

St. Giles' Church; the new stained glass windows.

You can't sneak a new window into a church without anyone noticing, ...so you've probably seen them by now; the larger, left-hand window commemorating the centenary in 1998 of the Victorian enlargement of St. Giles', and the right-hand window, just completed, sponsored by Peter Lawson in memory of his mother Laura, and his sister, Jean.

The two windows although done at different times, and for different purposes, were designed with similar formats; the richly coloured sky, the river flowing from the distance into the foreground over a waterfall, the trees, and the animals. But the symbolism is different, and Scriptural metaphor (which I can get extremely excited about!) is used to tell different stories.

The brief for the design of the 1998 window was to show St Giles' and her three daughter churches (St. Luke's, St. Paul's, and All Hallows.) The image of the waterfall seemed immediately right; God's Spirit as the water, flowing from the Holy Mountain, forging its way through field and bedrock, overflowing from one church through another and on again, sweeping leaves (only decorative at the sides of the window-the design taken from a window in the Lady Chapel-but becoming real in the water) over the sill into the church. (The stars bursting into the sky are also taken from a motif in another window.

The picture as a whole is straight from the Psalms, and in fact if you look closely you will see verses written in the painting of the grass and trees. Among them are; *'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.'* Psalm 42... *'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.'* Psalm 24... *'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.'* Psalm 23... *'I lift up my eyes to the hills-where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.'* Psalm 121... Just as in the world outside you can see God's word written right through creation... if you look.

The format for the 1998 window is echoed in the visual structure of the new window; strong colour at the top-deep blue and turquoise in the former, deep red, amber and yellow in the latter-the natural colours of both middle sections show landscape, trees, and the river flowing from the far distance, and at the bottom of both windows the water sweeps into the foreground.

Peter Lawson wanted this new window to be in memory of his mother and sister, and approved a design based on the theme of restoration and new life for those who grieve, and the promise of eternal life for those who believe, using imagery mostly from Isaiah and the Book of Revelation. Scriptures (taken from the New International Version of the Bible) are again written into the painting.

In this window, the river is the River of the water of life, flowing from the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It is a projection of holiness into the world, a provision of grace. *'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.'* Psalm 46.4 ... As in the 1998 window, it winds through the landscape. Here, the Lamb, Christ, stands at the top of the waterfall, traces of his blood mixing with the water. *'Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'* John 4.13... *'the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin.'* 1 John 1.7... *'For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'* Rev 7.17

The animals, (us,) the powerful and the vulnerable, are standing in the water and drinking from it, washed with the blood of the lamb, and receiving the grace to live together; *'The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat...for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.'* Isaiah 11.6 ... They are entwined in the vine, again a symbol of Christ. *'I am the true vine... Remain in me, and I will remain in you'* John 15.1,4,... *'A root will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him.'* Isaiah 11.1...

Central to the window is Christ, the link between Old Testament prophecy and hope, New Testament sacrifice and redemption, and Revelation's ultimate homecoming. It is on Christ, wounded and bleeding into the water, that the Spirit of God rests; *'This is the one who came by water and blood-Jesus Christ. For there are three that testify-the Spirit, the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.'* 1 John 5.6... *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted... to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve... They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.'* Isaiah 61.1-4... The trees by the river are these oaks, given new life through the Spirit to restore their lives. *'Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.'* Isaiah 52.9...

The design of the trees frames the view of the Holy City, the focus for Christ, and, should we choose to follow him, then ours as well. Written (very subtly) on the walls of the city are the verses; *'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'* Rev 2.1,3,4...

It has been an amazing experience working on these windows, never having done anything like this before, and it's due to the kindness, advice, (and tolerance) and sheer hard work of the experts at ME Stained Glass in Newark, especially Mary and John Hawcock, that they're in place now!

Thanks to everyone who's been involved, for giving me the chance to do it, and then making it possible.

Jennifer Bell