

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
10th August 2021

READINGS

What will you miss about the past 18 months once we return to more normality? We might be quick to say, 'not much!' There have been many struggles over the last year-and-a-half. We have lost loved ones, jobs, freedoms, routines, and so much more. Most of all, we have lost much direct contact with other people.

As my diary has filled up over the last few weeks, I have learned that it is going to take some time to get used to being 'busy' again. It was truly suffocating at times to not be able to go out and visit or attend to pastoral work that was in person. Yet there was also something peaceful at times. The lack of in person meetings in the evening was something I did not miss at all. For me meeting on a Zoom call is much more flexible and not as stress producing as travelling to attend a meeting in person. For some folks, the idea of a Zoom call is overwhelming. I have enjoyed learning new skills but have also been frustrated by them at times. I would hate to have to show you the bloopers of my weekly worship recording! They are not pretty. Yet for all the difficulties there were many blessings in the past year as well.

One of the biggest blessings for our family has been to meet all of you at South Holburn. Though I wish I could have met you all in person, I am grateful that we have been able to connect in all kinds of different ways (phone, Zoom, person, recordings, writings). I have learned we can create a community in so many wonderful ways. A community is not just the people we see in front of us. They are the people who walk beside us, pray for us, and challenge us.

Soon I will be moving on from South Holburn to my own parish. I want you all to know that I will always treasure our year together and that I will continue to pray for you and will consider you a part of my community.

Christian brothers and sisters are bound by the Spirit and through prayer. We share a common faith and direction. It is amazing to me how often our lives cross not just once but multiple times. Having lived in Scotland before, I love when I connect up with someone who I knew 30 years ago just by chance because we happen to be serving the same God! I also love staying in touch with people we knew back when we were just youngsters! It is awe inspiring to see how God leads our lives in different directions but with the same aim.

I am going to be sharing the scripture below in worship (online and in person) on the 15th of August: Philippians 1:1-11. I hope you will have a chance to read it before then, so I thought I would focus upon it for our devotional this week.

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:3-6 (NRSVA)

Something that Joe's illness has taught us is the importance of sharing our words of thanks. We are not promised tomorrow, yet so often we think we will call that person or send that note of thanks the next day. It does not take much to say 'thank you,' and it costs no money, yet our society often skips over it. Perhaps because saying 'thank you' can be humbling as it involves admitting we need others. Perhaps saying 'thank you' acknowledges we cannot make it through life on our own. As Christians, we are called to share one another's burdens as well and to pray for one another. As we have journeyed together this past year, I want to thank you for letting me share in the ups and downs of your life and for carrying my burdens too.

When we discovered Joe had a debilitating and terminal illness we were stunned and far from home. We had never anticipated facing something this challenging our first year back in Scotland. But many of you made it so much easier for us. You prayed for our family, you wrote notes and asked how we were doing. You asked how you could help and offered assistance. We are so grateful that when you knew us very little, you became our home away from home. Thank you!

Paul felt a bit like that with the Philippians as well. He had spent a few years with them and then life moved on to other ministries and places. Then he ended up imprisoned and near the end of his life. He never needed Christian fellowship more, but he was cut off from it by having his movements restricted. Yet the Philippians, his beloved friends and partners in the gospel, sent him Epaphroditus who became his constant companion and who brought needed supplies for him during his imprisonment.

The Philippians and Paul had a warm relationship, like family, even though they did not spend long periods of life together. Paul wanted God's best for them and remembered them in his prayers daily. Throughout this warm letter he encourages them that God is still at work in them.

I want to encourage you as well. I see the fruit of your labours and see how hard the road ahead looks for all of churches. I know it can be easy to become discouraged. But do be aware that, just like the Philippians were told that God would finish the work he had started in them, the same is true for South Holburn. There are so many wonderful ministry avenues to explore. Ministries to children and youth, families, students, people in care homes, retired folks and all that God has envisioned. As you walk the road before you, God will make the path clear.

*⁷How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*

*⁸Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.*

*⁹Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

*¹⁰The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;*

*and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.*

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NRSVA)

During the exile into Babylon, the Israelites were depressed and broken. They wondered if their lives would ever be the same. Would they sing again in the temple? They despaired their situation changing. Yet Isaiah speaks a message of hope. The people would again sing that their God reigns! They would again go into Jerusalem for festivals. Even though their holy place was in ruins, their faith was intact, and their God was still in control.

Though the pandemic has levelled many situations and has changed the nature of the church, it has not disrupted our faith. If anything, it has strengthened it! We have survived the wild ride of the years 2020 and 2021! There will be more to come, I am sure. But having faced this unknown giant with grace, we can be certain that there is not much that will frighten us.

God has a purpose and a plan for the Church, for our lives and for South Holburn. Though there may be signs of brokenness and destruction in our national church and land, we can be assured that the name of the Lord will continue to be praised!

REFLECTION

“In the Christian community thankfulness is just what it is anywhere else in the Christian life. Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think we dare not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must constantly be looking forward eagerly for the highest good. Then we deplore the fact that we lack the deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experience that God has given to others, and we consider this lament to be pious. We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.’

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community

We are not a perfect community, but we are family. Each one of us are a part of God's family and the Lord has given us the ability to work together and to work for one another's good. We have been given a great challenge. Together we might see not the potholes but rather find God's vision that sees the whole picture. Though we are walking through a rough spot in the Christian church just now, none of it surprises God. I am grateful to have walked a portion of this road with you, South Holburn church and I am grateful we will

continue to be family together. Let us find the way to move forward in faith, trusting that God is not done with us or with the Church of Scotland or with Christianity in our land. There fields are white with harvest, and we have the prime chance before us to love and show mercy to all the people God brings within our sight.

'Fellowship is a place of grace, where mistakes aren't rubbed in but rubbed out. Fellowship happens when mercy wins over justice.'

— **Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?***

Let us together be people of mercy and may we be a fellowship of grace, loving God, loving one another and loving the people before us.

With love and gratitude for an amazing year of fun, service and learning; my prayers will continue to be with you.

Julia

PRAYER

Thank you, God, for times of fellowship and coming together...even those this past year that have not been in person.

Thank you, Jesus, for Christian family who walk beside us through the ups and downs of life.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you keep us bound in Christian ties that we might continue to pray for one another and cheer each other on in this journey of life.

Lord, we pray that you might give your church more life and breath, that we might live more fully for you with joy and mercy.

Thank you, God that you are not done with us yet!

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

