

**Holy Cross, Knightswood**  
**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2013, Closing Eucharist**

*Genesis 1.26-28, Romans 8.31-39, St Matthew 28.16-20*

It's not very often, in our tradition, that a celebrant and preacher gets the chance to choose the readings – usually you have to grapple with what you're given, by authority, and that's that. But, for today's liturgy, I've chosen the readings myself and I hope that in the next few minutes you'll see why. And one other thing by way of introduction – last Sunday I celebrated and preached for the very last Eucharist to be offered here on a Sunday. That sermon was very much directed to the faithful remnant of Holy Cross and I'm not going to repeat anything of what I said there, at least not in the same words – preachers can't help repeating themselves anyhow – rather, this is not only for the people of Holy Cross but for all of us who have come to support and encourage them.

Let me say a few words about each reading in turn. First, the great, the foundational, affirmation from the first chapter of Genesis that we are made in God's image, all of us, without exception and without distinction of any kind whatsoever. This is the most basic truth about each of us. On this basis our faith and our religion encourage us to regard every human person as of absolute worth in themselves, precious to God and so worthy of respect from us. This is, as it were, and however challenging in practice, a non-negotiable position – whatever happens in life this truth about us abides. So, what I want to say is that each of the members of Holy Cross, and indeed all of us, remain precious in God's sight. Our sadness, our wonderings how we have come to this point, our anxieties for the future, our regrets for the past and for our loss, all of these are real and hardly to be avoided, but they are *not* ultimate – what is ultimate is that we are all human beings loved by God and made in God's image.

Now, I suppose that's a somewhat general, maybe even obvious, sort of point to have made. The readings from Romans and from St

Matthew's Gospel make it more specific to *us*, who are human beings with Christian faith, human beings who live and move and have their being, and their deepest identity, in Christ, in being constantly renewed in the image of God in Christ. Let's look at Romans first. Paul is absolutely clear – nothing, nothing whatsoever can separate us from the love of God for us which we find in Christ Jesus. Now, you might think, and you might from your own experience have pretty good reason to think, that St Paul is being rather too optimistic here – things *do* happen in life which can shake our faith in God's love and goodness towards us and towards all people. And for some people it's not just about being shaken, it's about losing that faith altogether. So, we *can* become separated from the love of God for us which is in Christ Jesus. I think many, if not all of us, know that and have some experience of that. But note a detail, a glorious detail – St Paul uses the future tense – nothing *will* be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That future tense isn't just a quirk of grammar, it's the heart of the matter. For again, it's not so much about what is our immediate experience, but about what is ultimate – and what is ultimate is God's unflinching love for us in Christ Jesus, even if from time to time, we find it hard or even impossible to see or feel that love. Maybe a time like this, the ending of the life of a Christian congregation. No matter, God's love for us is ultimate, not our fluctuating love for God.

And finally there is today's Gospel, the justly celebrated final verses of the Gospel according to St Matthew. Let me focus on the very last words: *and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*. These words are the climactic expression of a theme which holds the whole of Matthew's Gospel together – at the beginning we hear of Emmanuel, *God with us*, in the middle that where two or three are gathered in Christ's name there He is in their midst, and at the end this promise of his abiding presence. I want to end by paraphrasing these final words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: *remember, I am with you always, to the end of Holy Cross Knightswood and way, way beyond*.

**Amen.**