

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
23rd June 2020

READINGS

Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ. So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Colossians 3:9-14 (The Message Translation)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.

John 15:9-17 (New International Version)

A friend is more than a therapist or confessor, even though a friend can sometimes heal us and offer us God's forgiveness. A friend is that other person with whom we can share our solitude, our silence, and our prayer. A friend is that other person with whom we can look at a tree and say, "Isn't that beautiful," or sit on the beach and silently watch the sun disappear under the horizon. With a friend we don't have to say or do something special. With a friend we can be still and know that God is there with both of us.

Henri Nouwen

REFLECTION

As lockdown begins to ease and folk get the chance to meet with others, it's interesting to note who people turn to first. For most folk it seems to be family. For others it is friends. It seems relationships matter and perhaps now more than ever we are realising just how important it is to be connected to one another.

All of our readings today are about friendship and about relationship. From the very outset, being connected to one another has been at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus chooses disciples, not just for the purpose of teaching them and preparing them to take over from him, but also as companions and friends with whom he shared not just his mission, but also his life. When Peter's mother is ill, his friend Jesus visits her. He tells his disciples, 'I call you friends'. There are others within the circle of Jesus' friendship - when Mary and Martha are grieving their brother Lazarus, Jesus visits them.

Jesus' challenge and command to his followers is not just to preach the gospel, it also to make sure their interactions with each other are based on loving friendship. And that became one of the defining characteristics of the first Church – "See how these Christians love each other" was the admiration expressed by the Roman authorities in Carthage.

We do not live our faith in isolation, despite what has happened these last months. Part of the purpose and the character of the church is fellowship. I had a conversation with a colleague the other day and he asked what is different about Church just now? What is it we miss? We have online services, so each week there is a sermon and prayers and readings and singing, just like every other week in the life of the church. What is missing? We are not together. That is what is different about Church just now, we are not together as the family of God's people. We are not able to talk face to face, we are not able to shake hands, or to give a hug or a smile. We are missing being with each other, because that is what is at the heart of church life. We share our lives together in faith with sisters and brothers in our church family. We care for one another, support one another, help one another, pray for one another, seek the best for one another.

Perhaps then, when we do eventually meet again in Church, we should concentrate on making the most of our fellowship. In the meantime, let us not forget or neglect our fellowship. Let pray for one another. Let us make a point to phone a church friend every week. Let's support each other in any and every way we can.

PRAYER

Loving God,
Who is three in one,
Father, Son and Spirit in unity -
A perfect fellowship.

Almighty God
Who created all things,
Who walked in the evening in the garden with Adam and Eve;
You seek us out,
You call us and save us,
And invite us not simply to be worshippers
But to be family,

To be daughters and sons,
To call you 'Our Father'.

Our loving Father,
We offer you our praise,
And we bring before you,
Not just our own needs,
But remember all who are part of our church family.
We thank you for the joy of friendships,
And for the kindness of friends.

We ask that you grant us the grace and the compassion
To care for those around us.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen

