

**6<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.**

**Reading: John 1: 1 - 14**

**Sermon:**

The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow is fast approaching and Lochgilphead will be well represented, not perhaps on the track but certainly among the spectators and as part of the welcoming party. Two or three people from here, whom I know of, will be acting as stewards to help with the smooth running of the events.

But the build up to the Games has already started. Every time the news comes on the radio these days we hear reports of where the Queen's Baton is and the tremendous excitement felt by the crowds who gather to watch it pass by.

Locally, people are getting caught up in that too. People are busy preparing for the Queen's Baton passing through Lochgilphead next Sunday morning at around 11.15 a.m. and it would be good if as a Church we could somehow be involved in that.

Of course, we will be at worship with our doors closed and the world shut out but you know, just maybe next Sunday is one of those days when our doors should be open and when our worshipping community should be part of the wider community witnessing to the light of the world.

On the Church of Scotland website, I read that the Greeks had a race in their Olympic games which was unique. It was a game that involved running with a lit torch. Now normally the winner of a race is the person who crosses the finishing line first. In this particular race, the winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit.

At Heart and Soul, the event which takes place in Princes Street Gardens on the Sunday of the General Assembly, the Moderator was handed a baton which was going to be carried round each of the centres which are funded by Crossreach. Its purpose was to shine a light on the social care which is being provided by the Church of Scotland throughout our communities. The Moderator only walked a very short distance. He actually only walked from the platform to the first row of seats where the baton was handed over to two of the young Crossreach employees who ran off with it, I assume to pass it

on to others elsewhere. How far they would run, I'm not sure but what that did, was draw the attention of the thousands of people who were in Princes Street Gardens to the work of Crossreach. It drew attention to the work being done in the Name of Christ in many communities throughout our land.

The Queen's Baton highlights the Commonwealth and the Games and it serves to unite people and countries as together we celebrate the coming of the Games to Glasgow.

Light is a force for good. Light is always associated with the positive and therefore it is appropriate to have a symbol which highlights Games which unite athletes and spectators from across the globe.

All of that is in stark contrast to the darkness that pervades much of our world. The threats of terrorism being sent out by some of the radical groups in our world are an attempt to extinguish light that offers hope and life. They are an attempt to cause fear and death and destruction and we have to stand up to those who seek to destroy and who use fear and threats to make their point. I don't mean stand up to them by retaliating and by seeking to destroy them. I mean that we need to stand up to them by showing them that there is another way. There is a way of light. There is a way that stands in stark contrast to the path that they are on. There is way that involves love and not hate, which involves compassion and forgiveness, not fear and retribution.

There's a well-known children's hymn, the first line of which says: **This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.** How brightly does our light shine in our homes and in our communities, in our world, even in our Churches?

Jesus is the light of the world. In John's Gospel, he links life and light. Of Jesus, he writes: **In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.** The light of Christ can only shine out from us when we have the life of Christ within us. I make no apologies for that statement.

Maybe I will stand accused of using language that is foreign and concepts which are hard to understand in this day and age. I beg to differ or at least, I offer the following in my defense. The language I am using and the concepts of light and life and of Christ living within

us are no harder to understand, and, indeed, are probably easier to understand than much of the new age jargon and the language of modern day spirituality which seems to be accepted by many without question.

Many hundreds of people are carrying the light of the baton from place to place and holding it high as they run or walk to the next person in the chain.

What do we do with the light of Christ? The second verse of the children's hymn says: **Hide it under a bush, O no. I'm going to let it shine.** We have sung those words since childhood but are they just words? Do we let the light of Christ shine through us, as evidenced by our words and our actions or do we keep the light of Christ well hidden with the result that no one would even know we had faith? Do we keep the light of Christ behind closed doors, which is where I started today when I suggested that we would be locked behind closed doors as the baton passed by?

Maybe the Queen's Baton gives us the opportunity to shine the light of Christ in our community as the light of a united Commonwealth – at least for the Games - passes by.

Maybe this is our opportunity to show our little corner of the world that **the light shines in the darkness and that the darkness has not overcome it.** Maybe this is our opportunity to show the world that long after the Queen's Baton has passed by, the light of Christ will still be shining out.

We will be not be competing in the Commonwealth Games and as far as I know, none of us is carrying the Queen's Baton, but we have our own race to run. We are each engaged in the race of life, which is not about reaching the winning post first. It is simply about reaching the winning post, when the time comes, with the flame of our torch, of our baton, still lit for Christ.

In that sense, we maintain the tradition of the unique race run at the Olympic Games in Greece. May we hold high our torch, our baton, for Christ for the world to see.