

Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 29th March 2020

To be able to access the links, go to the bottom of this page and left click on the date. This will download the pdf in a new window, then simply click on the links as indicated.

Welcome

Sadly, we cannot meet together today. However, we are able to worship together by using the devotions below. Last week we explored one of the parables Jesus told during what we now call Holy Week, that week between Palm Sunday and Easter Day. Today the theme of our worship is another of those parables.

Call to Worship: Psalm 34:1 & 3

*I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

Song [Come, now is the time to worship](#) *Click on the link*



Prayer of Praise, Confession, Assurance of Forgiveness and Lord's Prayer



Heavenly Father, we enter your gates with thanksgiving, and your courts with praise, for you made us and we are your people; you are a great God, a great King above all gods, unceasingly at work, bringing order from chaos and filling emptiness with life.

Enthroned in heavenly splendour you revealed the power of your love in the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Accepting our humanity, he showed us the way of salvation. Loving us to the end he lay down his life that we may live.

As we reflect on the past week we are ashamed of things we've said and done or failed to say or do and those times when we have let you down and not been worthy of our being called your children. We ask forgiveness, your healing and renewal.

We thank you and praise merciful Father, that in Christ your Son, our sin is forgiven and that your Spirit frees us to live as your sons and daughters, brothers and sisters together, members of your family.

With angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, we sing the song of unending praise, Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Blessing an honour and Glory and power be yours for ever.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus

Coronavirus has completely changed our lives as we seek to keep our distance. So, I was reflecting on what we might be able to learn from the challenges we face.

One aspect of the way the world works, that the Coronavirus has highlighted, is our interconnected relationships. What happens in one place can have implications for people right across the world.



The virus is also teaching us how we need to care for one another, particularly those who are vulnerable and unable to look after themselves. I am sure we have many personal examples of where we have seen this in action, from our Government at national level to individuals supporting neighbours in need. However, we have also seen a run on the shops; shelves are empty despite their being plenty for everyone. The virus is showing us that when we seek to protect ourselves from the negative effects of isolation it can have knock on effects into the community which bounce back to hit us again at a personal level. Buying up loads of toilet paper only creates panic buying of other essentials. Then we find we can't get some of the things we need. The situation highlights that some have nothing whilst others have more than enough.

Do spare a thought and a prayer for those who continue to work. In particular, the post men and women and delivery drivers. The demand for their services is rising but, as they go from place to place, they need to be very vigilant of the risk to themselves. Thank God for those who continue to empty our bins and keep the lights on.

This week we received the following from our local NHS Chaplaincy Service.

UPDATE FOR FAITH GROUPS FROM CHAPLAINCY DEPARTMENT IN THE MIDST OF COVID 19

The Chaplaincy Department is very much part of NHS Grampian and in common with the wider organisation we are very busy but coping well. We prepare carefully for these eventualities and all the plans that have been developed are in place. NHS Grampian staff are fantastic, and we are very grateful to them – whether they are in a clinical role or a support function.

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The Chaplaincy department continues to function but with some changes:

- Some Colleagues for age or health reasons are self-isolating.
- We are avoiding multi-site working on the same day.
- We are changing our focus much more to staff support, although still responding as best we can to patient referrals.
- We are trying to work by phone and virtually, so all our Community Chaplaincy Listening appointments connected to GP practices and Aberdeen Health and Care Village are now by telephone.

All the experiences of life go on in the midst of Covid19 and in the past few days we have had an emergency bedside wedding, a virtual blessing for a very sick child at home and baby blessings for early pregnancy and neo-natal loss.

Thank you for the concern and prayers of all the faith communities. We anticipate the level of activity is only going to increase and intensify in coming days, so we would appreciate those continuing prayers for NHS Grampian staff and for the Chaplaincy department in particular. As well as those prayers we would urge you and your congregations to adhere to all to the advice issued from NHS Grampian and indeed nationally.

*Mark Rodgers, Lead Chaplain ,
on behalf of NHS Grampian Chaplaincy Team 25th March , 2020.*

Pray:

Loving God, we are not people of fear, we are people of courage.

We are not people who protect our own safety: we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.

We are not people of greed, we are people of generosity.

We are your people God, giving and loving, wherever we are, whatever it costs, for as long as it takes wherever you call us.

Loving God, we place into your care all who are affected by coronavirus, through illness, isolation or anxiety,
May they may find relief and recovery.

May people vulnerable and the fearful,
those gravely ill and the dying,
know your comfort and peace.

Direct those who are guiding our nation and shaping national policies: equip them to make wise decisions.

Bless health practitioners and medical researchers. Grant them dedication, resilience, perseverance and protection.

In the name of Jesus, healer of the sick, we pray. Amen.

*Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference
and Church of England; Adapted*

Bible Passages:

We have two Old Testament passages today. The first, from Deuteronomy, is about harvesting. It teaches that we should be mindful of others' needs. I wonder what it teaches us today about gathering from the supermarket shelves. The verse from Proverbs forms a bridge to our New Testament passage.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (NRSV)

Proverbs 14: 31 (CEV)

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

If you mistreat the poor,
you insult your Creator;
if you are kind to them,
you show him respect.

Matthew 25:31-46 (ESV)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Song [When I needed a neighbour were you there](#) *Click on the link*



Looking a little sheepish

Jesus spoke these words just a day or two before his crucifixion. They are words about his return. The passage begins with, “When the Son of Man comes in glory”, recalling the prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14. For the faithful these are words of reassurance, given that the events of the next few days will see Jesus arrested and put to death. Although the faithful didn’t understand it at the time there will be resurrection. Yet Jesus takes them beyond all of that to what we call the End Time.

It is a passage of great hope. It broadens our horizons, helping us to see beyond our immediate concerns and worries, even beyond the events of the next few days and weeks. That’s probably not a bad thing today in these times of crisis and uncertainty.

It is a passage of hope because it helps us understand that Christ is in control. Since we look back to the cross, rather than towards it, we know Christ lives and sits at the right hand of God. We know that Christ will come again because he said so, and because all that he said would happen has happened. The cross is not the end, but the beginning - of the End Time.

The image of the sheep and goats is a simple one. Both were grazed together. At the end of the day the less-hardy goats were separated from the sheep in order to be kept warm through the night. Sometimes difficult to tell apart, the distinguishing feature is that sheep’s tails hang down and goats’ tails stand up.

At face value this teaching seems to imply that salvation is by good works; be nice to people and all will be well. That goes against all New Testament teaching. If it is possible to earn salvation simply by our own good works, by being kind to others, then Good Friday isn't so good and the death of Jesus completely unnecessary.

Three key points come out of Jesus' teaching.

The first is that Jesus will return. Mark doesn't include the sheep and goats in his account of the Gospel, but he does record Jesus speaking about returning and not wanting to find people "sleeping in sin" (Mark 13:35). Both Mark and Matthew are keen to stress that when Jesus comes again, he wants to find us being Christ-like to others. He wants to find us expressing the love of God to the hungry and the homeless, people thirsty, sick or in prison, to the people least in society, the forgotten, the marginalised and the voiceless, the kind of people that Jesus himself associated with.

Secondly, although, Jesus will come again, he is also already here. Jesus tells us that what we do for the least of people, or what we don't do, we do or don't do for him! That's a sobering thought.

Jesus had told the disciples that "I am in my Father, you are in me and I am in you" (John 14:20). Paul eloquently expressed this teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:19; "don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?". Jesus is here, right now, living within his faithful people be they the homeless street dweller, the sick person in hospital, the child who walks miles each day for water, the domestic slave trafficked across the world, the exploited worker, the abused woman, or the child soldier.

Some theologians argue that, because Jesus refers to his 'brothers' - "the least of these brothers of mine" (verse 40) - he is speaking about his faithful followers and how they are treated. In Mark 3:35 we read Jesus saying; "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." But how do we know who it is that loves Jesus and does God's will? It is not for us to decide who is a brother for we may find, as did Abraham that we entertain angels without knowing it.¹ Indeed, we are encouraged, as Paul writes. to "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2) We are to love others just as Christ loves us, imitating him, showing love of others just as he has shown love.

Christ's love is a sacrificial love, demonstrated on the cross, and so our love for others should be self-giving. That is what he wants to find us doing when he returns.

¹ Hebrews 13:3 and Genesis 18

This raises huge questions for us at this time of crisis about the way we demonstrate love, both to those we know and those we don't. What we do know is, that only by acting collectively and responsibly, by acting with love and concern for others, can we actually protect ourselves. It is interesting to observe how we are willing to make radical changes in order to protect the homeless, the elderly, and the sick in today's testing environment. It raises challenging questions as to how willing we are to make resources available, and how determined we are to care for, the poor and vulnerable in more normal times.

Finally, there will be judgment; but the image of sheep and goats is not one of a trial. Although it is sometime difficult to distinguish between sheep and goats, they identify themselves – tails down or up, showing Christ-like love or not.

Just to underline this, let us read Jesus' words recorded in Luke 6:46-49:

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and yet don't do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Anyone who comes to me and listens to my words and obeys them—I will show you what he is like. ⁴⁸ He is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. The river flooded over and hit that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹ But anyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a man who built his house without laying a foundation; when the flood hit that house it fell at once—and what a terrible crash that was!"

The parable is clear that the sheep and goats have grazed together with the same shepherd. They have both heard his voice but have responded differently. Verse 34 makes clear that it is the faithful, the sheep, those on the King's right, who receive the inheritance. These are the people who love Jesus as their Lord and Saviour *and* have responded positively to his message. Their response living a life consistent with Jesus' teaching and God's purpose. They are imitators of Jesus, demonstrated by their actions and service among the nobodies and outcasts of this world. The goats, those on the King's left, are those who have not responded to Jesus' message and his call to love. Their lives and actions are characterised by self-serving power consistent with hierarchical and exploitative worldly structures and customs.

Those were the powers that hung Jesus on a cross over 2,000 years ago and continue to nail him there today. The power of forgiveness, acceptance, welcome, hope and love is the power that raised him from the dead and enables each of us, with all our faults, to share in his resurrection and live in peace and harmony with God for eternity.

Song [Longing for light we wait in darkness](#) **click on the link**

This song, often sung in advent, is a prayer asking that God will make Us. his living voice for people in despair, bread for the hungry, and shelter for the vulnerable. It looks to the fulfilment of the Kingdom.



Prayers of the People for the People

Jesus said, "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."



Lord, we have seen you hungry in the dust of African famines, and in the food banks of our towns. Lord, we saw you thirsty waiting at the standpipe in the centre of the West African village. We have seen you drinking the polluted water in the puddles of shanty towns. As we stock our larders fearful that we may have to go a day or two without our favourite ice cream. Help us remember when we saw you hungry and thirsty. Bless those who grow food and those who try to keep the supermarket shelves supplied. You have provided more than enough for all, help us to share it and use your bountiful gifts wisely.

Lord we have seen you as an outsider; forced from your home in Syria and Israel, selling the Big Issue on our streets, pushed aside to sleep in cardboard boxes. We have seen you arrive with your caravan or rusty bus and told to move on for you are not wanted. We have seen your home destroyed in Yemen and Afghanistan. Help us to have compassion on all. May your living Spirit strengthen the resolve of people running from abuse, exploitation or war. Purify the corrupt and bring peace to the hearts of those who perpetrate violence.

At a time when we are going to such lengths to save lives from a virus help us bring peace in places where we kill, maim and destroy. We pray that all disputes and misunderstandings, opposing dreams and desires may be brought to a settled peace based on mutual respect and honour and a concern for each other's grievances.

Lord, we saw you lose all your possessions in the earthquake, fire and hurricane. We saw you arrested for shop lifting because your children needed shoes. We have clothes for weddings, clothes for work, clothes for school and sport and sleep. Help us to use what we have wisely and if someone asks for our coat may we give him our shirt as well.

Lord we saw you on the cancer ward, your hair falling out, we saw you in the psychiatrist's chair because of the voices in your head, we have seen the paralysis in your arm because of your stroke, we saw you walk miles through the bush to the nearest clinic. We remember before you, O God, those known to us who are sick, those who care for them that they may know the comforting presence of our Lord Jesus.

Lord, we saw you pressed into an army when just a child, sold into prostitution, shackled by drugs and other addictions. Lord Jesus, feed with the bread of life those who suffer exploitation, abuse or neglect and free them from the oppression that they experience.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the example of the faithful departed and pray that your church will show your love through its ministry to the needy. When the day of judgement comes may

we be fit to stand on your right hand with the sheep, for the Lord is our shepherd. May we hear you say, "Come... take your inheritance, the kingdom is prepared for you. For whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Benediction and Blessing

Christ the good shepherd,
who laid down his life for the sheep,
draw you and all who hear his voice,
to be one flock within one fold.

[Blessing](#) **click on the link**

One of the consequences of us not being able to worship together is that the church anticipates a fall in income. However, we will continue to incur costs, of insurance etc. There will be little financial saving to our not meeting, yet revenues could be severely hit. Please prayerfully reflect on this and, if you are able, continue to put aside your financial offering so that you can make your contribution for the work of the church when we next meet together. Thank you.

Thank you too if you already give by standing order or by bank transfer, that is much appreciated.