

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
19th October 2020

READINGS

We have had some absolutely beautiful days since I arrived in Aberdeen. We have also had some rainy and dreich days (although truthfully not too many yet!). Today is one of those days...the wind is howling off the sea, and the house we live in is whistling with drafts. It is one of those days where you might like to pull the covers up and lie in bed a bit longer. Yet, it is a day that makes me contemplate God's goodness and to dwell on the Lord's grace.

Without the rain, the green lush grasses and golden fields would be dry and brittle. The lovely roses in our garden would not be blooming without the drink they receive from the mist that falls to the earth. Water and replenishment are needed to have a fruitful and plentiful earth as well as a healthy and whole humanity. Though, some days I'd like to have a little less water fall from the sky!

Not only do they remind me of God's promises to care for us, but rainy days can be downright beautiful. I have often told friends back home that though it rains a lot in Scotland, when the sun comes out you appreciate it all the more.

There are many places in Scripture that remind us of the need for rain and how God replenishes the earth. The Psalms particularly reflect the hearts of the Israelites who were an agrarian people. They relied on farming for their existence and understood that God's provision for them was out of their control.

⁹You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.

¹⁰You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

¹¹You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

¹²The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

¹³the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Psalm 65: 9-13 (NRSV)

When we think of rainy times in our lives, it might not just be a physical rain that we are imagining. Dreich days, months and even whole years enter our lives when there are times of struggle, uncertainty, and even fear. We may feel as though that rainy day is never going to end, but as we come out of it we feel the heat and warmth of the sun again, we see the ways we have grown and been stretched, and we begin to adjust to the light. We find joy in the struggle, we find God in the fear, we recognize we were not

walking alone at all, but that we were being carried by the one who faced death on the cross, betrayal and the muck and mire of life so that he might embrace us fully! Our New Testament scripture in John 15:1-2 reminds us that God prunes us to shape us into the best version of ourselves. The Lord molds us in the darkest of times.

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."

John 15:1-2 (NRSV)

REFLECTION

Indeed, we need the times of growth and all the struggle that comes with it so that we can flourish in this world. There are, of course, hidden blessings of the rain, and every so often we find beautiful rainbows that are created right after the storm.

We all need the rain and the dark days to bring growth and depth to our lives. What sustains us is a Savior who has gone before us and will lead us when we feel lost and uncertain. Recent struggles with loss of jobs, illness, and fear over COVID-19 surges have perhaps left us feeling like it is one of the days where we need to pull the cover over our heads and stay in bed. However, what an opportunity it is to instead allow God to prune us, to know that the Lord will provide for us, and to find our rainbows as we see light peeking through these dark times.

We have been studying a book by Diana Butler Bass called *Gratitude* in an online Zoom meeting each Sunday. She opens her book by discussing why she (a renowned theologian, author, and professor) has 'flunked' Gratitude 101 as she sailed through life (Butler Bass, 2018, p. 8). It is a down to earth, honest facing of the lack of gratitude most of us experience. The first Sunday we had an animated dialogue about this quote she cites by David Steindl-Rast:

'Everything is a gift. The degree to which we are awake to this truth is a measure of our gratefulness and gratefulness is a measure of our aliveness.' **(Butler Bass, 2018, p. 22).**

Sit with these words for a moment. In the midst of your rainy days, are you able to find gifts of gratitude? Are you able to find ways you are growing and being stretched? If we look for them and ask God to shed light on these opportunities, we will find them! If you do not believe me, ask my husband Joe! He is doing the study with me, and it is always good to be reminded throughout the week of what we have learned (well, maybe not always!). As our wee girl Lydia was eating breakfast the other day, she decided she had enough of her Weetabix and decided to fling her cereal against the wall, the door and the floor. Our first reaction was not to think of this study on gratitude. In truth, I was not feeling particularly grateful, and then Joe said, 'Well, at least she is here with us, and she is a beautiful girl!' I then thought, 'Well, I am grateful she has all her limbs and can throw it with such force!' This example is a small illustration of how gratitude can change dark days into times of grace and celebration!

On your rainy days, consider what you have to be grateful for in the midst of the struggle, hold onto Jesus because he is pruning you, and reach out to church family so we can pray for you and carry one another's burdens!

PRAYER

Loving God,

We give you thanks for the rain and for the sunshine.

We do not like to be pruned but we know it leads to growth and renewal.

Help us to welcome both the joy of life and the struggles.

Help us to wait for the rainbow in the midst of the rain.

Grant us the wisdom to reach out when we need people to walk beside us.

Grant us the strength to allow others to help us carry our burdens.

May we bring sun and light to people in our lives who need it.

Thank you that you never leave our side.

Your love is more than sufficient.

Your grace knows no bounds.

In Jesus precious name we pray,

Amen.

