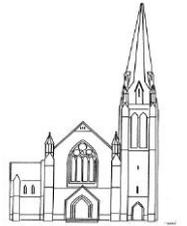




**THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
NORTH PARISH CHURCH, GIRVAN AYRSHIRE.**



**A Further Reflection from the Interim-moderator -**

It is said that we do not miss the water until the well runs dry. In that context there must be things about our life that we miss, and did not know their importance, until we were deprived of them by of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Something that I have noticed most strongly is the embargo on shaking hands. A handshake is one of the most primitive ways of greeting or parting. Primitive in that from earliest time, a hand grasping the hand of another, accompanied by a brief up-and-down movement, has been the sign of a relationship. Touching elbows is a poor substitute.

Soon after birth a baby will hold onto one finger of its mother. As the child grows a small hand will be placed in a mother's hand in order to support. When walking is attempted a supporting hand is even more necessary. With a firm hand the parent will teach the child the rules of the road. But there comes a time when a girl and especially a boy would not want to be seen holding his mother's hand. This would be a humiliating experience.

That same boy will grow to manhood and find a girl, and the thing he wants to do is hold her hand. Marriage is solemnized with hands held. The desire to hold a partner's hand may last for a long time, but latterly it may be needed to guide and support one of the couple. Hand-holding has a part to play throughout life.

Of course shaking hands is not the same as holding hands, though the difference may be only one of duration. We shake hands when a bargain is concluded, when a prize is won, when an accolade is bestowed, when a reconciliation is made. We do so with pleasure, congratulating someone who has achieved something. We do it as a sincere form of recognition and respect. We shake hands when we meet a friend or when we leave the friend. The hand-shake is an expression of good wishes towards a friend we have enjoyed meeting; we wish our friend good fortune in the future. Robert Burns captured the moment of departing when he said –

*“And there's a hand, my trusty fiere!  
And gie's a hand o'thine!  
And we'll tak a right gude-willy waught, (good-will drink)  
For auld lang syne.”*

Perhaps shaking hands is not so common within families. A daughter will rarely greet her mother with a hand-shake; nowadays fathers and sons great each other with man-hugs. Hugs and kisses are part of everyday family interactions.

Jairus approached Jesus in great distress for his daughter was close to death, and he begged for Jesus' help. However news came from the president's house

that his daughter was dead. Undeterred Jesus proceeded to Jairus's house insistent that his daughter would be well again. Despite the commotion, for mourning had already begun, Jesus entered the child's room, "took hold of her hand and called to her: 'Get up, my child'" – immediately the girl got up and walked about. (Mark 5:21-43)

The healing of Jairus's daughter is meant to signal the central Christian belief that the dead are raised to life. The incident also illustrates Jesus' thoughtfulness. Time and again we see Jesus attending to individual needs, and when he does so, he gives himself to that person without distraction. He 'took her by the hand' – what better expression of tender love could there be? He took her by the hand and raised her up.

One of the consequences of the lockdown is that access to hospitals is denied. The current restrictions prevent those who wish to sit with and hold the hand of a family member in hospital. There is great comfort in holding the hand of someone who is departing this life, and bidding farewell as they are raised on the other side. Jesus assured us that he is with us always, and we may find comfort in that he was present when we were absent

.  
Then comes the funeral when a hand-shake could express all our condolences when we had no words, and when we had them they would be most inadequate. The firm hand-shake symbolizes all our sympathy and conveys the unspoken hope that the bereaved will find consolation in God's love.

It is a feature of modern church life that the minister goes to the door at the end of the service and shakes hands with those who have attended worship. Here we have a physical recognition of the individual. The value of each individual is acknowledged by a clasp of the hand. It may be a hearty shake or a gentle hold (because of arthritis), but it is an expression of the bond that exists among all those who belong to Jesus Christ.

I look forward to the time when we can shake hands again.

Dr. James Anderson

Interim Moderator

jca/June20