

COMFORT in North Carrick

**Caring Observant Mindful Friendly Obliging Responsible Tactful
Providing comfort to the people of North Carrick at a time of crisis
Sunday 14th June 2020**

The Rev Chris Blackshaw is a Methodist Minister and was appointed Pioneer Farming Minister by the Church of Scotland in 2018. He writes:

The terrible virus that we are all currently in the grips of has changed many lives beyond recognition, but for farmers life pretty much continues as normal. Farming is an isolated existence where you work each day, often from dawn until dusk, going days and sometimes weeks without seeing anyone, so in reality nothing has changed for farmers, that is until they leave the farm and go to the shops or local agricultural merchants. Then social distancing and keeping a cow's length from people kicks in.

But of course, farmers are no strangers to this sort of isolated existence. Nearly 20 years ago many farmers were affected by the terrible foot and mouth disease and had to self-isolate in an attempt to keep the disease off their farm. The rest of society were not affected and it had little impact on them, so this is the first time that people truly realise what isolation is and what farmers went through in 1967 and 2001.



Those experiencing isolation for the first time find it hard and it has been really difficult staying away from friends and family. The major challenge for farmers is when they go to livestock markets. Only buyers are allowed into the market and sellers have to drop their animals off and leave. But the retired farmers are really feeling the isolation because going to the market was probably their weekly social activity and for some the only time they left their farm.

I have had to rethink the way I carry out my ministry, because going to the markets and visiting farms was so pivotal to my work. But I believe out of all situations in life, good and bad, there is always something that we can learn and benefit from. I have found a new way of making contact with farmers, I phone them up and I have had some amazing conversations, which have led to invitations to go and visit them when life returns to normality. I also find that I am making connections with more farmers than I would usually do so this is very positive.

My role is developing and we are hoping to visit other markets in the southern part of Scotland and as far north as Stirling. But of course, we need to have help to do this and so we are looking for volunteer chaplains who have a good knowledge of farming and who have a desire to serve the Lord in this ministry.

The article above appeared in the most recent issue of St Oswald's Church magazine. If you would like to receive this magazine by email, please contact Matthew at secretary@stoswaldsmaybole.org.uk

From Rev Dr John Lochrie, Locum minister at Crosshill and Maybole Parish Churches



The words of the first verse of Psalm 98—“O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he has done marvellous things” - have been the inspiration of hymn writers for generations.

Hymn writing is not a simple task. There has to be a marriage between words and music. It is not enough to find a good tune, nor is it a case of expressing an aspect of faith in appropriate words. The two have to fit together and make sense and be singable by congregations. Having a catchy tune when the words are doggerel is a trap all too easy to fall into and no doubt examples will come to mind.

From time to time we hear demands to make our worship more up to date and of course worship has to be relevant. That does not, however, mean that we should be abandoning the rich heritage of hymnody that has been handed down from past generations. We ought not to forget that much that has been handed on is what has stood the test of time. A look through some of the older hymn books will reveal many items that have long been cast into the dustbin of history for the good reason that it was realised they were not really worth preserving. No doubt in time the same will be said of at least some of the modern hymns of the present day.

A lot is being said about the benefits of these weeks of lockdown. One clearly has been the relative silence, the result of so much less traffic on the roads. Those of us fortunate to live in the countryside are much more aware of birdsong for example, though it can be a mixed blessing when one is wakened at 4 in the morning by birds singing their heart out!

It does remind us of the importance of listening. Hymns are not just for singing they are meant to be heard for they should have something to say. If they do not then they should be set aside. Just because a song is new does not mean it is necessarily good.

What the Psalmist was urging was new songs that reflect the good things that God does. They should speak of God’s marvellous doings and remind us of his mercy truth and salvation. We are to make a joyful noise unto the Lord as we sing his praise, but above all it has to be a fitting offering to the Lord.

Two hymns, one modern, the other from around 1700, put it rather well. The first is “Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.” as are His glory and power.

These are the things our hymns must acknowledge and as the other shows they have to reveal an aspect of “the hidden love of God, whose height, whose depth unfathomed no one knows”

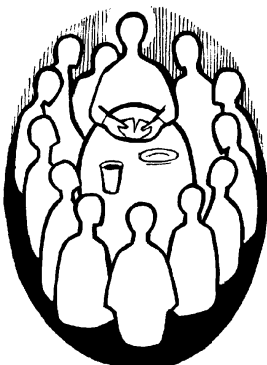
If they do not they are of little value no matter whether they have a ‘nice’ tune or not.

Be Still (WT 19)

**Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here;
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear:
In Him no sin is found,
We stand on holy ground.
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here.**

This Sunday Christian Churches, in their various traditions, celebrate, through bread and wine, the offering which Jesus made of his own body and blood to sustain and nurture us on our earthly journey.

The first time Jesus declared that he himself was the bread that came down from heaven, rather than the manna provided in the desert for the Israelites, caused consternation among his listeners. Today there are still different interpretations, but there is a consensus that we celebrate and continue this special event which took place at the Last Supper. We are commemorating Christ’s great act of love on Calvary. As a community of believers, it is a way of encountering Christ individually and together as one.

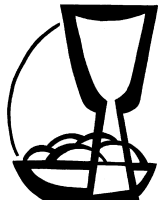


St John devotes a whole chapter of his gospel to record Jesus’ teaching about our participation in this important event. We are warned that unless we do participate, we will not have eternal life, because from it we draw into ourselves the life of Christ, here and now. It makes sense that just as we need food for the body, so we need food for the soul. The miracles of the loaves and fishes foretold this greater provision of spiritual food.

In current times family and neighbours are providing a great deal of support to those in need or isolation and this is very much welcomed and appreciated. It is becoming more obvious that there is a growing need for mental health support as well. In the same way, we also need spiritual support, as we are unable to meet for communal worship and sharing Holy Communion. Happily modern technology enables us to share online services and, as in this Carrick Comfort newsletter, to come together in an unprecedented manner of sharing our common faith in Christ.

Ellen Hawkes

From Marguerite Hunter Blair



We celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi this weekend, the most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever;

and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' John 6:51-58

The Last Supper with Jesus and the disciples was the first Eucharist. Ever since that meal, the church has gathered regularly in his name, to do and say what he did and said at that last supper—taking bread and wine, blessing both, breaking the bread and giving both for all of us as disciples to eat and drink. In calling on us to take and eat, to take and drink, he is inviting us to live with him as Christians, to live by his values, walk in his footsteps and love and care for one another.

'Doing good does you good' read the heading in the paper on Thursday. Scientists have observed that just two hours of selfless pursuits a week helps keep the doctor away. People who volunteer to help others are less likely to die early and more likely to have a positive outlook on life than those who do not. Harvard University scientists suggest that volunteering should be prescribed by doctors as a "way of simultaneously enhancing health and society".

Doing our best to follow in Christ's footsteps many of us know this already. Doing good can be a simple smile or a rainbow picture in the window. When we look at the fantastic efforts that friends, neighbours, and essential workers have made in recent weeks, we know that doing good can also help save lives and support community wellbeing.

Every time we gather for the Eucharist, we find ourselves once more in that upper room with the first disciples, being invited to live like Christ. Accepting this invitation commits us to doing our best for others, and as the scientists have observed, it is good for us too!

When this is all over I don't want things to go back to normal. When the coronavirus pandemic has passed, I don't want a return to normal. Not if normal means that we fall back into our old way of living. Not if it means that the health care workers, whom we clap as heroes every Thursday, return to being underpaid and undervalued. Not if those in low paid jobs who were surprised to find themselves raised to the dignity of key workers, like shop assistants, carers and cleaners, are once more considered unimportant. Not if the air that we breathe, which has suddenly become healthier and less polluted, and the world that we live in, that is now being valued as our common home, return to being exploited, abused and scarred by human activity. The virus has in an instant brought our old way of life to a halt. Now during lockdown we have time on our hands to think and reflect about how things were, and to plan and to prepare how we want things to be. The virus makes us aware of the fragility of our humanity, and of how men and women everywhere, rich and poor alike, are all vulnerable. It makes us conscious of how our strength as a global human family is when we are all united together. There have been acts of selfless dedication, of health care staff risking infection to care for the sick. There have been acts of human kindness with people looking out for their elderly or housebound neighbours. And there have been parents giving that gift to their children which they are often denied, the gift of their time.

We now appreciate that those who add real value to our world are not necessarily the rich and the well paid, but those who enhance our world and our lives by their acts of care and compassion. Do we really want to return to normal? The virus has forced us to change our lifestyle, but are we so addicted that we will revert back to bad habits of old; are we just longing to clog the roads once again with our cars, to fill the air with our exhaust emissions; are we dreaming of that flight abroad or that Mediterranean cruise, and never mind the CO²? Our common home requires us to change our way of life. Our sick planet needs the same care as our sick bodies. If we can unite against a virus, can we not unite against other problems that inflict our world. Such as poverty, which decimates so many lives. Covid-19 has killed many, but many more die throughout the world every year due to hunger and malnutrition. In a world where there is food aplenty for everyone, not everyone is fed. And our society, which was becoming more and more focused on the individual and narrow self-interest, has suddenly been reminded of the value of community, of being concerned for others, of working with a common aim for a common good, of being united with our fellow human beings as part of a greater humanity. We will all be glad to see the lockdown over. It places so many restrictions on our lives that it will be good when it is lifted. But it will be even better if, when it is lifted, we replace the normal of the past with a new vision for the future, an appreciation of what is really important in life and a determination to ensure things are never the same again.



A thought for today from Lynne at the Parish Church

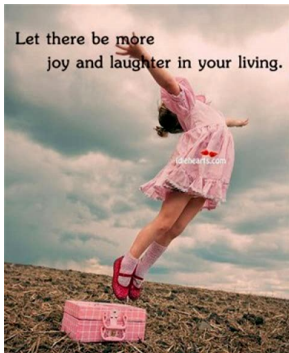
The lectionary readings for this Sunday are a strange mix, to a certain extent. And some have additional verses that make their interpretation easier or clearer. I decided to focus on one of these as it seems so relatable to my life here and now.

Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7) A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah.

We don't often hear of people laughing in the Bible – its stories are not habitually humorous, but I found today's story about Sarah laughing particularly poignant. The first passage tells how, whilst offering hospitality to three strangers, Abraham is told his wife Sarah will bear him a son. It should be wonderful news. But both Abraham and Sarah are old, very old and well past childbearing and even child-rearing ages.

So, Sarah laughs. It seems to her, I suppose, a cruel joke. She has no children. Her thoughts of motherhood are of an impossible dream. 18Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? 15But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.' Sarah feels caught out when she laughs, she is embarrassed and afraid – no doubt she finds it difficult to believe that she can bear a son and yet she does. The miracle happens.

216Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' 7And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet, I have borne him a son in his old age.'



I wrote earlier that I could identify with Sarah's story for two reasons.

Firstly, I love to laugh. I think humour is often the best medicine. If we can make light of our troubles or be distracted even momentarily from our worries, by comedy or something seemingly absurd then I believe that is a good thing. As Christians, indeed as human beings, our life should not be all doom and gloom. Although there is much that needs to be taken seriously.

Secondly, this week past, saw us commemorate World Empathy Day (yes, it's a thing) and as a woman past her childbearing years I can understand Sarah's laugh. It would be a laugh or cry situation. Sarah has no doubt over the years wept over her barrenness. Lamented her lack of offspring and tried to come to terms with it. So, someone saying she was going to have a child now, so late on in life would be farcical to her. And painful.

Yet nothing is too wonderful for God to do. He accomplishes the miraculous every day.

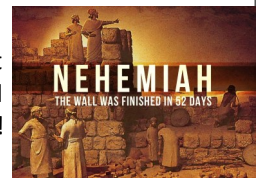
As we reach our 12th week in lockdown, and look forward to, and worry about, the easing of restrictions, or contemplate another six weeks of shielding and isolation – I pray that God will give us something to laugh about – and that we will continue to believe in His miracles.

BROKEN WALLS

In recent days, the lockdown is becoming more relaxed, albeit slowly and cautiously. A television reporter has said that when we emerge from this, there will be much rebuilding to do—in the community, in the country and in the wider world.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he saw before him a sight of utter devastation. Due to the unfaithfulness of its citizens to God, King Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed the city, taking its people into exile. The massive city walls lay in ruins. Nehemiah was charged by God with the rebuilding project. In Nehemiah 2:11-20, he went out by night to survey the ruins for himself. It was nothing less than a disaster, and a major undertaking would be needed.

Nehemiah quickly put a plan together, and then made his intentions public in stirring tones: "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and suffer derision no more!" Having gathered his builders and craftsmen together, he set about this enormous task, completed, we are told, in a mere fifty-two days! In seven weeks the city walls were rebuilt, and Jerusalem's civic pride was restored!



We live in a world of "broken walls". There are broken lives all around us— people with little or no hope for the future. There are broken churches, places of Christian worship, once vibrant, from which "the glory has departed". In government, in business, in education and in the public services, much "brokenness" exists—a fundamental disordering that requires attention. The whole world is a "broken" one, with broken families, broken relationships, broken homes and broken hearts, and a high level of "brokenness" has been predicted when this pandemic subsides.

As Christians, we are called to undertake the remedial work. The question is: where do we start? We start where Nehemiah started. Nehemiah was astute, perceptive, energetic and enthusiastic. Above all, he was a man of prayer. Nehemiah started with prayer: through prayer, he came to the conviction that his project was God-inspired and God-blessed and would come to a successful conclusion. "Strengthen me for the work, was my prayer".

Human skill and wisdom alone will not mend the "brokenness" in society, and in the wider world. We need the practice and the power of prayer, believing with the poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of". Prayer is a powerhouse for good. That was Nehemiah's starting point. That must be ours. Through prayer we tap into the divine energy that helps bring about the healing this "broken" age so urgently needs. If this sounds far-fetched in the 21st century, do as Nehemiah did: try it, and see!

The Rev. W. Gerald Jones