

Issue 6
27th April 2020

For these days ...

'I pray that your inward eyes may be enlightened, so that you may know how vast are the resources of his power open to us who have faith.'

Ephesians 1.18-19

Lectionary Readings

Acts 2,14a, 36-41

Psalms 116.1-4, 12-19

1 Peter 1.17-23

Luke 24.13-35

Hymns

153, 'Great is thy faithfulness'

417, 'Now the green blade riseth'

694, 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'

I popped to the supermarket yesterday to do some shopping and, at the checkout, was asked by the cashier if I had any plans for the rest of the day! I looked at her and we both laughed, 'no, not really!' Apart from some daily exercise and a weekly trip to the shops, there really isn't much else to do, is there?! Plans all feel a bit on hold at the moment and yet, as we enter week six of distancing, we are all finding new normals, habits and a sense of routine. So, I hope that's all going well for you and offer, for your perusal, our sixth newsletter as a way of keeping connected and helping sustain our faith in these days.

Prayer

Sometimes in life we skip,
Carefree,
Soaking up the sunshine.

Sometimes we stroll,
Taking our time,
Looking at the beauty around us.

Sometimes we run,
Headlong,
Not stopping to look behind.

Sometimes we plod,
Heads down,
Too heavy hearted to look up.

And sometimes, Lord, we stand still 2 metres apart,
Waiting and wondering what's going on
and when we will move forward.

Today, in and through all our journeying,
we remember that you are God.

God who loves us.
 God who wait with us.
 God who joins us on the way and meets us wherever we are –
 in our high days and dreaming,
 in our low days and worry,
 in our fearful days and impatience,
 in our sad days and sorrow,
 and promises to listen and keep company with us.

Faithful God,
 As we turn to your Word,
 We pray that the story of travellers on the road
 Would encourage us to lift our heads and open our eyes
 That we might recognise your presence with us in the ordinary,
 And that it might challenge us,
 To safely get alongside others,
 waiting with, listening to, and serving one another,
 So that hope might be born and embraced in every heart.
 So be it,
 Amen.

Reading

Luke 24.13-35

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going

to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Reflection

Walking – it's something that many of us take it for granted. Walking the dog. Walking to the bus stop. Walking to post a letter. Walking to and around the supermarket. Walking to work, to school, to church. At the moment though, walking has taken on a slightly different dimension because it's one of the few things that we are allowed to do and so many of us have been heading out every day, taking walks round the garden, the neighbourhood, the park, always leading us back to the place that we started.

On one of my walks with Grace this week, she took her toy telescope with her and decided to do a bit of bird watching. As she stood, aiming the telescope into the sky, I quickly realised that she was looking through the wrong end. Despite my suggestion that she turn it round the other way, Grace was having none of it - she could see! Of course, what Grace could see through one end was very different from the other and it got me thinking about our story today.

It's one of my favourite stories in bible and takes place on Easter Eve, as two of Jesus' disciples, perhaps married couple Cleopas and Mary, walked the road towards a place called Emmaus. No doubt they were filled with sorrow and confusion and sadness and just wanted out of Jerusalem, the place where their Lord had died and with him their hope.

It is on this journey that Jesus joins them, but they don't recognize him. Perhaps because the sun was setting and dazzling their sight. Or because Jesus' resurrection body was different from his earthly. Or maybe because they were just so consumed with grief that their focus, perspective, had shifted and they didn't dare to believe that Jesus might actually be alive. Whatever the reason, Jesus recognises them and walks and listens to them, asking them what they are chatting about.

They are baffled by this question. Is this stranger the only one who doesn't know the news? So they tell him about what happened on Friday, how their Lord, rich in love in word and action was arrested and crucified, and how they had hoped he would be the one to save them, but he was dead. And although there were rumours floating around about an empty tomb and him being alive, nobody had seen him.

Jesus keeps walking, but in the course of their travelling challenges them with a new perspective - turning the telescope the other way round, if you like, opening up the scriptures to them and inviting them to look and see. When their walk comes to an end and Jesus keeps on walking, they stop him, invite him in (for it is late) and ask him to stay; and he does. Then, in the ordinary act of gathering round a table, he breaks bread and as he does so, ***their eyes are opened and they see***. They recognise those hands that have welcomed, healed, embraced, invited, fed the hungry and were nailed to a cross. Then Jesus disappears from their sight.

Yet, you know, it is enough, because suddenly their heads have been lifted and their eyes have been opened and hope has been reignited, because their Saviour lives. Saving them not from suffering, but through it.

One of the things that I like best about this story is that it doesn't rush to the end. Jesus could have met them and in an instant said 'ta-da', it's me! But he doesn't! He meets them where they are – in their disappointment, grief, confusion and pain and walks with and listens to them. It is only when the time is right for them, does he offer a different perspective. And so this week, like the disciples on the road, may you know, that it's OK not to be OK. May you know that is OK to be angry and question and cry out to God. May you know that God can take it and bear it and will accompany you through it because God is love and knows what it is to suffer and question and hurt.

And, when the time is right may you lift your head up from the ground and see signs of hope, hear sounds of life and know that ***you were not and are not ever alone*** through the people who love and care for you and the God who walks with you, even closer than two metres, every single day ... whether you recognise him or not.

Prayer

God of life,
 there with us in all our travelling,
 today we thank you for those whom we are able to hug,
 those we are able to see,
 those we are able to chat to.

We thank you for the sunshine,
 For walks in the park and gardens to enjoy,
 And we thank you for family, friends, neighbours and all on the
 frontline,
 Whose caring, helping and serving are signs of love's presence,
 And are keeping us together,
 In body, mind and spirit,
 in these difficult times.

We pray for those who are ill,
 at home or in hospital,
 and for all who support and care.

May those taking steps towards recovery,
 know healing,
 and may those who nurse, reassure and rehabilitate –
 find encouragement and strength.

We pray for those struggling with isolation,
 Feeling frightened, depressed, anxious and alone,
 And for all who seek to assist and lift them up.

May those plodding along,
 discover peace and calm on the road,
 And may those who offer light,
 find renewal.

We pray for those who long for justice,
 The hungry, impoverished and displaced,
 And for those individuals and charities who strive for fairness,
 In a world where there is enough for all.

May those waiting and lamenting,
 Encounter solidarity,
 And may we all do our bit to rebalance the scales.

We pray for those who are grieving,
 Unable to be hugged and celebrate loved ones lives in the way that
 they would want,
 And for all those involved in funeral and bereavement care,
 Who seek to offer comfort and support.
 May the sorrowful,
 Be met with compassion,
 And the compassionate,
 Find strength on the road.

We pray for those who will die today,
 Without much-loved voices and faces by their bed,
 And pray for chaplains and hospital, care home and hospice staff,
 Who will hold hands and accompany them as they near journeys end.

May the dying,
 Be assured of your gracious welcome, love and mercy,
 And the comforters sense the peace of the risen Jesus by their sides.

God of life,
 In the silence,
 Hear our prayers ...

Silence

As we move into another week,
 We pray for ourselves,
 Asking for renewed patience,
 Perseverance and perspective amidst all that is perplexing,
 as we trust that you are with us,
 granting us enough hope to see that one day this will come to an end.

God of life,
 These are our prayers that we ask in the name of Jesus,
 Who taught us to pray together saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...

Closing thought ...

As always, please keep safe and do stay connected. I know that lots of you are phoning and caring for one another and that is really wonderful. Remember that I'm always at the end of the phone too if you fancy a chat and a change of voice. I'm doing my best to phone everyone on both congregational rolls and if you haven't heard from me yet, I'm on my way! Lorraine is back from furlough on Monday 4th and I'm looking forward to her return. Unfortunately, that means that it's Gillian's turn to be furloughed. Many Church of Scotland staff are experiencing this at the moment in a bid to address the financial situation caused by COVID-19. There is no doubt that our church buildings being closed will have a detrimental effect on our church finances, so please do 'save up' your weekly free will offerings for deposit when all of this is over and, if you are able, perhaps consider shifting to standing order. For now though, may God's peace and blessing be with you all.

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