

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
16th February 2021

READINGS

As many of you will have heard by now, my husband Joe has been diagnosed with motor neurone disease. Today it is a full month since we have heard this news from the doctor, and prayer has truly sustained us. We are so grateful that there are many people in various parts of the world and from many different facets of our lives praying for us. We know many of you are praying for us as well. I cannot tell you how much your prayers mean to us! Prayer is powerful! It can lift you up when you are feeling low. It can usher you into the presence of God. Prayer is truly our lifeline to the Lord. We pray to respond in obedience to God. We pray to bring all our worries, questions, doubts and thankfulness to the Lord. We also pray to sit silently before the Lord and listen. There are many Old and New Testament Scriptures on the power of prayer, why we should pray and how Jesus taught us to pray. Today I want to share a portion of the Bible's teaching on prayer. We are called to pray and to include others in those prayers when we need healing. This Scripture was shared with us recently at a small Zoom prayer gathering where friends and family asked God for Joe's healing and strength for our family.

¹³ Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

James 5:13-16

There have been times in my life where I kept quiet about my need for prayer and suffered in silence. One time in particular, God spoke to my heart and wanted me to open up and tell others what Joe and I were facing. We had been struggling with unexpected infertility and were too embarrassed to share our prayer needs. I was a new pastor, and it was not something you "talked about" at church. It was scary, but we shared our prayer needs and God was so faithful. We were eventually able to become pregnant (in fact we have triplets!), but we understood we do not always receive the answer we are most hoping for when we pray and that many in our situation were left with empty arms. Since that time, we have been often compelled to share what we are going through with others. We are never above asking for prayer and know that even though we cannot explain how prayer works, we know that others praying for us has been such an amazing blessing and necessary part of our lives.

The outcome is what most often drives us to pray but prayer is so much more. Seeking God's will and the power of God to be displayed in our lives is what really compels us. Joining with others to see that end occur is a godly and wise decision. Praying for one another we carry each other's burdens, watch walls tumble down, and find a way to help each other through life's most trying situations.

The people to whom James wrote were no different even though they lived 2000 years ago. They had pain and sorrow, difficulties and needs for direction. They longed to walk

closely with God and often faltered. James is a wonderful letter, more a sermon really, that shares with the early followers of Jesus how to live the Christian life.

They prayed together and involved the church family with their needs. They prayed when they were ill, when they were struggling, when they needed forgiveness, and when they needed a deeper walk with the Lord. They used anointing oil which some ministers use in prayers of healing today. But the issue is not the way or how they prayed but that they did pray and joined together as the people of God aligning their minds and hearts in accord with people who were crying out to God. This kind of coming together takes unity and a communion that is the alternative to strife. The people to whom James was writing had several struggles with one another as the poor and the rich did not seem to mix well. James knew that when we are faced with the struggles of life, we are all the same and when we unite our hearts in prayer for each other there is much healing and unity that can result.

REFLECTION

Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things 'above all that we ask or think.

Andrew Murray

It is so important to believe by faith God can and will do miracles in our lives. We have seen it time and again in our lives and ministry work. Yet we always need to recognize that sometimes God's answers are what we do not expect and sometimes cannot understand until maybe years later, if at all.

If you need prayer, do not be embarrassed to ask for it. Talk to someone about it. Share it with me (jpizzuto-pomaco@churchofscotland.org.uk) or David (dstewart@churchofscotland.org.uk) or a trusted friend in the congregation. God has given us each other as companions on this journey of life.

As is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.

Martin Luther

As Christians it is our "business" to pray. They do not have to be fancy prayers or filled with big words. God knows our hearts and just wants us to come to him. Sometimes we come in silence to listen, sometimes we join with others and are encouraged to share our prayers with God together. Sometimes we pray even when no words will come and depend on the Holy Spirit to take our cries and bring them to God.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27 (NRSVA)

Sometimes prayers are written, sometimes they are silently shared in our hearts, sometimes they are spoken out loud, sometimes they are shouted at the top of our lungs...always our God hears our prayers.

I have found during my ministry that people rarely turn down a request to pray for them. Usually when asked, people who have no connection to the church always have needs that can be prayed for by God's faithful.

If you want to reach out to people around you, why not ask if there is something you can pray for them about. I have been hoping to help start a prayer email or WhatsApp group at South Holburn. If you would like to be a part of it, please let me know. Hopefully, it is something we can offer to others in this time of need and it will be able to continue long after the pandemic is over.

If you have ideas about how we can pray for our community and neighbours and friends at church, please let me know. I believe God wants us to pray continually and to bring him our whole hearts.

Thank you for your prayers for our family! Please let me know how we can pray for you and yours.

Julia

PRAYER

Loving and gracious Saviour,
We thank you for the many blessings you have showered upon us.
We thank you that you surround us with people who care for us.
Help us to really see and hear those people you put in our paths so that we can bring their hurts to you and intercede for your healing work.
We do not understand how prayer works but we know that you command us to do it. We know it is our love language with you. We are grateful that we can carry one another's burdens and are pleased to have the opportunity to sit at your feet and listen to you.

Give us strength to be courageous and give us compassion to be loving and available for people in need. Help us to take your love into our communities and pray for our neighbours.

In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.



Hope Gatherings – Wednesdays in February (Week Three)

We continue to meet on Wednesday nights at 7:30 (Virtual Vestry from 7-7:30 p.m.) throughout February to discuss how we can get through this latest lockdown and thrive in this time of isolation. We will discuss different themes as we move through the month that will help us to better cope with what is before us. This week we will talk about how creativity and service can help us to find meaning in this time of difficulty. We will spend some time reading about the gifts God has given us to be both creative and service oriented, and we will pray together.

- 1. We were made in the image of a creator God and are filled with creative potential.** Do you know that art and music therapies are ways that adults and children are helped through challenging times? God, who imagined the Milky Way, paints the sky at night, and cares for the snow drops and daffodils that bloom, has given each of us an ability to dream and create. It can sometimes feel silly when we are older to pick up a pen to draw, a crayon to color, or a paint brush to paint, but it can be relaxing. Have you ever tried it? That does not mean we need to create a masterpiece or have it look just “so”. Just having fun doing these things and designing shapes, coloring in a page, or putting whatever comes to mind on a blank slate can be a form of creativity we usually ignore. Listening to music or singing a song or playing an instrument we put down long ago can all boost our outlook on life and keep our minds engaged in positive ways.
- 2. Movement and writing are creative expressions as well.** Do you love to dance when no one is looking? Do you enjoy walking and exercise? These are all ways we can express our creativity as well. It is important during this time in front of computer screens and Zoom calls that we keep moving. We all need the sunshine too! When you see it out, put down what you are doing and go to the window to enjoy it or take a walk if you are able. It will lighten the mood and help you to have more energy. Writing is also a great expression of our inner thoughts and a wonderful way to process what is going on inside of us. Write what is on your heart, pour out a prayer to God, ask your questions and share your doubts. Write a letter to someone you need to speak to and are afraid to do so. Maybe they have passed on and you keep thinking about them. You do not need to send the letter to have it be useful to you. Just getting out your emotions and feelings through writing can make a big difference! If you are struggling with grief, depression or any mental health worry, there are people who can help you who are just a phone call away. Phone one of your ministers or use the links listed below to find help lines where someone is always available to listen.
- 3. Serving others is also what we have been created to do.** Jesus is continually telling his followers to care for people who are hurting, to go the extra mile and to go out of their way to be servants. He showed us his servant heart when he washed his disciples’ feet at the last supper, taking on the role of the least in the room. You might think how can I serve others when we are not supposed to leave home? There are many ways we can be a blessing to others, without ever stepping out of our door. Serving someone else gives our day meaning and helps us to see that God can use each of us despite our age, health, or ability. Start by thinking of small ways you can assist others. Make a phone call a week or every couple of days to someone you know is lonely or isolated and share a conversation. Write a note to a friend you have not seen in a while. Offer to take some groceries to someone who is shielding. Knit or crochet a handmade item for someone you know who needs some cheering up. We can all do little things to encourage one another and in so doing we will find encouragement to keep making it through this pandemic one step at a time.

4. **Find meaning in this time of difficulty.** We often want to know the reasons behind why certain events have unfolded. We are all on a quest for meaning and purpose in our life. Yet we often do not find solid answers and that can be frustrating. What we can do is learn from what is happening around us. We often fail to take the time to reflect on the life lessons that are unfolding and to consider how we can put what we have experienced into practice in the future. Why not use the extra time you have in these quiet days to seek the Lord's wisdom for your life? What are you learning about yourself and others during this time? What have you seen as positive societal outcomes during this challenge and what have you felt were actions, we as a society, need to correct? We are living in unprecedented times. Wouldn't it be a blessing to look back on your thoughts years from now and see what you have learned or to share them with future generations in your family? Try journaling, keeping notes in a diary or even drawing pictures and keeping newspaper clippings. There are many ways of telling the story!

Meanwhile, plan to come out on Wednesday night to discuss your thoughts on navigating this recent lockdown and how we might help each other to negotiate it. We will hear Scripture and spend time in prayer too! To enter the Virtual Vestry, go to the church's website (southholburn.org) and scroll down for the Zoom Meeting link. Below are a few helpful resources you might want to check out.

nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/

bbrfoundation.org/blog/how-stay-mentally-healthy-amidst-covid-19-pandemic?gclid=Cj0KCQiA6t6ABhDMARIsAONiYyw9zBiVBKegWys-JktX5k-Yknn2JssIMjirGp