

50th Anniversary Celebration

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Preacher: Various Speakers

[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Ian. I was at Brunfield during the time of the week-long holiday clubs where Maggie Shearer was the kind of brains and inspiration behind so much of what went on.

And the stories you told there, I do remember on one holiday club year where in the evening we had talks and you had to dress up in the character that you were speaking in.

I don't know if you remember these things, Maggie. And on one occasion I had to be Peter and tell that very same story. And this is coming up for probably 40 years ago, so I've got a really good memory thinking about these things.

But I do remember being in the character of Peter and coming up with the most wonderful tongue twister, which I'm still really quite chuffed about. Because in describing my father, because I was Peter, I described how my father had a fleet of fishing ships.

Now that is really difficult to say. And for the rest of the time I'm speaking, you can just begin to think about that in your head. A fleet of fishing ships. You can only say it about twice without ending up saying a fleet of fish and chips.

[1 : 11] But I think it's a wonderful tongue twister and I'm really proud of it. And I really do thank you and Janice as well for the invitation to come and spend this special weekend with you.

It's been a great weekend. Yesterday I thought was truly amazing. And I don't want to be critical. But the only slight disappointment for me is that you weren't able to come up with a better speaker for this morning.

And I'm sure by the time we get to the end of where I'm going to get to, you will be sharing my disappointment. But at the beginning, as we look at looking back, I do want to read some words from Scripture.

We find them in the first chapter of the letter that Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian church at Thessalonica. And I'm basically going to be saying the same thing as a number of people have been saying over the course of the weekend.

But I do think it bears repeating. So these are the words of Scripture. These are the words of the Lord. To place these words in some context, this was a church that Paul knew well.

[2 : 29] He had spent some time with them. The time came for Paul to leave them. He had been very much part of them. And now physically he was away from them. And although he was away from them, his thoughts were still very much with them.

And it was during the time that Paul was in the city of Corinth that he received news about these Christians and of how they were getting on. And as he heard news of them, he wrote this letter. And this is what he says. Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.

Brothers, we remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor, prompted by love and your endurance, inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

[3 : 38] You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you. Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Amen. Amen. As we have read God's word together this morning. It's just a great opening to a letter that Paul sent to a church that meant so much to him.

It's overflowing with thankfulness to God for all that God had done in them and was still doing in the lives of individuals who had come to experience the very life of God in them, working through them, and of how they now were examples to others of what being people of faith should look like.

[5 : 04] Paul is so thankful to God for the faith and hope and love that has taken hold of them and changed them and set them in an altogether different direction.

He's full of thanks to God that as others see and hear for themselves the change that has taken place in these individual lives, that this introduces them to Jesus Christ, the one who has brought about the change in the first place.

So what we have here in this letter that Paul is writing to these Christians is that Paul is expressing his thanks to God for this local church that he both knew and loved.

He was a church that God himself had brought into being. He was a church that God was working in and through in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

He was a church who, as followers of Jesus Christ, were good representatives of Jesus Christ, simply because the way they talked and the way they walked made them look like Jesus Christ.

[6 : 24] My wife Janice and I, as I said, we spent 10 years in Brantsfield from 1978 to 1988. We came here a year after we were married, and while we were here we had our two children, Andrew and Joanna.

You as a church are a church that we grew to love, and Brantsfield will always have a special place in our hearts. Just as Paul was filled with thankfulness, as he thought about the church at Thessalonica, I'm sure all of us have that same sense of thankfulness when we think about Brantsfield Evangelical Church.

On an occasion like this, it's good for us to remember and to reaffirm our conviction that it was God. It was God who brought this church into existence.

That it is God who has led this church and sustained this church over the past 50 years. That it is God who is working in and through you to spread the good news about Jesus Christ.

That it is God who through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the power of his Holy Word has brought you this far and has kept you safe this far.

[7 : 58] I obviously don't know everything that has happened over the past 50 years. But what I do feel able to do this morning is to briefly mention some of the things about Brantsfield that were a huge influence on Janice and I during the 10 years we were with you.

And hope that my experience, that our experience is very similar to your experience. Whether this is from the past or from the present, whether it's for a long time or just a short time.

And I'm going to be very, very simple. All I want to do is take the word 50, you know you're celebrating 50 years. And mention five things relating to Brantsfield that I and hopefully you want to give thanks to God for over this weekend.

If you want to switch off and think about a different five things, all beginning with these five letters, then you can write them down and give them to me at the end. And we can multiply them perhaps a hundred times.

But these are my five and hopefully they will be your five too. The first, of course, and it's so obvious, but the first is fellowship. And this has been a recurring theme over the whole weekend, constantly mentioned about fellowship.

[9 : 15] And fellowship, of course, has a vertical dimension. It connects us with God, but it's also a horizontal dimension where it connects us with one another. We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's in the context of being part of a local church, we have the privilege to working out what fellowship means in practice. Really, the one word that defines fellowship is the word together. And it's when we are doing things together that fellowship exists, that fellowship becomes real, that fellowship becomes meaningful. And fellowship meets the most basic of all human needs, of having that sense of belonging.

And if there is anything that I hope that Brunnsfield still excels in, is that anyone who is part of this local church experiences a depth of fellowship and a depth of knowing that you belong beyond anything you thought possible.

It was Phil Hybels here in Edinburgh, actually, that described the church as being a place where you can know and be known.

[10:26] You can love and be loved. You can serve and be served. You can celebrate and be celebrated. And that's fellowship in a nutshell. And it's probably the outstanding memory that I'm grateful to God for when I think of Brunnsfield.

I is innovation. Now, by innovation, I simply mean change. But unfortunately, 50 doesn't have the letter C in it. In fact, as I thought about it, there is no anniversary you could have where you would have the letter C.

Unless, of course, you were thinking about an anniversary which was B.C., which, of course, was a long time ago. So I had to come up with another word. And, of course, the word is innovation. But it's really changed.

And I know that we thought about that a bit last night. But change can be difficult in any church.

Yeah, I recently heard of a pastor who was in a church. And they didn't like change at all.

And it took him three years to move the piano from that side of the building to that side of the building. And how he did it was he just moved the piano three inches a week.

[11:35] And eventually he got there. And Brunnsfield is a very, very different place from how it was 50 years ago. And this has come about as a result of change taking place.

The building, the leadership, the membership, the ministries, the music, the dress codes, the methods of communication.

They've all seen significant change. And some of these changes will have been relatively easy to make. And some of them will have been really, really difficult. What struck me about Brunnsfield when I came and when I was part of Brunnsfield, and I'm sure it's still true, is that as a church, you do understand your history.

And yet, in a remarkable way, you're not held prisoner to your history. That you do value traditions. And yet recognize that there has to be a better reason for doing something than simply because it's always been done that way.

You do appreciate the past, but you know that living in the past means that you end up facing the wrong direction. And I know that you don't need me to tell you that a big reason why you have been able to celebrate and to mark 50 years of God's goodness to you as a church is because of your ability to embrace change.

[12:59] And yet, at the same time, to remain united. Which brings us on to F for foundations. You know, many churches find it impossible to embrace change and to stay united.

And so the question is, why has Brunnsfield been able to succeed when other churches have failed? I think it's because, as a church, you're sure of your foundations.

In all the many changes that have happened over the past 50 years, there have been some things that haven't changed and won't change. And that everyone who makes Brunnsfield their home will clearly understand.

You know, I'm sure over 50 years, nothing will have changed as this relates to maintaining a passion for God's word. And for its relevance and its effect of communication.

Nothing will have changed as far as keeping Jesus at the centre of all you do. Nothing will have changed as far as pointing others to Jesus. Nothing will have changed as far as valuing everyone equally.

[14:10] Not because of what they can do, but simply because of who they are. Nothing will have changed as far as having a commitment to looking out for one another. Of giving one another the opportunity to discover and to develop the God-given gifts that he has given to each one of us.

These are some of the hallmarks that make Brunnsfield unique. These are some of the hallmarks that make Brunnsfield Brunnsfield. And it's what you all know, who you are.

And knowing who you are means you've got plenty of scope. Plenty of scope to go in any number of different directions. T for me is tears.

And you might think, well that's not a very good word to use to describe a church that you were part of for ten years. But you know, sometimes you can cry with laughter.

And I do hope that at Bruntsfield you still regularly laugh together. But it's also through being part of a close, loving, caring family church that I learned that following Jesus doesn't mean the absence of bad things happening to you.

[15:25] That following Jesus comes with no guarantee that life will be easy or successful or comfortable or even that life will be long. And it's through the example of other Christians as they faced disappointment and pain and suffering and loss.

That I witnessed firsthand what it means to trust God when you are going through the fiercest of storms. And that's a lesson that I will always keep close to me as I think of Bruntsfield and as I deal with life's issues.

And why is for youth? In yesterday's celebrations and today it is great to see the commitment you have as a church to children, to teenagers, to students.

And one of the many things I think that Bruntsfield can be thankful to God for is the huge influence that you have had over the past 50 years in the lives of literally hundreds of young people.

Many of whom are now scattered throughout the UK and beyond. There are so many who will look back to the time in Edinburgh and be able to say that it was here that they learned what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

[16:49] And that it was here that they made choices that shaped them into the kind of people they are today. And there are so many who are so grateful and appreciative and owe Bruntsfield so much that that is the reality of their experience.

Unfortunately, I'm at the age and this is just what happens with age, where really the only services I get to speak at are funerals.

And it's all about kind of marking the end of someone's life. And in being asked to talk about look back for a minute or two, I thought, well, I need to do a kind of funeral talk this morning.

But there are dangers of spending too much time looking back. You know, we can become nostalgic and actually end up thinking that the past was better than it really was.

One thing that I'm sure you know is that in the past Bruntsfield wasn't perfect. Today it's not perfect. As you go forward, it will not be perfect, not until Christ himself returns.

[18:02] It won't be perfect for as long as fallen, fallible human beings like you and I are part of a local church. But we can also look back and be kind of envious that a new generation is rising up.

I think the only thing that's wrong with the younger generation is that I'm not part of it. And sometimes I really struggle with that. But I do think that you have done well this weekend to look back in gratitude, but not to stay in the past.

And just as I finish, and I don't want to steal Graham's thunder as we begin to look forward. But here's just a verse to sum up where we have been and hopefully where we're going.

1 Samuel 7 verse 12. It's a great verse that.

It's a verse that Samuel says as looking to God and acknowledging God's help and goodness in bringing the people of God to this point in their journey. But Samuel is saying more than that.

[19:15] He's saying, you know, the journey isn't over. We've got to this point, but this is not the end. We're not finished. We're not done for here. That we have a future.

And that future which lies ahead of us, although it's unknown, but just as God has helped us to get to this point, so he will be with us in all that lies ahead.

And it's so good that so much of this weekend hasn't simply been about looking back, but about looking forward. And it's good that in a few moments, Graham will come and take us in a forward direction.

Well, good morning, everyone. What a joy it is to be here. It's been a delight over the last few days to meet so many new faces.

In particular, is Maggie here? Maggie, you're here. Benji, I've never met Benji. Excellent. But, hey, but lesson learned. Never have the audacity to stand up, Maggie, lest you too endure the wrath of the Shearer.

[20:18] Poor Tim. But there we go. What a great morning so far. And my name is Graham. It is a true privilege, and I want you to know this, to introduce myself today as the guy who's got the incredible joy of being the pastor of this church.

I love this family. It's great. I just want to spend the next 10 or 15 minutes or so. We've been thinking about looking back, just about looking forward. So here's the question I want to ask you as we kick off this morning.

What do you see as you look at Brunsfield? As you look out at our area, what do you see? Well, back in 2007, The Guardian ran a series of articles headed, Let's Move To.

And the idea of these articles was to highlight some of the reasons why people in the UK should move to a particular area. And lo and behold, 2007, one of the areas that they highlighted for Edinburgh was Brunsfield.

Let me just read what this article said. And in social media style, let me say that these views are not my own and they're not those of my employer. But here we go.

[21 : 31] So this is what it said. The Guardian. While J.K. Rowling and Ian Rankin hang out in posh Merkiston, the cannier Scott invests a few minutes down the road in Brunsfield.

Brunsfeld and Marchmont used to be solely the preserve of smelly students owing to their proximity to the city's universities. Though now, young mums and dads have cottoned on to the villagey field that Brunsfield offers.

So the article goes on to state that Brunsfield is an area with great schools. And it's an area with nice houses and flats. And it's an area brimming with wonderful cafes and bistros.

I mean, you don't need to be here long before you know that we have some fantastic places to eat in Brunsfield. Which presumably is the reason why Craig, a local Brunsfield resident, took the opportunity to write in the comments section of this article, I can't stress enough how lovely Brunsfield is, especially if you're like me and have a big belly.

Thanks for that, Craig. But what do you see as you look out at Brunsfield? I've been asking myself that question over the last couple of weeks as I've been thinking about this morning.

[22 : 45] As I've been on my lunch break walking up the high street. As I've been jogging home across the meadows. What do I see as I look out at Brunsfield?

And it's reminded me of the challenge that Jesus gave to his disciples in John chapter 4. If you've got your Bibles there, then maybe this is the opportunity to turn to John chapter 4 and verse 29.

If you don't have your Bibles, don't worry, just follow along on the screen. John chapter 4. The first thing to see about John chapter 4 is it's a chapter with a controversial context.

Jesus has just been and is in what Jews at the time considered enemy territory. So he's in Samaria. Controversy number one.

Controversy number two. What he's just been doing in Samaria. He's just been speaking to this notorious Samaritan woman.

[23 : 44] There's an episode of Jeremy Kyle just waiting to go off in John chapter 4. There's spice to John chapter 4. And this woman who Jesus has met has gone back to her village.

And as we see, say, in the west of Scotland, she's clearly one who's got the gift of the gab. Because she's gone around and she's told everyone that she's met about Jesus.

Verse 29. Inviting everyone that she meets to what? Come and meet a man. Come and meet a man who's told me everything that I ever did. Come and meet Jesus.

Come and meet the Messiah. This is her invitation. And so the people from her village, are they going to come? You bet they're going to come. Meanwhile, the camera pans to the disciples.

Where is their mind? What are they thinking about? Jesus, have you had something to eat? See, it's not just Craig from Brunsfield who has his mind on his belly. The disciples are thinking the exact same thing.

[24 : 45] Jesus responds, verse 34, effectively, boys, you need to get your priorities right. You need to get your priorities right. Verse 35. Don't you have a saying that it's still four months until harvest?

I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. Lift up your eyes, says Jesus, and see. The question is, when they lifted up their eyes, what did they see?

Well, most likely they just saw brown, empty fields. I mean, it's not harvest time yet. It's still four months until harvest time. But what does Jesus say? These fields are ripe for harvest.

It's ripe for harvest. Really? Brown fields? You can picture the disciples at this point, can't you? Getting back into their little group. Their minds previously occupied by bread.

Looking at each other and looking at Jesus and thinking, actually, is he the one that's a few sandwiches short of a picnic? Is he out of his mind? What is he talking about? The fields are white unto harvest.

[25 : 50] But lift your eyes, says Jesus. Lift your eyes. What do you see? What's on the horizon? Or rather, who's on the horizon?

People. The people from this Samaritan village responding to this woman's invitation, making their way across the fields to get to Jesus. Here is the harvest, says Jesus.

He's not talking about physical harvest. He's talking about soul harvest. What are the disciples invited to do? Verse 34. Join in the Father's work.

And what will that mean? It will mean two things. Firstly, that they are to get sowing. Telling everyone they come across about Jesus. Seeking to introduce everyone they come across to Jesus.

Seeking to invite everyone that they come across to put their faith in Jesus. Diligently sowing the seed. And expectantly spreading the word. And as if they needed a better example of that.

[26 : 58] And here is this woman of Samaria. The gift to the gab. Back to her village telling everyone. Come and meet the man, the Messiah. Get sowing.

Secondly, get reaping. Working to see those gospel seeds. Those seeds that others before them have planted. Come to fruition. Imagine these fields currently full of lost people.

This is the harvest, says Jesus. And so the question at this point in John chapter 4 for the disciples. Will they lift their eyes to see what God is doing?

Or will they just get on with their daily business? And like Craig from Brunnsfield, will they be occupied with filling their belly? As they look out, will they continue to have their horizons dominated by the way that the world sees things?

Or will they seize the invitation to join in the Father's work? Will they view what they see through the eyes of Jesus Christ? Subtext, will they have a heart for the harvest?

[28 : 05] So what do you see as you look out at Brunnsfield? As we think about looking forward this morning, the call of Jesus and the invitation of Jesus in John chapter 4 to these disciples is the same one that comes to us this morning.

In Brunnsfield and as we scatter from here to all the different circles, all the different people in our circles that are connected with this church family. All those people who don't know Jesus as their King, Lord and Saviour, will we have a heart for the harvest?

What will it mean to have a heart for the harvest? It will mean looking to our fields and committing ourselves to reaping and sowing. In our streets, in our neighbourhoods, in our stairwells, in our schools, in our universities, in our families, in our workplaces, in our coffee shops, in our hairdressers.

Wherever we meet people, to sow and to reap. And out of a love for the Lord, a deep love for the Lord, standing on his truth, telling people, what is it the hymn says, the old, old story?

Of this King Jesus, who came, who lived, who died, who rose, who rules, who reigns and who will one day return in glory.

[29 : 29] And who died to make a way for sinful people to be ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven and to come back to that relationship with the God who made them.

You know, we're celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness this morning. That is incredible. Can I just say at this point, it humbles me to come in at this point of the church's life.

It's incredible. But we're marking as well 50 years of people in this church reaping and sowing. Reaping and sowing.

And so as we, this generation of Brunnsfield, as we look back and we see the reaping and the sowing, the question for us is, will we continue to be a generation of this church marked by reaping and sowing?

As we're thinking about looking forward, we've got to ensure that looking forward involves always looking up.

[30 : 29] I've had so many conversations this week with people who look at the growth that's going on in this place by God's grace. A lot of people have commented, why don't we just knock the roof off and we'll get the balconies in use again.

You can see the building guys going, no heating bills, heating bills, heating bills. But wouldn't it be great, wouldn't it be wonderful if this place grew and boomed? And it didn't boom simply because people were moving to the area, to Edinburgh, and just wanted to join a church family.

As brilliant as that is, would it not be wonderful if this church booms? Because there were so many people who didn't know Jesus as their saviour who come to know him and put their faith in him.

This place goes boom. Will we have a heart for the harvest? So what do you see as you look at Brunnsfield's fields? What do we see?

See, Jesus calls us to lift our eyes and to see that our field is Brunt's field. And Brunt's field is a field white unto harvest.