's voice" lifted up towards God. Although the prayers are often led by individuals, the invitation is to all as evidenced by the commonly used phrase - "Let *us* pray!", "Responses" during prayers, the shared praying of "the Lord's prayer" and shared words of closure such as "Amen" - reflect the fact that the entire congregation is participating in the prayers.

In the Church of Scotland, the opening "prayer of approach" traditionally covers two aspects of the congregation's conversation with God: the first is "invocation" where we invite God to be present with us through the living word and the Spirit; then "confession," where we seek forgiveness and renewal at the outset of our time of congregational worship. Giving thanks to God for his goodness in our lives, week by week, is another integral element of prayer – often included in the "approach," thanksgiving continues in word and song throughout the service.

Later in the service, the "prayers of intercession" offer a time when the "conversation" extends as the "people's voice" speaks to God on behalf of the wider world and wider church but also looks inward giving thanks and seeking God's help and encouragement in the ups and downs of life and the Spirit's enabling for the coming week.

The prayer of "blessing" or "benediction" at the end of the service is the moment when the minister commends the whole congregation to God bringing to an end one conversation, but allowing the congregation to renew their relationships and conversations with God, day by day, as they are sent into the world to lead lives of joyful, Spirit-led service.

Warren

Remembering Vi - 'a sweet, gentle lady of real graciousness'

Violet Williamson MacKenzie lived all her life on the Black Isle. She was born at Littleburn, attended Munloch Primary School and went on to Fortrose Academy, sometimes travelling by bus, bicycle or even train. She was an only child but part of a large extended family with close links to her grandmother. She helped on the croft which seems to have led to a lifelong dislike of goat products!

She enjoyed sport, including tennis, badminton and hockey. She was an able student too but, as was not uncommon in those days, she was told to leave school shortly before sitting her Higher examinations when a job became available at the local Royal Bank in Munloch.



She met Ross Beattie, and they married in 1953 setting up home at Mrs Young's at Bogallan. After Warren's arrival they moved to North Kessock and Derek came along.

Being a child through the war years, she had quite a hard life and further hardship was to follow when she was suddenly widowed with two teenage boys. She quietly persevered and worked hard to ensure that they had all they needed. Both went on to University in Edinburgh, doing summer jobs to help. She was proud of her boys but in a quiet, non-boastful way.

Although she had had to forego a university education herself, she did pursue her banking exams and worked her way up. She was based in the Inverness branch of the TSB and, in her 50's, travelled around the Highlands as a relief bank manager. Vi was good at her job and appreciated by customers. She spotted at least one significant fraud. The latter years at the bank were not quite so happy as the new vision of banking became a reality with target setting and a push to sell products which customers did not necessarily need, something to which she objected. She is warmly remembered by her banking colleagues.

She continued to be active in her retirement as she and three other women formed the Lady Active Retirees of Kessock - LARKS. They got up to all sorts of activities, generally enjoying the freedom of their post-working lives and it was there she learned to swim for the first time.

Given such a vivacious character, perhaps it is surprising Vi was a widow for almost 19 years. However, this all changed when she met a certain retired minister. They exchanged pleasantries, then contact details and eventually married in 1996. Cecil was artistic and musical. They shared many interests and enjoyed travelling. Cecil was older and when he developed a series of health problems, Vi nursed him. After he passed away Vi continued to keep in touch with Cecil's family, regularly sending cards and presents each Christmas to his children and grandchildren.

When the boys were younger she was very active in the Cub Scout movement as a much loved Akela. For many years she read for the blind in the days before modern technology, recording newspapers and articles to be made available to those who could not see. Latterly, she herself developed Macular Degeneration with ensuing sight impairment. Fortunately, she was still able to read even until this year.

From an early age, Vi was involved in the Scottish Women's Institute, a passionate member for around 70 years serving for many years on the local branch committee. Had she not been a committed Christian, it could have given the appearance of a religion - especially when it came to competition time!

She was fiercely competitive. She would seek out the schedules for the competition as early as possible in the SWI year and then plan which categories she would enter. She always went to enormous pains to ensure that her entries were of a very high standard. She embroidered, knitted, did cross-stitch, submitted photos, made cards, tourist items, floral arrangements, bulbs, baking, calligraphy...Double golds were not uncommon, as well as a range of trophies and it was an anxious 24 hours between the submission of the entry and the judges' results the following day. Even at Urray House there was a bake-off competition the first weekend she was there and their website has a lovely photograph of her holding a decorated wooden baking spoon, and a big triumphant smile as her team had won the competition.

Vi was grateful for good neighbours and made many friends over the years, not least her new friend in recent years Aileen Fraser with whom she met regularly, laughing and sharing as they headed out to Otago exercise classes, the Beach Cafe or one of a number of other venues. When Warren had an emergency admission in May, Aileen dropped everything and came round to sit with Vi to free me to go to the hospital with him.

Vi was always a very private person, she was not keen to have anyone outside the immediate family, attending to her but by the start of this year, it was necessary and she grew to look forward to the morning visits of Donna and Jackie who assisted us and then in her final weeks at Urray House, she appreciated the care and attention of the staff - albeit with the exception of anyone who had cold hands! The Urray House staff were also very kind to us as we sat by her bedside for several days before she slipped away.

From an early age, her Christian faith sustained her. She recalled a particular situation as a child and how her reaction was to cry out to God in prayer, and she knew He answered. She was a committed church member of Knockbain Church of Scotland, teaching Sunday School for years, serving as Treasurer, Elder and Presbytery Elder. When she moved to live with us in Fortrose, she joined, as able, in the life of the congregations of Avoch, Fortrose & Rosemarkie Churches of Scotland where she was warmly welcomed by the congregations, attending the craft group, afternoon teas and prayer meeting.

When she first moved to be with us in May 2020, it was on a 'temporary basis' but, she became increasingly frail. She stayed with us for three years, the last year or so seeing a series of hospital admissions and decline in her overall health. She was uncomplaining. She bore

her deteriorating eyesight, then latterly diminishing mobility and memory with grace - most of the time! In fact as her carer, it has been so good to recall through your many cards and conversations, her true personality. She was a sweet, gentle lady, with real graciousness. She was kind to others, an exceptional gift giver, spending hours contemplating what the intended recipient would like and then choosing very carefully.

She always had a twinkle in her eye. She was a very loving mother and good friend to so many. We are grateful to the Lord for the many years we have had her and recall, despite the immediate pain of separation, that we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Or as one contemporary translation puts it:-

13 Our friends, we want you to know the truth about those who have died, so that you will not be sad, as are those who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will take back with Jesus those who have died believing in him.

Stroma Beattie

‘Mary’s special ingredient was love’

A tribute to Mary Manson, Helen Donald’s mother, who worshipped with us in Rosemarkie Church in the last few years before she passed away in July.

Mary was born in 1929 at Sheilinghill, the family croft near Alness. She left school at 14 and helped to work the family croft. It was hard graft six days a week. Hard work and family would be hallmarks and pillars of Mary’s life.

Her dad was the eldest sibling in the family and the other siblings went round the world – Alexander to Australia, George to the USA and William to Canada. As the oldest, Mary’s dad stayed at home to work the croft for and with his parents. Mary followed his example.

At the age of 15, Mary was offered a place in a cookery school but her mum was not so keen and the letter offering the place ended up in the fire. Mary only found out about it many years later. Life on the croft was not easy and seems a world away from us today – no electricity, no hot water, carting water up to the house and so on.

Fast forward a few years and Mary had met Bill when she took a horse to be shod at the smiddy at Achnaggaron. She and Bill got married at the family croft in 1951. Pictured right, Bill and Mary on holiday. Their marriage was blessed with two children, Helen and James.



The family moved to Queen Street in Invergordon in 1955. Mary was a hard worker and someone whose whole life revolved around family. She spent some years working cleaning job in the Doctor's surgery and the local school. Sadly, her husband Bill passed away in 1992 at the age of 70 a mere five years after his retirement.

Mary's door was always open to visitors who never got away without a cup of tea at least. She was always helping others giving lifts, shopping and even hospitality. Her pancakes were legendary. No one could make pancakes like she did – even when they had the recipe. One little boy commented, 'Mary's special ingredient is love.' And you can't replicate that!

Mary started driving when her Uncle Alec came home from Sydney in the early 60s to bury his wife's ashes. He had a licence to drive but was not fit to do so. He asked Mary if she would learn to drive so that she could chauffeur him around the area. Mary jumped at the idea as she'd always really wanted to drive!

That was just the start and she was thrilled when she passed her test and then took delight in driving all over Scotland. It was not so common at that time in the early 60s for women to drive. Mary was chuffed to be leading the way for the ladies.

It was also important to try and be one step ahead of her older cousin Teddy from Tain who was well known for driving around on her motorbike. Mary carried on driving into her 90s and took it very badly when the DVLA rescinded her driving licence. We'll say no more on that one!

Mary was a keen writer. She wrote many letters to pen pals and was well connected to the many cousins in her family. She also kept diaries throughout other life right up to the last couple of years. It was once commented that Mary could fit more on a postage stamp than most of us could on a whole page!

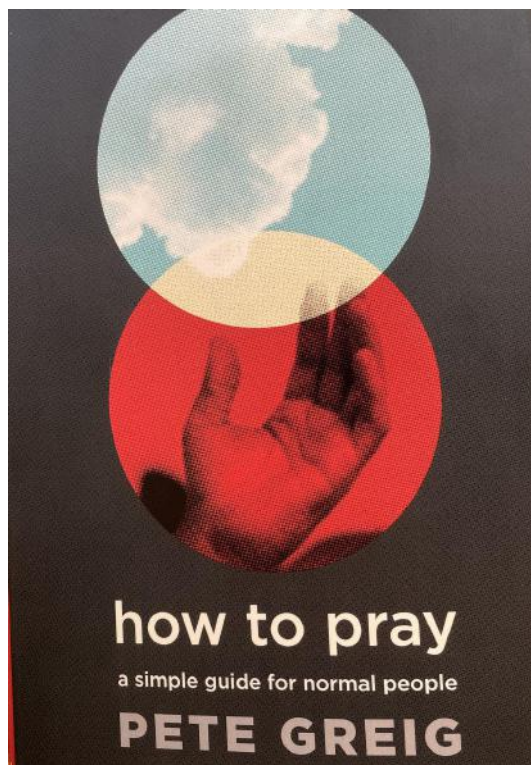
At her funeral in Rosskeen Free Church, minister Rev Calum MacMillan commented: 'Mary has been part of the congregation here her whole life. Indeed, the longest of anyone in the church. Mary loved Jesus and she loved his church. She once told me in her younger years that she would hide in the ditch when she saw the minister approaching in his frockcoat. But nowadays she was always delighted to see children and young folk enjoying being in the church.'

We remember the family that Mary loved and worked so hard for her whole life: Helen, James and Amelia, her grandchildren David, Catherine, Gordon, Elaine and Alan and her great-grandchildren, Adienna and Gabriel.





Lord, Teach us to Pray....



In *How to Pray – a simple guide for normal people* by Pete Greig uses PRAY as an acronym to remind us that the Lord's Prayer invites us to Pause, Rejoice, Ask and Yield.

For Greig, the first step to a deeper prayer life is to **Pause** and sit quietly ('Be still and know that I am God.' Ps 46:10). He suggests that stillness and silence prepares our minds and primes our hearts to pray from a place of greater peace, faith and adoration.

Having paused, for Greig the most natural and appropriate response is reverence. 'Linger here,' he suggests '**Rejoice** in God's blessings before asking for any more. Like an eagle soaring, a horse galloping or a salmon

leaping, worship is the thing God's designed you to do,'

Ask. At its simplest and most immediate, prayer is asking for help for everything from 'daily bread' to 'kingdom come', praying for ourselves (petitioning) and for others (interceding) exploring the extraordinary miracle-working power of prayer while also wrestling with the questions posed by unanswered prayers.

Finally, **Yield.** In this section Greig is at his most lyrical. 'The final step in the dance of prayer is surrender. It's a clenched fist slowly opening, an athlete lowering themselves into an ice cold bath, a field of poppies turning to the sun. We yield to God's presence 'on earth as it is in heaven' through contemplative prayer and listening to his word which is 'our daily bread'. We yield to God's holiness through confession and reconciliation, praying 'forgive us our sins as we forgive others'.....And so, in all these ways it's by surrendering to God that we overcome, by emptying ourselves that we are filled and by yielding our lives to prayer that our lives themselves can become a prayer – the Lord's Prayer – in the end.'

A copy of Pete Greig's book, *How to Pray* is in the Rosemarkie Church library. Please feel free to borrow. It's an encouraging read!

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. John 3:8



Earlier in the spring of this year I was in the Netherlands, in North Holland, a province I've visited many times. Friends who are aware of my lifelong love of mountain areas have often asked why I would enjoy walking in such a low-lying, flat and 'featureless' (their words) sort of landscape. To me, however, it's a place of infinite interest, not least in the polders, those areas below sea level where past Dutch generations have built up strong earth dykes and pumped out the standing water.



The result is a landscape of damp, green water meadows and countless drainage ditches alive with birds such as the lapwing (left), a once plentiful species that has been largely driven out of our country places here at home. To walk among these same displaying birds: peewits, teuchats, call them what you will (according to where you happened to have been brought up), is a wonderful experience. If, like me, you have a strong interest in the natural world, the polders are wonderful places to be in, no more so than in misty, early mornings when, apart from the calling birds, the world is still.

One of my favourite things when walking there is to come upon one of the old windmills, once used for grain milling or water pumping. It's hardly surprising that the wind was used as a source of energy to turn the big sails, for it can certainly blow unimpeded across such flat land. It's strange that a thing so strong should be totally invisible but that's the way it is with the power of this natural force. In church, we sing Spirit of God, as strong as the wind, Gentle as is the dove, to the tune of the Skye Boat Song. Everyone has heard of St Francis of Assisi and his empathy for God's creation and we've probably all seen visual representations of him in his



monk's simple habit, surrounded by living creatures, doves included. Years ago, my wife and I visited Assisi and the Basilica of St Francis and when, on my recent Dutch trip, I passed one of those big windmills one morning, my mind drifted back to that Italian visit and what we learned of the saint. The fact is that Francis not only regarded the animals and birds as brothers and sisters but the weather elements too. His Canticle of the Sun reads: 'Be praised my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which you give your creatures



St Francis preaching to the birds

sustenance.’ Appropriately, at the time of our visit to the Basilica, a small white, living dove was feeding contentedly from the open, outstretched hand on a statue of the saint.

St Francis, in his life, was making a real key connection. In recognising the existence of a unity throughout the whole living world of Creation, he was well ahead of his time. Even those weather elements, so vital to the living environment of the world we inhabit, were looked upon by the saint as part of Earth’s greater, complex whole. In this way, he might truly be regarded today as the patron saint of environmental awareness. Too often, that all-important connection isn’t being made these days. People talk of ‘going out into the environment’ when, all too clearly, we’re there already, part of the divine creation.

Those beautiful words from the King James Bible at the start are a reminder that it’s not the only time the power of the wind gets big billing in the Bible, with reference to the Holy Spirit. Like St Francis, Jesus was well used to being out and about in country places and well accustomed to using familiar countryside things to illustrate his stories. In today’s language we would say that they were his handy visual aids. In the memorable encounter with Nicodemus, from which the opening quotation comes, Jesus characteristically employed something very familiar to illustrate his powerful point - even if it was entirely unseen.

Douglas Willis

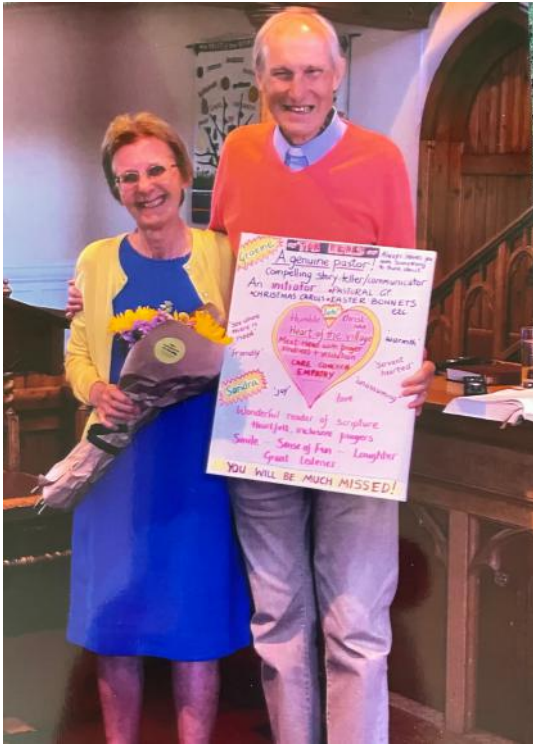
The Bible in Doric

Douglas would not have been the only one delighted with the news that retired solicitor, Gordon M Hay (right) has completed a 17-year project to translate the Bible into Doric – the first time the entire text has been translated into Scots or any of its dialects. Over the years the church elder and organist has also been commissioned by Aberdeen University to put some of Handel's Messiah into Doric. Here are well known words from Ecclesiastes 3:



Aathin his its sizzon, an for ilka thing ye dee aneth e hivvens there's a time: A time tae be born, an a time tae dee; a time tae shaav, an a time tae hairst; a time tae dee awa wi, an a time tae mak aa better; a time tae pu doon, an a time tae bigg up; a time tae greet, an a time tae lauch; a time tae moorn an a time tae dance; a time tae scatter steens, an a time tae gaither them up; a time tae gie a bosie, an a time tae haud back fae gien a bosie; a time tae sikk, an a time tae tine; a time tae haud on tae things, an a time tae fling awa; a time tae rive, an a time tae sort; a time tae be quait, an a time tae spik oot; a time tae loo, an a time tae hate; a time for waar, an a time for peace.....

Thank you, Graeme and Sandra!



There were a few lumps in throats as we said farewell to much loved members of our congregation, Rev Graeme and Sandra Bell.

A popular double act, Graeme and Sandra had led worship on numerous occasions over the years with Graeme's illustrative stories and Sandra's heartfelt prayers always engaging and providing food for thought.

A community minded couple, they were constantly seeking ways to help and support anyone who might need a helping hand. They were instrumental in establishing the Pastoral Group ensuring a team approach to local visitation.

A sense of fun was a big part of the Bells' approach, a recent example being their hugely successful Easter Bonnet making afternoon which generated much laughter and amusing photographs!

At their farewell, after they had led worship, they were presented with flowers, a painting by local artist Sarah Dunton illustrating one of Graeme's favourite beach walks, a 'tributes canvas' featuring comments by members of the congregation, vouchers for Culloden House and Kingsmills Hotel and a healthy cheque reflecting the love and respect in which they were rightly held. We wish them every blessing in their new home in Inverness. Graeme and Sandra Bell – shining examples of faith in action!

JDS / AF



Graeme will be well remembered for stories and warm, inclusive services; Sandra for her prayers. Both for their heart for their community. A story and prayer now follow.

Where we served in Glasgow, there was a park across from the church. And to the left of the park were the (22 floors) high rise flats of Kennishead. In between the park and the flats ran a substantial burn.

When there was heavy rain, the park flooded quickly. Though the water also cleared quite quickly once it was dry.

One Friday afternoon I visited Sadie who lived on the tenth floor. From her living room window she had a good view of the park. She was keen to tell me what she had noticed happening on the football pitch.

Rain had left a large puddle in each goalmouth exactly where you would not want a large puddle. A chap had come along with a cup and a bucket. He scooped up a cupful of water and put it in the bucket. When the bucket was nearly full he emptied it in the burn.

Sadie said he had been working at it for over an hour. Progress was slow but steady. And there was always the chance that another shower could ruin all his effort. Yet he continued until both goalmouths were clear.

This gives me a picture of our faith. We continue with small acts or words of kindness in the hope that they will make a difference. But we do not know. We continue in trust hoping to hear Jesus' words to us when we complete our journey.

'Well done you good & faithful servant! You have been faithful in managing small amounts so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!' (from Matthew's gospel 25: 21 & 25:23)

PS. There was no shower of rain & the game went ahead.

***Good Shepherd**, we pray for those known to us, family, friends and neighbours who feel overwhelmed by the storms of life - those who are finding it really hard to cope or struggling, trying to remember how to do everyday tasks; those who have been waiting ages for an answer to their prayers and can't see a way out of their present difficulty; those who find every day a real challenge whose days are lived under the shadow of nagging, constant pain; those who feel weary trying to keep going and those saddened by loneliness and grief.*

Within the church family we hold before you..... (those ill, in hospital, recently bereaved, those who are housebound and unable to worship with us in person.....(all named). Reach out and touch them with your immeasurable love and fill their hearts with your strengthening grace and peace.

***Life-giving Father**, we thank you that we can come and speak with you as to a friend, that we can open our hearts and share our deepest thoughts in the knowledge that you are always there, ready to listen and understand. We lay before you the pain we feel, the fears we have, the worry we carry, the confusion and despair that trap and hold us hostage. Help us to remember that you are with us in the swirling currents of change even though it doesn't always seem that way. Help us to trust, to rest in your arms still and at peace, for new strength is found in quiet confidence and trust.*

***Heavenly Father**, help us to cultivate the art of listening, of stillness and rest before you. Forgive us when we do not listen, when we think we know best, when we become so fixed in our ways and opinions that we become deaf through our unwillingness to listen and to wait. Help us to hear and respond whenever you call, and have faith to follow wherever you lead, assured and confident that you know best. In Jesus name we bring these our prayers. Amen*

Keswick Convention 2023

It was good for Catherine and me to be back in Keswick once more for the first week of the Keswick Convention, now in its 148th year. As last year, all events took place at the site of the newly refurbished 'Pencil Factory', an iconic art deco building which had been decaying since falling out of use, and which has been magnificently rebuilt internally to form on three levels a modern conference venue available all year round for Christian teaching and training programmes, facilities and accommodation for visiting Church groups and a venue for local businesses needing a conference meeting space.



The building was originally purchased in 2015 and a further four years was required to obtain planning permission. Despite covid, the next four years brought the total reconstruction of the interior. The huge increases in costs during this period resulted in the operation, called the Derwent Project after nearby Derwentwater, being slightly scaled back. It was obvious that the Lord was behind this work when we learn that of the £8 million cost, only £250,000 (3.12%) remained to be raised at the beginning of this year's convention. The funds had been raised from the incredible number of 75,000 donations! (that was also the number of pencils which used to be produced there each week). It was so encouraging to see lengthy queues of youngsters, ranging in age from 3 to 23, waiting to enter the Pencil Factory for all the activities specially arranged for them during the Convention.

The 'main tent' is situated on land adjacent to the Pencil Factory and is hired each year for the three weeks of the convention. It can accommodate roughly 2,500 people and is usually packed each morning for the 'Bible Readings' and each evening for the 'Evening Celebrations'. The former packing hall of the factory, cleverly left almost 'as it was', with bare brick walls and unwashed roof windows, is the area used for the numerous stands of missionary and other organisations and the most dangerous place of the convention, the bookshop run by '10ofthose.com', a wonderful business which supplies the highest quality of Christian literature and devotes its profits to Christian outreach. Their salesman, Jonathan Carswell, recommends several books at each meeting, and is a compelling salesman!

There is a theme to the convention each year. This year it was 'human'. 'Human' is not a subject to be discussed and examined at a distance. For one thing, as Calvin famously said, "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself." The convention gazed afresh on the God revealed supremely in Jesus Christ. But Jesus is also fully human, so it looked to him, and delighted in him, fully God and fully human. Crucial also was the calling that God gives to humanity, to live out His new creation purposes in His world as His image-bearers.

In addition to all the magnificent teaching and worship – 2,500 people united in praising God – ‘All One in Christ Jesus’ – there are smaller seminars each morning where specific subjects are dealt with from a Christian perspective by some of the convention speakers. We were particularly blessed to attend one on chronic pain by Paul Mallard, author of the excellent book ‘Invest your suffering’ and who for decades has been caring for his wheelchair bound wife who has been suffering chronic pain. If you would like a copy of the notes from his talk, please ask Catherine or me.



Final thoughts and impressions? The magnificent sound of thousands united in praise led by the band ‘Emu’, the refreshing and enlightened teaching from men and women who held your attention through their knowledge of and passion for Jesus Christ, the professionalism of the organisation, and simply being ‘All One in Christ Jesus’. If you would like to sample any of the Bible Readings or Evening Celebrations they are available on You Tube, or go to www.keswickministries.org. **Jack Kernahan**

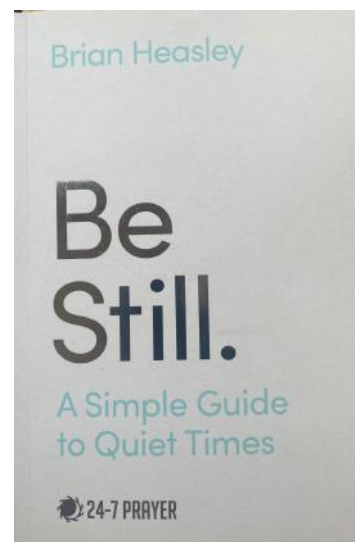
Be Still and Know that I am God - Brian Heasley

‘Prayer had always been part of my childhood, from the little picture that hung on our bedroom wall of a child kneeling with the words *Prayer Changes Everything* but, from the moment I committed my life to God, prayer has remained at the forefront of my faith.

I fully believe that prayer – a devotion to relationship, encounter, and conversation with God – is the root of all we do. It’s the presence of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Jesus and time spent with the Father that makes us who we are. Directionless lives are given meaning in our relationship with God; this relationship is grown in community, through discipleship, and by establishing and developing our personal devotional lives.

One of the key ways I have sought to establish a rhythm of prayer that sustains me through the various seasons of life is through a quiet time. A quiet time is simply a daily time that I set aside to specifically tune into God through prayer, Bible reading and reflection. It’s a time when I not only speak to God but to ask God to speak to me. It also gives me the opportunity to examine my life on a daily basis, to see if I am truly practising my faith. It is the wellspring, the oasis, the source of my life as a Christian.....!’

Want to read more? The book is in the Rosemarkie church library.



Fulfilling an Ambition in Art

Ever since I saw examples of Morven Skinner's art work at an exhibition in Muir of Ord a few years ago, I was keen to hear how she'd developed her talent. The chance came along last month as we sat down for a chat over a cup of tea. We covered a lot of ground, far more than we could relate here. It was a joy!

Margaret MacSween



Where were you born, Morven?

I was born in Tain. My mother was a nurse and my father was a policeman. Six months after I was born, my dad joined the Marines as WW2 had broken out. With dad being away we had a room in a house until Dad was demobbed, re-joined the police and was posted to Carloway on Lewis.

That would have been quite a change.

Oh, yes indeed. All the children spoke Gaelic both in the classroom and the playground and, of course, I didn't have a word of Gaelic. I remember I was asked to learn a Gaelic psalm but I couldn't learn it as I couldn't read Gaelic and mum and dad didn't speak it. As a result, I got the belt aged 5 because I couldn't recite the psalm. However, I soon learned to speak Gaelic to the extent that my father took me with him when he needed help to interpret for any Gaelic speaking people and for whom it was their first language. I'd also have to say that I got a great grounding in English grammar as I learned it as a second language – that has stood me in good stead. We were there until I was 11 at which time my father got a transfer to Avoch in 1952. By then I had two younger brothers born close together.

Did you attend church in Lewis?

Yes, my introduction to church life was in Lewis, mainly Free Church where the services were in Gaelic but the Church of Scotland had an English service once and month and my dad and I attended it. I remember I went to the Free Church services with my pal and her parents and the services were long and in Gaelic, the highlight was getting a pandrop to suck! However, I still love hearing Gaelic psalm singing with a precentor for which the Free Church are renowned. In fact, when Willie my husband was ill, I was talking to a Marie Curie nurse who mentioned she was in a choir and they had compiled a CD of old Gaelic psalms, some of them with a precentor. It was soulfully beautiful and took me back to Carloway days. When Willie was ill, we used to play it a lot as it brought us a sense of peace.

You'd have been at the end of primary when you came to Avoch?

Yes, I was only at Avoch Primary for the year, then moved up to Fortrose Academy. I recall that when I came back to Avoch from Lewis, I had a very distinct Lewis accent which children made fun of. Even yet, a west coast accent can be detected, I think.

I settled quickly but by third year at the Academy I wanted to leave school. I felt the academic life wasn't for me - I'd had enough of Latin and maths and you needed a maths pass to get into university. The maths teacher wasn't really encouraging as he said I should be at home helping my mother with the dishes and housework! That said, I couldn't get my head round maths at that time. The Rector came to the house to speak to my parents to persuade me to stay on but I had my heart set on leaving to find a job.

After looking at becoming a nurse or a policewoman, I opted for Rigfoot Secretarial School on Southside Road, Inverness which was run by two spinster ladies. A lot of girls from this area went to the school, where we learned shorthand, typing and book-keeping. From memory, the course was for 2 years until I was 17. At that time my father was transferred to Ullapool and because of the lack of employment in Ullapool, I chose to go into digs in Inverness and find employment there. These were really good days. I liked Inverness, which was not such a big city then and where I got to know a lot of people.

You've always had an interest in sport and fitness, haven't you, Morven?

Yes, throughout my life, I've always tried to keep as fit as I could and have engaged in different sports. I played hockey, tennis, badminton, curling and golf. I always found sport good for the mind as well as for the body. Nowadays, my only sport is walking supported by walking poles but it keeps me moving!

When did Art become part of your life?

As a pupil, I wanted to study Art but I was persuaded to do Latin instead. Many people at that time did not consider Art to be a proper subject to study and of no use for getting a job. But I disliked Latin to the extent I tried to fail the exams. But the teacher was a kindly man and always gave me marks for neatness to ensure I passed!

I dabbled at art when I was working but it was only after my mother died and I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 61, I decided to retire and do something I'd always wanted to do – develop my art skills. I went for six months to study Art and stayed for two years. My son Grant was in the college at the same time, albeit on a different course but my age was never an issue – I was welcomed and encouraged by everybody and relished the challenge of being a mature student. My husband Willie was a great support. I miss him for many reasons including his honest, helpful critiques of anything I did.

At college we covered a broad spectrum of creative arts. Amongst other things I completed a SQA Higher course in Photography but didn't know it was a Higher until the certificate arrived in the summer. Most of the students were completing portfolios before applying for Art College but others had different ambitions. One day I was chatting over coffee with a young man whose parents both worked in the NHS and I asked if he'd considered studying the role of art in mental health. A few years later I met him and that's exactly what he was doing.

How has your art developed over the years?

I became a member of the Muir of Ord Art Class many years ago, and I still attend, although now it is a group of like-minded people who meet every week to paint and learn from each other. I use oils, acrylic and pastel but have never really mastered the art of water colour. Often children are given water colour at an early age but it requires patience and I like to work with a more instant medium!

Over the years, I have gone to classes in Fortrose with David Webster and Esther Armstrong and was always learning. I also went to two-day schools in Cromarty and always enjoy a new challenge. Through classes run by the WI, I learned silk painting and for some time designed silk scarves, which I sold. Then I ran out of people to sell them to and did not want to go down a business route. Now, I do them for friends and family and have come full circle as I am at present, painting a scarf for the WI Handicraft Show at the end of September.

It must seem a long time since were a 5 year old learning a Gaelic psalm!

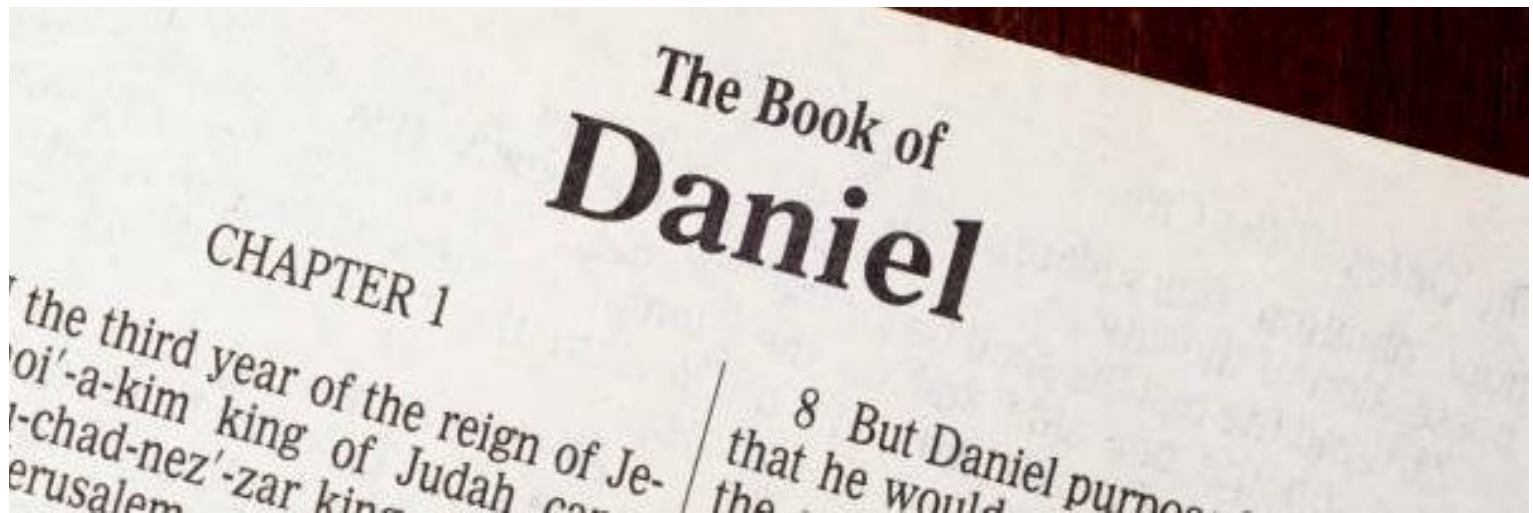
O yes indeed! But from my early years, I have always been aware of God in my life. Sometimes very much in the background and at other times to the fore. As time has gone on, I have come to rely on my inner faith and the comfort and peace it brings. I have always thought of God as a God of Love and no matter how my life evolves, He is there for me and I serve Him as best I can.

From Morven's Gallery



Daniel's Prayer

A Tutorial in Prayer from Daniel 9: 1-19



This marvellous example of prayer, brought to us from over 2,500 years ago, is a tutorial for us today in the twenty-first century. We see Daniel praying under pressure, praying 'by the Book' (v 2-3), incorporating confession (v 4-14), praying for God's glory (v 15-19) and finally seeking reconciliation (v 17-19).

The Bible contains around 1,100 references to prayer in 61 out of its 66 books. The first reference to prayer is in Genesis 20:7 where God tells Abimelech that Abraham will pray for him. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6: 5-15 which incorporates the outline structure of the perfect prayer, the Lord's Prayer. The 150 Psalms are the wonderful sung prayers of God's people.

After six chapters demonstrating faith in exile, and one of the clearest glimpses of Christ in the 'hinge' chapter 7, we come to the difficult visions of the future after the exile in Babylon, in the middle of which we find ourselves in a prayer meeting! It probably dates from around 538BC when Daniel, refusing to adhere to the edict of King Darius that no-one should pray for thirty days to any god or man except him, was famously saved from the lion's den.

He 'understood from the scriptures' (v1) (the only reference in the Old Testament to the Scriptures) that the exile was to last seventy years. Daniel reads what he has as his 'Bible'. There can be no better way to get to know God's purposes. His prayer is full of references to the Scriptures he had – Deuteronomy, the prophets and Jeremiah. He prays the promises of God! He knows that God uses prayer as a way through which his Word is fulfilled.

Why should we pray? Does God need our prayers? Inevitably the answer is 'yes'. There are many things He waits to do until such time as his people have prayed to Him about them in faith. 'So I turned to the Lord and pleaded with Him' (v3). The Lord's promises are driving his servant's prayer. When we read our Bibles maybe we should be looking for some promise of the Lord which will drive our prayers in a current situation.

Daniel starts his prayer with adoration. He stresses the greatness, the awesomeness, of God who keeps His covenant. (See also Nehemiah 1: 5). There is humility, confession and reflection

on God's purpose. There is abject confession (v 5-14) although there seems to be no record of any blemish on Daniel's individual character, as there is recorded against Noah, Abraham, Moses and David for example.

Yet, in the midst of all this confession: 'Lord, you are righteous' (v7), 'The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled against him' (v9). The first 70% of the prayer is taken up with this form of worship and confession before Daniel comes to petition.

Change only comes after confession of sin and repentance. No excuses are offered. Rather there is acceptance that the exile was caused by God as a result of sin (v 11 and 14). 1 John 1: 8-10 puts the situation regarding sin very simply. We need to be honest with God and, as Daniel does in his prayer, accept God's verdict.

At last we come to the actual petition. Verse 16 asks that God 'turns away his anger and his wrath' and in verse 17 that He 'looks with favour on your desolate sanctuary'. That really is it! Two simple requests, preceded with humility, adoration and confession. Consider also the reasons surrounding the petition. Each of the four verses from verse 16 contains the reason 'for your sake, O Lord' or the equivalent. The petitions are for the glory of God. Four times the Lord is named in verse 19 as Daniel gets more passionate in his pleading – not for the sake of the people, certainly not for himself – but for God's own glory.

Daniel's petitions line up with God's purposes. This is good guidance for us today. We come to God in prayer to seek God's purposes and to align our prayers with those purposes. This is a prayer for restoration – of the people to their homeland and of the rebuilding of their temple.

We, too, seek the real restoration of the United Kingdom to be once more a Christian country and, nearer home, a revival in the Black Isle. Our prayers should be stressing the honour which would come to God through his answers to our prayers.

Daniel's prayer was answered as he spoke. Read the rest of Chapter 9 from verse 20 to the end. Daniel probably did not get the answer he was hoping for. Neither may we to our prayers. We, too, have to see and accept that God's delays are often because He is dealing with an underlying problem, but we see in verse 25 the crucial point where the coming of the 'Anointed One', Jesus Christ, is the pivot of the timing. Verse 26 suggests that it will look as if He has failed, but we all know that through His resurrection and ascension exactly the opposite is the case! God's answer to all our rebellion, to all our sin, is Jesus. God's answers to all our prayers will direct our lives towards Jesus.

Answers will come to our prayers. The Gospel will bear fruit. There will be revival. But the work will be opposed and suffering will continue. May the example of Daniel's life, his faith and his prayer, inspire us in our walk with God, for we too are 'highly esteemed' as God's dearly loved children if we come to Him in faith, through Jesus Christ. **Jack Kernahan**

The dogs: they came, they came and they came!

Somehow word got round pet-lovers at the Black Isle Show and I ended up doing eight portraits of dogs and even one cat. Help! What have I done to deserve this?!

My aim was to do quick 'portrait-sketches' of people, but the dogs, they came, they came and they came! I suppose it's something to do with people loving their pets and wanting to remember them.

It all started 40 years ago in East Sussex when St Leonards-on-Sea church put on its first 'Summer Fayre'. I was a curate then and in naive enthusiasm volunteered to do some portraits...Despite all sorts of problems they somehow worked and I have been doing them ever since, mainly at open-air summer events.

Most recently it was the Black Isle Show and then St Boniface Fair. At the end of August it was the Classic Vehicle Rally in Fortrose and then the Art Society of Inverness exhibition in the first week of September. Sometimes there is a tent to put up, other times a patio-umbrella and always a lot of preparation behind the scenes.

So why do it? Is it really worth all the hassle? I've tossed and turned with ideas and finally came up with a little leaflet. The main wording goes like this:



Yes, you are special!!!

God gives wonderful gifts to all of us - making us gloriously different - and special!!

I've always loved art and sold lots of paintings. I've been a Church Minister for 40 years but am now retired so this is a fresh ministry! I work in oils, acrylics, watercolour - and charcoal and pastel for:

PORTRAIT SKETCHES!

So, thank you for letting me do this lightning portrait of YOU! Yes, you are SPECIAL!!!

It is a real pleasure to do this as I love drawing people in buses, trains and cafes but this way - with you - I can do it big and you can keep it. You might even consider getting it framed.



William working on a sketch of Ethel at a VERY wet Classic Vehicle Rally in Fortrose last month. The finished piece to the right. Thanks to Hannah for photograph.

Over the two days at the Black Isle Show I did 30 Portrait Sketches – so actually more people than dogs. One of these was a request for nine heads on one A3 sheet of pastel paper. Quite a challenge!

At the St Boniface Fair, 14 portraits were completed with a further 9 at the Classic Vehicle Rally, a good number given the weather.

If in this way I can help people feel special and loved by God then what joy! For me it is also a joy and a privilege to do charcoal and pastel paintings of so many wonderful people!

William Mather



More from RE Tests

- The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- John the Blacksmith baptised Jesus. Jesus's followers were known as the 12 decibels.
- The greatest miracle was when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
- Moses died before he reached Canada. Kind David fought the Finklestiens.
- Jesus explained to the disciples that man cannot live by sweat alone.
- Matthew was a taxi man. Paul cavorted into Christianity.

Holy Land Trip Part 3



Douglas Simpson completes his tour of the Holy Land by heading north to Tiberias.

Leaving Jericho, we're heading north travelling up the wide valley of the Jordan River. To the west, the mountainous spine of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and, to the east, shimmering in the distance, the uplands of Jordan from where the wandering Israelites would have looked across to 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The landscape is largely desert but the valley floor is cultivated with all manner of fruit and crops. Almost imperceptibly, the hills turn green and we head north to the busy resort of Tiberias on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Once a hospital, the Church of Scotland's 'Scots Hotel' will be our base for the next couple of days. It's now a 5 Star facility sitting in a splendid location on the edge of the lake. This is a slice of luxury! Sitting in the beautiful gardens in the cool of the early morning, watching the sun reflected on the Lake as it rises over Jordan, is a memory not quickly forgotten.

After breakfast it's off down to the lake for a short voyage on a 'Jesus Boat', designed in the style of the crafts fishermen disciples would have used. The saltire is raised and we head out to Scottish dance music. Around twenty minutes later the engines are cut, the music stops and we are invited to conduct a short act of worship on the Sea of Galilee, ending in a period of personal reflection and contemplation as we reimagine the many events of Jesus's ministry which took place around us. A flypast of flamingos only adds to the poignancy of the occasion. The crew judged the right moment as they turned up the music and encouraged us to dance. We didn't need to be asked twice!



Back on dry land we stopped off at St Peter's Church (right) on the shore of the lake, one of the few places where we can access the Galilee shore and said to be the location where the resurrected Jesus shared breakfast with his disciples.



There are many other fascinating locations and beautiful churches commemorating significant Biblical events around the lake but the visit to Capernaum stands out in my memory. Major excavations have revealed some of the secrets of this

1st century town and it's not difficult to be transported back in time as you sit in the synagogue where Jesus taught or as you look down from a glassed viewing area on the building reputed to be Peter's house.

So many other memories of remarkable people and fascinating places spring to mind as I write this brief account: the impressive remains at Caesarea Maritima or Herod's palatial fortress on the plateau of Masada. But, more than anything else the kindness, hospitality and courage of so many people we encountered has been truly inspirational and I can't wait to return once again to this country of amazing contrasts.

The Scots Hotel, Tiberias



Even the Bees.....



While the world is focused on tensions within Israel following their decision to abolish the Supreme Court's power to overrule government, the Israeli government continues to occupy, oppress and deny Palestinians their fundamental rights and freedoms. Even the bees suffer.

The Bedouin villagers of Umm al-Khair were dispossessed of their land in 1948, only to have much of their new lands confiscated in 1967. The large, illegally built Israeli settlement of Carmel is now their neighbour. While the settlers have every modern convenience, the residents of Umm al-Khair have no electricity and only have access to water for 7 hours in a day. But they are nothing if not enterprising and in 2018 began honey production.

Sadly, the settlers have objected to the bees coming in to their gardens and have attacked the hives with pesticides and fire. Please pray for both sides in this apparently intractable situation repeated across numerous Palestinian communities.

There was a good turnout of local Rosemarkie residents to watch the arrival of guests for Tom Nelson's marriage to Sarah Greenberg. Tom has lived in the USA for many years and took his bride - and around 80 American guests - to Rosemarkie Church for the ceremony. Rev Sam Torrens travelled up from Edinburgh to fulfil a promise made to all in the Oasis Youth Group that he would return north to conduct their weddings if they so wished. He has conducted no less than a dozen weddings over the years. That's impressive!



Above - the bride has arrived and the ceremony is underway.

Above right - many will remember Tom's siblings Ruth and Robin, here flanking the newly married couple

Right - the Nelson family on Tom and Sarah's happy day. We wish them God's blessing in their lives together.



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As with all previous newsletters, we are grateful to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter. Really appreciated.

We'd hope to have our next newsletter out in December. Please send any articles or suggestions for articles to: calummacsween76@gmail.com by 24 November - earlier if possible! Thank you.