

SERMON 21st June 2026

Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illuminated by your Word, shine with radiance of his glory, that his love may be known in the world as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever. Amen.

Do you feel you are missing out? If you are Scottish, you might. After all, over the past ten days or so Scots have been partying. In Boston, in America, the Tartan Army, those Scots who follow the Scottish football team everywhere, no matter how badly it is playing, have been making friends with their good-humoured and high spirits while the football team plays its games at the World Cup. We, who are left back home, are not only missing out watching Scotland's football team play its first games in a World Cup for twenty-eight years, we are also missing out on a good party.

Moreover, there is more to a good party than just a good time. The Tartan Army's determination to enjoy itself despite, as our Gospel reading puts it, having to pick up the cross of following the Scottish football team, one of the lowest ranked team's at this World Cup is, in its determination to proclaim from the rooftops – as the Gospel puts it – is not only a joyous celebration, but it is also a rebuke, a proclamation, and good news.

Tens of thousands of partying Scots – mostly men – having a good time and endearing themselves to the locals is a rebuke to the maligned image of football fans as hooligans. Football makes up a large chunk of Scottish men's leisure time. Men commit almost all violent crime, and they do so mainly in their leisure time. That tens of thousands of men can assemble in one city and spend a week of alcohol-fuelled, passionate leisure time without their being any reported violence is a rebuke to anyone who thinks football fans are hooligans.

But, more relevant for our Gospel reading today, the Tartan Army's party is also a rebuke to FIFA, the governing body of world football and organiser of World Cups. In 2015 endemic corruption within FIFA was exposed. At the time, FBI director James Comey said, "Undisclosed and illegal payments, kickbacks and bribes became a way of doing business at FIFA." Officials were arrested, and the then president, Sepp Blatter, was forced out. "The defendants fostered a culture of corruption and greed," said Comey.

There has always been a whiff of suspicion about how World Cup host nations are chosen by FIFA, how money changes hands, and how murky the relationship is between FIFA officials and national governments. As the journalist Simon Kuper puts it in his book, *World Cup Fever*, the global balance of power is heading east away from western democracies and towards autocracies, precisely those governments that FIFA finds easier to deal with. With fewer journalists asking questions, and less law-abiding rulers, nations like Russia and Qatar have more chance of hosting tournaments.

But, despite the historic governance culture within FIFA of backroom deals and brown envelopes, still, in case such dubious doings depress us, the Tartan Army is showing the world that, as Jesus puts it in our Gospel reading this morning, we should not "... be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul."¹ Even if the body of football governance is suspect, the Tartan Army is very much keeping the soul of football alive. We should rejoice because if that ever changed, if the soul of football is ever polluted by something like the reassertion of hellish hooliganism, then we should be afraid of what that would mean not

¹ Matthew 10: 28

only for football but also for Scotland's national reputation. As Jesus said, "Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Meanwhile we should enjoy the Tartan Army's peaceful partying because it is not just a rebuke, but also a proclamation. When the Tartan Army "proclaim from the roofs", as Jesus encourages his followers to do, their love of the game it is a way of revealing what really matters; not kickbacks and collusion, but kickabouts and celebration. Although the Tartan Army's efforts might not amount to much in the grand scheme of things, still this is how people make transparent what is usually kept hidden. This is how people reveal the soul of a thing when it is otherwise encased in a body. And when it comes to things, to anything, to any institution, government, or person, bringing the soul of a thing into the daylight is the way that we begin to make transparent what otherwise remains hidden.

Making transparent what otherwise remains hidden is what Jesus encouraged his disciples to do in our Gospel reading this morning. "So do not be afraid of them," said Jesus, "for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."²

Here, we hear Jesus not just proclaim the kingdom of God as something that grows up from his disciples' example of love, kindness, and charity, but, more courageously, also something that grows in the soil of his disciples' resolve to confront corruption by exposing it to the light of transparency, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."³

The truth is that human frailty becomes most sinful when it is allowed to fester in the darkness behind closed doors where no one can see. Whenever corruption, greed, and particularly abuse, is exposed, it has almost always been a lack of transparency that has allowed it to spread in the first place.

Jesus said, "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters."⁴ Be like me, he means, and confront, challenge, and expose corruption, lies, deceit, and abuse wherever they lurk. Shine a light in the dark corners and reveal the truth no matter the cost.

And it can be costly. Corruption, greed, and abuse are often found in institutions that lack a culture of transparency, oversight, or a proper audit trail, but equally, perhaps more so, one of the most dangerous places where sin can flourish, corruption can crawl, and abuse can consume is behind the closed doors of our homes where the light of transparency struggles to penetrate.

That is why Jesus warned his followers that if they were going to follow him by exposing to the light that which prefers the darkness then they should be prepared to face what might feel more like the keen edge of a sword than the warm bath of peace. Shine a light into the darkness of some homes and you might well find that you, as Jesus put it, "...turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law..."⁵

² Matthew 10: 26

³ Matthew 10: 27

⁴ Matthew 10: 24 - 25

⁵ Matthew 10: 35

But, as costly as exposing the darkness to the light of transparency through rebuke and proclamation might be, that is the way of the Gospel, that is the way to grow a society in the fertile soil of good news, and so Jesus can say of the cost, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Indeed, in extreme cases, like the case of the Christian Alexei Navalny, the murdered Russian politician who challenged Vladimir Putin, a World Cup host in 2018, Jesus can say truthfully, "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."⁶

Christianity is often reduced to the gentle Jesus of Sunday School and children's addresses, but in our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus is a lot more courageous, confrontational, and self-sacrificing in pursuing good news than that. It is not easy to follow someone who shines a light and reveals what goes on in the darkness. We who are his followers, his students, may even feel that opportunities for us to equal our teacher's ability to do so are hard to find; we cannot all be Russian dissidents. So, perhaps, we should take a lesson from the Tartan Army. Let us remind ourselves that the way we behave can be a rebuke to those who misbehave, and that we can be lights in the darkness by proclaiming from the roof tops our faith, our faith that the pure souls of things can survive even the death of their bodies. That is good news for the whole world.

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.

⁶ Matthew 10: 39