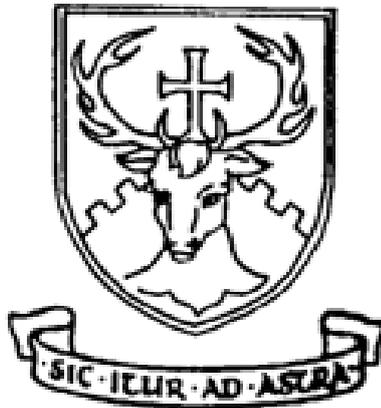


**CANONGATE KIRK  
THE KIRK OF HOLYROODHOUSE  
and EDINBURGH CASTLE**



**BBC RADIO 4**

**PRAYER FOR THE DAY**

**20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

**The Revd Neil Gardner**

**Saturday 20 May 2017**

Good morning. Today marks the start of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and in just under four hours time the Assembly Hall on the Mound in the centre of Edinburgh will be packed with commissioners and distinguished guests awaiting the fanfare of trumpets that marks the arrival of the Lord High Commissioner. There will be a gun salute from the ramparts of Edinburgh Castle too, for this is technically a state occasion: the High Commissioner, on this occasion Princess Anne, is formally representing the monarch and therefore to be treated as such. Whatever their usual rank or status, the monarch's representative for the week takes up residence in the Palace of Holyroodhouse and is officially referred to as His or Her Grace and addressed directly as Your Grace, a reference back to the days when that's how Scottish Kings and Queens were addressed. These days it's a rather old-fashioned term, grace. In a secular sense it can simply mean courtesy, while its more theological definition might refer to the kindness God shows to the undeserving. Either way, it seems particularly well suited to the cut and thrust of the Church's annual gathering, when amongst the plethora of reports and deliverances, motions and counter-motions on the agenda, grace is what's needed in our debates and discussions especially where differences and disagreements emerge. And not just in the Church but in the Nation.

*Loving God, whose son Jesus Christ was the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, help us to approach whatever challenges and opportunities await us this day with something of your grace, even when confronted by those from whom we differ and with whom we disagree.  
Amen.*

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017**

Good morning. Canongate Kirkyard on the Royal Mile has a number of graves of the great and the good who made a lasting impact in public life – the economist Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy, and George Drummond, six times Lord Provost of Edinburgh and the driving force behind the building of the New Town. But many of the gravestones tell a more private story of local families who lived and died without ever making a lasting impact on wider society but nonetheless did their bit quietly and selflessly. Take the Simpson family, for instance, whose gravestone reflects the loss of two brothers in the First World War, one of them in the Gretna Green train disaster in May 1915, the 22<sup>nd</sup> May to be precise, 102 years ago this very morning. Drummer George Simpson had joined the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, and was travelling with them to Liverpool to join a troop ship bound for Gallipoli, when their train collided with two others. Very quickly the old wooden carriages of all three trains were engulfed by a catastrophic fire and over 200 soldiers were killed instantly, among them Drummer George Simpson, aged 25. Remembering him today, and those who died with him, reminds us of all those who have risked and lost their lives on active service these last hundred years and more and of the debt of gratitude we owe each and every one.

*Loving God, we give thanks for all those whom you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence, and give thanks especially for those we have known, and whose memory we treasure. May we be taught to live by those who learned to die. Amen.*

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017**

Good morning. This year marks the 75th anniversary of St Margaret's Chapel Guild, a unique organisation focussed on the tiny twelfth century Chapel high up in the precincts of Edinburgh Castle. Anyone can join, as long as you are called Margaret and are willing to arrange flowers in the chapel when it's your turn. There are currently around 200 members, each with Margaret as their Christian name or middle name, and for the last 75 years they have been putting fresh flowers in the chapel every week. By 1942 the chapel was a rather neglected place, gloomy and forgotten while the war went on around it and the Guild was established both to revive it as a place of worship and to restore the place of St Margaret among Scottish saints. She was renowned for her selfless capacity to show kindness and compassion to the poor and the needy and every year funds raised by the Guild through donations are disbursed to a variety of charities of which it is hoped their saintly namesake would approve. Nearly a thousand years on, members of the Guild are still inspired by their motto to live in the light of St Margaret. But you don't have to be called Margaret to find inspiration in her example and to live in the light of her generous concern for others.

*O God, in whom sinners find mercy and saints find joy, we thank you for the example of Margaret, Queen and Saint, who from her royal throne sought only to serve your heavenly kingdom. Help us in our own day and in our own way to reflect something of her kindly light in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Amen.*

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

Good morning. Did you know this is Bermuda Day, this year coming just two days ahead of the start of the Americas Cup but an annual public holiday, when the residents of Bermuda celebrate the beginning of summer and take their first dip in the ocean? It's a bit soon for that in Edinburgh but it's just over a year since I visited Bermuda for the first time and enjoyed swimming in the sea as well as visiting some of the local historic features. One I particularly remember is what is known as the Unfinished Church, which from a distance looks not unlike some of our ruined Border abbeys but in fact is a shell that was never actually completed in the first place. It was commissioned in 1874 to replace the nearby St Peter's Church which was badly in need of costly repairs, but for one reason or another the repairs were eventually made and the intended replacement, already with its walls and tower in place but not yet a roof or windows and doors, abandoned. St Peter's still stands today and beautifully reflects the history and heritage of Bermuda. And not far away the Unfinished Church still stands too, and challenges visitors to look to the future in faith and in hope that we can each play our part in the ongoing work of the Church, work which is never finished.

*Loving God, you call us each to play our part in building up the body of Christ all over the world, from shore to shore. Show us where there is work for us to do today, and take us and use us in the service of your Kingdom. Amen.*

(An amended version of this script was broadcast to reflect the terrorist attack in Manchester.)

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

Good morning. One of the distinctive features of the interior of Canongate Kirk is the natural light that floods in through its clear glass windows and brings an unexpectedly bright and open atmosphere to the sanctuary especially on a sunny day. But it means we can see the world around us too, the homes and offices of those who live and work nearby, and the cars and busses transporting folk through the parish and across the city. Sometimes the Church can be guilty of looking inwards too much, but in our church we can't help but look outwards and upwards to those around us. It's a view that constantly challenges us to make a connection between what happens inside and what happens outside. Another of our distinctive features that adds to the brightness inside is the light blue colour of the painted pews, originally intended I think as a shade of heavenly blue. The combination of the light blue of the church interior and the view through the windows certainly helps to lift our hearts and minds out and up, towards heaven. Today is Ascension Day, when the Church recalls how Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after Easter, not to disappear forever but to be with us always, even to the end of the world.

*Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended into the heavens, lift up our eyes this day to be more aware of the needs of those around us. Lift our hopes and our hearts too that our discipleship in this world may be touched with the glory of heaven, and our lives be signs and promises of the fullness of the life to come. Amen.*

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

Good morning. Like nearly everyone who crosses the Forth Road Bridge by car or the Forth Bridge by train these days, I've been fascinated to watch the progress of the construction of the Queensferry Crossing, the new third bridge across the Firth of Forth now nearing completion. Some 2700 metres long it has three towers taller than 200 metres each and is technically a "cable-stayed" bridge built to a modern design using the very latest techniques and technologies. Now I'm neither a scientist nor an engineer and far from being able to understand the complexities of such a project, I can't even imagine how they knew where to start when the first squad turned up for work one morning by the shore. Clearly they knew exactly what they were doing, but I wonder if the disciples felt a little less clear the first morning after Ascension Day, when Jesus had finally left them and they were now on their own, looking to the future mindful of his final command to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations, and wondering how on earth to make a start. Yet step by step, bit by bit, the work of the Church began, as hands were reached out and bridges built. To this day the Gospel challenges us to reach out to those on the margins of our society, the homeless and the hungry, the neglected and the rejected, to follow the example of Jesus and to fulfil his command.

*God of all nations, your love is without limit and without end. Enlarge our vision of your redeeming purpose for all people and help us even today to reach out to someone in need and so build a bridge for your Kingdom, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*way. Amen.*