

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
21st June 2022

READINGS

We despised him and rejected him—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we didn't care.

Yet it was *our* grief he bore, *our* sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, for his *own* sins! But he was wounded and bruised for *our* sins. He was beaten that we might have peace; he was lashed—and we were healed! We—every one of us—have strayed away like sheep! We, who left God's paths to follow our own. Yet God laid on *him* the guilt and sins of every one of us!

Isaiah 53:3-6 (The Living Bible Translation)

“When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.’

“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

“Then he will turn to the ‘goats,’ the ones on his left, and say, ‘Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
Sick and in prison, and you never visited.’

“Then those ‘goats’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?’

“He will answer them, ‘I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.’

“Then those ‘goats’ will be herded to their eternal doom, but the ‘sheep’ to their eternal reward.”

Matthew 25:31-40 (The Message Translation)

REFLECTION

There were once two brothers who lived on adjoining farms. Sadly, they fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in their 40 years of working together. It began with a small misunderstanding, and grew into a major difference, and finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning, there was a knock on the older brother's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there that I could help with?"

Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my younger brother! Last week, there was a meadow between us, but he took his bulldozer and dug a small river between us. Well I'm going to do him one better. See that pile of old wood? I want you to build an 8 foot high fence between us. Then I won't need to see his place or his face anymore."

The carpenter said, "Show me the nails and the tools, and I'll do a good job for you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he left for the day. At sunset, when he returned, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. The carpenter had built a bridge that stretched from one side of the river to the other, with handrails and all!

And his younger brother, was coming toward them, his hand outstretched. "You're quite the man," said the younger said, "after all I've said and done. Instead of turning your back you made a way for us to come together"

The two brothers met in the middle, and shook each other's hand. Their rift was mended. They turned to see the carpenter leaving. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

As our reading from Isaiah reminds us, Jesus does for us what the carpenter does for the brothers in our story. He builds the bridge between us and God which was destroyed by sin. He gives himself to create and restore our relationship with the Father when he takes on himself the cross

And in turn he asks us to be God's bridge builders in our communities. For, when you and I come to the end of our days, just remember this: God won't ask what kind of car we drove, but He will ask how many people we helped get where they needed to go. He won't ask how big our house was, but He will ask how many people we welcomed into our home. God won't ask what side of town we lived in, but He will ask how we treated our neighbours. And He won't ask how many fences we made, but He will ask how many bridges we built.

Where are the bridges you need to build in your own life and relationships? And where are the bridges you can help others to build?

Amen

PRAYER

Lord God,
Highest of heaven,
Most holy, most glorious, most splendid.
You are the ultimate bridge builder.
You create our way back to you.
In Jesus, sin is crushed
Its consequence paid in full,
No longer need we be distant,
No longer need we fear to draw to your holiness,
You have built the bridge,
You have created the way
For your prodigal children to return to you embrace.

So we can praise, and we can rejoice,
For we can come to you,
Know your blessing for ourselves,
Know your peace whatever our circumstance.

Lord God,
Remind us to build our own bridges.
When relationships have broken down,
Where angry words have been spoken,
Where awful actions carried out,
Enable us to find the way to build forgiveness
Enable us to find the way to restore relationships,
And by our actions bear witness to your unending love.

In Jesus name,
Amen.

There will be no weekly devotions during July and August. Weekly devotions will return in September in a slightly different format. If you know of anyone who would like to receive our weekly devotions when we restart in September, please ask them to email the minister, Rev. David Stewart DStewart@churchofscotland.org.uk

