

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
29th June 2021

READINGS

I have always wanted to see puffins in person. We lived in Fife years ago but never made it to the Isle of May where tens of thousands of puffins make their nests in the spring and summer. More recently, when we visited the Borders for summer missions with Scripture Union, we hoped to get to the Scottish Seabird Centre but never made it. So, when I heard there was a chance to see puffins near Stonehaven, I thought this was my chance to see them up close! Though seeing puffins is not really a high priority in my life, once I had the idea in my mind, it became a bit of a challenge. We have visited Fowlsheugh Nature Reserve once and Bullers of Buchan twice in the last month!

Have you ever had a goal that seemed silly such as this one? I would love to hear about it! Yes, my challenge was not at all God-related (though I suppose we could say I wanted to marvel at God's creation!), but it did occupy my thoughts on one particular afternoon. I will tell you about it in just a bit. For the moment, I want to focus on our thoughts and what Scripture has to say about how our minds influence our spiritual life.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 (NRSVA)

Paul reminds the Romans that their minds are influenced by the world and that how they live and what they long for will impact their worship. We can be transformed and refreshed in our minds by offering our lives to the Lord, or we can remain stuck in our old routines and habits that often pull us away from God and what he desires. You might be asking what this has to do with puffins, but do not worry there is a connection, just hang in there!

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete...

¹⁷'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

1 Corinthians 10:3-6, 17, 18

In Corinthians we see that Paul is again encouraging Christians to keep their minds set on Christ. If we think too highly of ourselves, we will be focusing on the wrong perspectives. The Corinthians often lost sight of the community, or body of Christ, and could only see their desires and what they were hoping to receive (whether it was with communion, use of spiritual gifts, or role in the community). In truth, that second time at Bullers of Buchan I

was thinking mostly of myself. My son Josh had come on the walk with me because he knew I did not want to go alone. All I could think was maybe those puffins were just over the next cliff. My thoughts were not focused on the whole picture, but on the me who was sitting on the throne of my life in those moments.

Sometimes we do ridiculous things because we have a challenge in our minds. It was my 52nd birthday, and I think I was out to prove that I was able to make it along the path and by the cliffs without tripping to find the elusive puffins.

My desires were not about what God wanted for me that day but what I needed to prove to myself. Thankfully, it was not a warm day and we arrived back to the car without a sunburn, Josh made it out of the uncut grass without too many scratches on his legs (since he was wearing shorts). I only fell once...and thankfully was able to get up! The hungering I had was to seek out adventure and, in my mind, perhaps something better than reality. Yes, puffins are pretty cool but are they really all 'that', and what would I think once I actually saw one in the wild?

Josh and I had some good conversations along the way, and I began to realize that what we imagine is often quite different than what exists. We build ideas up in our minds only to be disappointed, and yet when we focus on the right ideas, when we center our minds on Christ, we find a satisfaction that cannot be met elsewhere.

Psalm 107 reminds us that God is the ultimate one who can meet our needs and quench our thirst. Will we fill our minds with good things and God-given tasks, or will we search after pleasure that is fleeting?

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.^[a]
Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.
Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.*

Psalm 107:1-9 (NRSVA)

REFLECTION

Now back to my puffins story...I never did see one. I did climb a fair bit of hills and saw some absolutely gorgeous scenery. I did receive a reminder of how I often allow my desires to get away from me. I am not the center of the universe, and I lived even though I never saw a puffin on my 52nd birthday. Over the course of my life, I have had to reign my thoughts in on numerous occasions. Perhaps you have done so, too. Do I really need to watch so many movies on Netflix? Do I need to see 'Call the Midwife' the night it comes out (really waiting until December is just not any fun!)?

I am overstating my desire to see the puffins, but I am being serious that the battle for the mind is real. We all have our areas of weakness. Do we really need that extra piece of chocolate or glass of wine? Do we need to indulge in that science fiction book or puttering in our garden until the wee hours? These ways of spending our time are not wrong in themselves (and certainly puffins *are* really cute and a beautiful creation of God!), but we need to ask do we allow certain thoughts and activities to crowd out our thoughts of God and his will and way? Do we focus on ourselves rather than the people in our lives?

Years ago, I cut back on my movie watching, and my friends thought I was crazy. For me it was a way to escape reality and avoid dealing with life. Yet when I changed my watching habits and was more careful in my selections and about how I spent my time, like Psalm 107 suggests, I was satisfied and felt fuller by spending more time with God.

Missionary Amy Carmichael wrote:

*'And shall I pray Thee change Thy will, my Father,
Until it be according unto mine?
But, no, Lord, no, that never shall be, rather
I pray Thee blend my human will with Thine.*

*I pray Thee hush the hurrying, eager longing,
I pray Thee soothe the pangs of keen desire—
See in my quiet places, wishes thronging—
Forbid them, Lord, purge, though it be with fire.'*

What would it be like if we allowed God's desires to fill our lives? Little by little we would be drawing nearer to the one who loves us like none other. God desires for us to avoid looking to the next cliff to find the elusive puffin, but rather to look around where we are in the moment and breathe deeply in the goodness that he has provided us.

Hurry, longing, and personal desire fill us with a thirst for more and greater and larger activities and accomplishments. Yet when we sit before our God, we recognize that just being in his presence is enough to refresh us. Living into God's plans for us may look different than we expect. We may never find our puffins, but we may have wonderful conversations with our children and opportunities to sit and relax and soak in the creation around us!

Perhaps each of us will evaluate the cliffs we try to scale and the dreams we chase and ask are they just for me or is God the driving force behind them? When God plants

dreams in us, he bears great fruit in us through them. When we long after the things of the world the battlefield of our mind often leaves us feeling empty and wanting more. My prayer is that each of us would always ask where God is trying to refine us. What can I relinquish so he can replace it with God-sized dreams?

*With Love,
Julia*

PRAYER

Loving God,

Take my stubborn heart and far-flung dreams and bend them to your desires,

Show me how to live for you and to be renewed in the refiner's fire.

Show me what comes from your heart and plant it in the soil of my life.

Give me faith to see more than I can imagine and discipline to reign in that which runs away with me and does not provide true rest.

Thank you that you care enough to take it slow and give me unending opportunities to find your path.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

