

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
2nd March 2021

READINGS

Spring has come and with it there are lots of opportunities for new walks! John and I chose a path near Dunnottar Castle the other day. It was beautiful and bright, and the path was fairly dry, so we weren't slipping in lots of mud. I had my eye on a particular part of the path that we did not walk on during a previous visit, because it was too muddy. This time I said to John, "Let's do it." Even though he was a bit reluctant (knowing Mom does not like hills he doubted I could keep up with him!), we kept going and enjoyed our leisurely stroll. Up ahead was Stonehaven's War Memorial that sits atop Black Hill. It seemed that the road was too steep for me, as my bad knees usually complain loudly if I am going uphill. But John encouraged me onward and we kept going. What beautiful coastal views, and it was so much fun to finally visit the place I had been looking at from down below for so long. There was nothing amazing about the memorial, but it was the sheer fact that I had done it and my son had encouraged me to reach my goals, that gave me such joy! As Scottish walks go, it was pretty wimpy, but for me it felt empowering. The best part was doing it together!

*Iron sharpens iron,
and one person sharpens the wits of another.
Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit,
and anyone who takes care of a master will be honoured.
Just as water reflects the face,
so one human heart reflects another.*

Proverbs 27:17-19

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-14

The knives in our kitchen became so dull, they could not cut anything. So, we bought a knife sharpener, and the knives became useful again! As Christians we sometimes grow dull, too. We become weary and forget the end game. Just as iron sharpens iron, so too are we called to sharpen one another as we strive towards what is ahead together. What a great wisdom saying we have in Proverbs 27, that still rings true today. A good friend, a loved family member, a challenging work colleague or an encouraging neighbour can all help us to look to the future. Each of us knows the time of restrictions ending is in sight! We have received the vaccine, or we are expecting it soon. We know there are days coming when we will be able to return to visiting our friends and hugging our extended family, and yet we are still not there yet. We have to operate on what we know is

coming. We can see it in the distance, but until we arrive, we must keep trudging on the path in front of us.

John's encouragement was just what I needed to keep striving to make it to the top of Black Hill. If he had not been there, I might have turned around or given up. But with someone there quietly encouraging me forward, I was able to rejoice in making it to the top. The beautiful scenery down below and the joy of accomplishment made the trip worth it.

There are many things we are learning during this pandemic. Not all of them have been beautiful and good. Some of them are challenging, such as the level of inequality in many societies. Not all people have the same access to good health care and the ability to stay safe from harm. Yet we have also learned we can work together and accomplish so much. We have seen neighbours pitch in and buy groceries for people on our streets that are struggling or who can't get out because they are shielding. In 1 Thessalonians we are reminded of the importance of being there for one another, building each other up and even admonishing each other when we need to do so. In this epistle Paul wrote to encourage the people to stay strong in the midst of struggle. Some wanted to give up and others had decided if the Lord was coming again, why should they keep working. Paul encouraged them to keep going and to be steadfast in their pursuit of their vocations while remaining at peace with one another. We, too, are called to keep walking beside one another even when we feel weary or a bit ratty. This pandemic has dragged on for almost a year now, and it is taking its toll on all of us. It is not surprising that we might feel a bit run down, cranky, or out of sorts. But we can spur one another onwards and bear with each other's burdens.

REFLECTION

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."

Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was an American poet and civil rights activist who spoke at a time when many women and African Americans were not able to make their voices heard over the din of privilege. She was able to capture the attention of the world and help us to ponder the gems she gave us, while considering the part we might play in the world. In this quote above she encourages us not only to give cheerfully but also accept gratefully!

Sometimes we only want to give but have a hard time receiving the encouragement of others. I was blessed on my walk to have my son encourage me. I am glad I was willing to admit I needed some encouragement. Too often we feel weak or vulnerable when we show others the chinks in our armour. Yet when we do admit our need, we often find joy in our weakness.

During this pandemic journey, some of us have had to accept help from others, and that is not easy. Yet we have been blessed in that offering. We have allowed others to find joy in helping us, and we have found a blessing in the receipt of help. Others of us are on the giving end, and we have been able to go out of our way to make a difference in someone's life, whether to encourage them with words or to serve them in some physical way, like dropping off groceries. Yet, if we ponder this quote, we realize how both the giving and receiving are needed for joy to be experienced and blessings to abound in our world.

Wouldn't it be great if after lockdown, when restrictions finally loosen, and these difficult days are a distant memory, that this idea of encouraging each other, sharpening one another, and helping one another, might continue?

What a great by-product of a difficult situation that would be! Let's start now, keep practicing giving, and also practice receiving. Let's practice encouraging and sharpening one another by helping each other to reach our fullest potential in life!

PRAYER

Gracious God,

Thank you for your kindness towards us in sending us people who are our encouragers.

Thank you for giving us people in our lives who sharpen us.

Help us to also assist others in their place of need by sharpening them.

Give us vision for the good that is ahead and how we can learn in this difficult time.

Empower us to be joy bringers and joy receivers!

Thank you for the poets in our midst who show us a different way and help us to reach for greater blessings.

Thank you for this difficult time of restrictions, as it has made us a better community.

Help us to never forget what we have learned.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

