

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
5th January 2021**

READINGS

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in the deepest, darkest place, you are there with me.

Psalm 139:1-8

Keep your lives free from the love earthy, material things,
and be satisfied where you are
For God has said,
"I will never leave you;
I will never abandon you."
So we can be sure when we say,
"I will not be afraid, because the Lord is my helper. People can't do anything to me."

Hebrews 13:5-6

"Worry is like a rocking chair: it keeps you moving but doesn't get you anywhere."
"Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a centre of fear."
"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength."
"If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest."
"Now, I know in my experience that Jesus' light is stronger than the biggest darkness."

Corrie Ten Boom

REFLECTION

I will confess that I have started this week's reflection a couple of times now. Initially, I had planned something really positive for the start of the new year with all the promises of new beginnings and fresh starts. However, the news of rapidly increasing Covid-19 infection levels and hospitalisations which, in turn, has led to the reintroduction of lockdown restrictions, has very much changed the outlook for us all. Instead of reflecting on the hope that comes with the start of a new year, I find myself having to consider what to do when it seems like everything is going wrong and expectations seem crushed.

And yet, is my reflection going to be that different?

At the heart of our faith there is the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. A promise that is made real in the Christmas message of Immanuel – “God with who is with us”. The ‘God who is with us’ does not guarantee a life free from difficulty and troubled times, instead, God’s promises are that we will never be alone, and, that we will never be overcome.

While Covid-19 restrictions may have changed our plans for the immediate future, as Christians, our hope is not based on circumstances. It is not determined by the conditions under which we live. Our hope is based in God, whose love is guaranteed, whose welcome is assured, who is ever present. The same things I was going to say about a new year and fresh start remain valid – namely, we look forward with hope and with expectation. Our hope is in the Lord, the God who is with us always.

We face today and tomorrow and all the days that follow with an unshakeable, unquenchable hope.

With the call of faith in the new year comes the challenge to turn to God every day in prayer, to allow space in our lives each day to discover the presence of God with us, to give time day by day for hope to come afresh.

PRAYER

Loving God,
Immanuel
God who is with us.

Covid-19 seems to dominate our world,
To destroy so many lives and cast aside so many plans,
But the virus is not greater than you,
Lockdown restrictions limit our interactions with friends and family,
And impede our freedom,
But do not isolate us from you.

Thank you, Loving God,
For being ever present in our lives.
For never giving up on us,
Never turning away.

Grant to us

The courage to trust in your love and blessing, even when the days feel like failure,
The patience to take the time each day to find your hope,
The resilience to rely on you.

In Jesus name

Amen

