

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
5th May 2020**

READINGS

³ He was despised and rejected by humankind,
 a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
 he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
⁴ Surely he took up our pain
 and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
 stricken by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
 and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
 each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.
⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
 yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
 and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
 so he did not open his mouth.
⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
 Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
 for the transgression of my people he was punished.

Isaiah 53:3-8

All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too.

2 Corinthians 1:5-6

In God's economy, sometimes the measure of our hurt is the measure of our success ... More often than not, God does not remove our suffering. He does something better: He enters into our suffering. The Lord Jesus enters into our pains and bears it with us. He is the God who is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Stacy Podrick

REFLECTION

As the lock down goes on into its seventh week, the novelty of the situation has certainly worn off! The death toll continues to rise towards 30 000, though, mercifully, it has slowed down. Talk is turning to the what happens next. It is clear that, while we may be in lock down for a few weeks yet, even when the lock down is lifted, there will still be many restrictions placed upon us because of COVID19. As people of faith, we are not immune to sadness and fear and frustration and all the other emotions that are filling our society at this time. What difference then, does our faith make?

From the start, God has never promised his people a life free from hurt. In fact, the challenges of faith have always led to difficult choices and often to suffering. The Christian faith is not an insurance policy against pain and hurt. Our faith is not about what we avoid, it is about who we share the journey of our lives with. We are promised that whatever we experience in our lives, we do not face it alone. God is with us. Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth, tells God's church that they are not alone. God is with them. As he is with all the of his people.

It's not just that God is with us. For we share the journey with one who understands exactly what it means to suffer. Isaiah looking forward to the coming Messiah, paints no wonderful picture of what God's chosen one's life would be like. He is someone well acquainted with suffering and sorrow. That is born out in Jesus own life. From the rejection he faced, from the betrayal of friends, through to the agony of the cross, Jesus knows what it means to suffer and hurt. So, when we say that God is with us, we are saying that God understands exactly how we feel, Jesus has been there.

These days of COVID19 are not a sign that God is not real, or that God has deserted us, or that we have done some wrong to deserve all of this. As broken as our world is, we share the journey of life in its light and its shadow with our loving God. Our loving God who knows and understands pain and suffering, despair and worry. Our God who, as our companion, offers all love, all compassion, all care, all hope. Our loving God who offers the promise that, as deep and as dark as things may get, we will not be overcome and we will never be alone.

As unsure as the future may seem, our loving God declares the resurrection hope, not just for Easter but for every day - Christ is risen, light defeats the dark, death is overcome with hope.



Prayer

God, broken on the cross
God, rejected
God, fractured and bloodied
God, acquainted with suffering
We call out to you.

In our need
We reach for you,
In the loneliness of isolation
We look for you.
In our pain,
Make us aware of your understanding.

God of love,
God of resurrection,
God of companionship
God of hope,
We give ourselves to you.

Be with us even in our darkest places
Make us aware of your arms around us
Whisper comfort to our fear,
Shatter distress with your peace which passes all understanding,
Infuse our days and nights with faith,
So that we might rest in you
Confident in your strength.

In hope Father we give ourselves into your care,
In Jesus name
Amen

