

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
19th January 2021**

READINGS

GOD keeps an eye on his friends,
his ears pick up every moan and groan.
GOD won't put up with rebels;
he'll cull them from the pack.
Is anyone crying for help? GOD is listening,
ready to rescue you.
If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right there;
if you're feeling broken down, he'll help you find your peace.
Disciples so often get into trouble;
still, GOD is there every time.

Psalm 34:15-19 (The Message Translation)

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honour at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep."). No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 13:5-6 (The Living Bible Translation)

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 pain 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

How do you cope with adversity? What do you do when things don't turn out the way you hoped? How do you deal with the world when it feels like you have lost everything?

I have been thinking about those questions a lot over the days of lock down. As we see the numbers of those infected rise so high; as the number of people in hospital grows ever greater; and as the death toll from COVID continues to rise, I am sure that none of those people expected that it would be them. I am sure none of them thought that they would be in this place, that they would be part of the awful statistics of COVID, one of the faces behind the numbers report each day.

And it's not just COVID is it? It's all that other things that happen to us in life, that blindside us and knock us off our feet. Unexpected illness, unprepared for relationship breakdown, loss of a job into which we put our whole selves. And so many other calamities and sadnesses that strike our lives. As people of faith, how do we respond?

I am not sure that I have the answer to that question. I am not sure that there is even an answer or that in the face of another person's suffering I am the one to give it.

All that I can do is turn to God, to the character of our heavenly Lord as revealed in the pages of the scriptures and in the experiences of his people through the ages. There we see that our God is loving, our God promises never to leave us, never to desert us, never to turn away from us. No matter what, God is with us. His everlasting love is ours to call upon, his unending care is offered freely to us. Our sufferings are shared, our hurts are shared, our pain is shared. As big as the hurt upon us may seem, it is not bigger than our God, it cannot crush the love of God for us, it cannot demolish comfort God offers in our lives.

Whatever adversity you may walk through, you do not journey alone, and the one who is with you is infinitely able to comfort and care, to strengthen and to bless.

PRAYER

Loving God,
Healer and saviour
Comforter and friend,
Divine one who welcomes all,
Who sees what we cannot see,
And knows what lies ahead when we do not.

We cry out to you.
Filled with questions
Lost in what seems a sea of troubles,
We reach for you,
Knowing that you are reaching out for us,
Open armed
Ready to embrace, ready to comfort.

In times loss and in times of hurt

In times of doubt and in times of frustration
Make us aware of your presence
Reinforce us with your company.
In times of hopelessness
Fill us with the hope that only you can give
In times of doubt and fear
Fill us with the comfort only you can give
In times of brokenness and utter despair
Fill us with the love and the light that only you can give.

In Jesus name
Amen

