

**22 December 2015**

**The Rt Rev Dr Gregor Duncan, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway said:**

“St Augustine, in explaining his understanding of the Christian teaching of God as the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, says *When the question is asked what three? Human language labours under an altogether great poverty of speech. The answer however is given, three persons, not that it might be adequately talked about but to avoid silence.* Now, St Augustine was a great theologian and a great bishop and I am neither of these things, by a very, very long way indeed. But, whatever I am, I have just about enough wit to recognize the profound wisdom of what he is saying. We say something about important matters not because we pretend that what we say is adequate, or up to the matter, but to avoid silence, to avoid saying nothing at all.

That’s how I conceive my task today – to be honest with you, in many ways I would prefer to embrace silence and to allow the service alone to speak, but a preacher has to avoid silence. Yet what I say, I say because I believe it, but not by way of any attempt to explain why the world is as it is, and why God allows it to be as it is, not with any claim that what I say is adequate or anything like that. After all, I was merely an accidental bystander, an accidental witness of the immediate aftermath of the tragic events in George Square a year ago. And that is many, many worlds away from having been directly and immediately caught up in the terror and horror on the day itself and with having to live with its fearful consequences for the rest of my life. I did not lose my life, I was in no way injured, I did not lose members of my family or any of my friends, I did not have to bury the dead, to bind up the terrible wounds of the survivors, or to care for them beyond remembering them in my prayers. No one but those directly involved on the day and during the long days since can presume to know what that must be like, least of all a bystander and a preacher like me.

So, what to say? Well, I mentioned a moment ago that I was *merely an accidental bystander*. Accidental. What happened recently in Paris was not accidental. But what happened in Glasgow a year ago was an accident, we now know an accident waiting to happen, but still an accident, pointless, meaningless, a consequence of human folly and irresponsibility. And we also know that we live in a world, God’s world, nobody else’s, not only where people deliberately plan and execute evil deeds, but where such terrible accidents are always possible, always have been and always will be until God’s loving purposes for us and for the world are finally fulfilled.

Christians believe that the God who became flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, in Jesus Christ, the God of Christmastide, continues in our midst. God is to be found in the people who ran to help in George Square, who ran towards the mayhem. God is to be found in the efforts of the people who staff our emergency services. God is to be found in every act of compassion and of solidarity and of love, in every tear that is shed, in every moment of heart-rending grief, in the long winter of numbness and of pain and of loss. God is there, whether we can find it in us to find God there or not, or to believe that God is there or not. God is there to take our anger, our disbelief, our forsakenness, our outrage that the world is like this, if that is all we can do. And often it is all we can do, as the psalmists often show us. God is there in our efforts to reduce

the chances of such a thing ever happening again in our city. And God will be there when we fail and other, as yet unforeseen, accidents happen. God is there. God is here. God is *God with us*.

God is *God with us*. Many people of faith, and not only Christians, experience this to be true, even, maybe even especially, in the darkest times of life. We hope and pray that this service, in a loving if inevitably small way, and in the midst of suffering and heartbreak, may help to keep that perspective alive and visible, whilst fully realising that for those whose lives were torn apart in our city centre a year ago the grief and the loss and the questioning will continue.

In a little while the beloved names of those who died at 2.29pm at Queen Street on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2014 will be read out and candles lit for each of them. It happens that at this time of year, as Advent draws to its close and Christmas is very near, many Christians pray this prayer to Christ Jesus in the evening - may it be ours today and at any time of any day: *O Morning Star, O radiance of the everlasting Light, O sun of righteousness: Come, shed your light on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

**Amen.”**