

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 5th July 2020

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

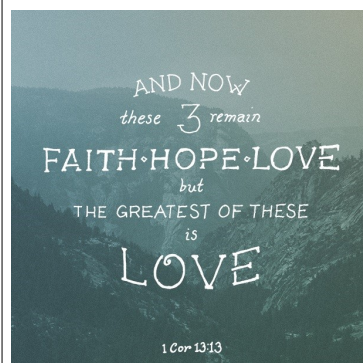
The Authorised Version of the Bible is known for its beautiful use of language. One of the best known passages is the hymn in praise of love that is found in the 13th Chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. When it is read aloud the words simply flow from the tongue, truly making a joyful noise to the Lord.

We tend to think of these verses as a hymn in praise of love, but in many ways that is to ignore the most important thing Paul has to say in this chapter. It really reaches its climax when Paul says, "when I was a child I spoke and thought and acted as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things". These simple words convey a potent thought about faith, especially when they are taken with other word of Jesus. He said unless we are like a little child we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To see the connection we have to be clear what Jesus meant. What matters is being childlike, not childish.



In many ways a young child is a sponge for knowledge. Children are almost learning machines, constantly absorbing new ideas from their experiences. This is how it should be with faith for most. The sudden Damascus Road experience is not something given to many. For most of us the seed of faith is sown early in life and slowly develops from there. We know that children see things differently. By and large they accept without asking too many questions which tends to make what they believe and how they believe different. But adults do ask questions quite rightly and find that asking questions and seeking answers leads to development in so many ways. This is, or should be, as true of faith as of anything else.

It should never cease to amaze us how God is able to bring out from even the most familiar passage new things every time we read it. We ought never to cease exploring the great riches he offers through faith. Our spiritual lives must grow and develop as much as our physical life. It is often said that we never stop learning. Neither should we stop growing in faith. In both Ephesians and Philippians Paul urges his readers to strive for that maturity in faith that is measured by the fullness of the stature of Christ. He recognises that he has to press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of him (Philippians 3:12), and so he presses on towards the goal of God's call.



In the coming weeks we hope to see much relaxation of the restrictions we have been enduring since March.

It is clear that for this to happen we must all exercise great responsibility, as much to protect ourselves as to protect others.

Let us never forget the calling of Christ that we should love one another as he has loved us. In the end it is the mark of a mature faith that we are able not just to attempt this, but to do it.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

At this moment, many people are in the grip of nervousness and anxiety. Our young people are anxious as to what qualifications they might obtain, while others are concerned about their future employment prospects. Others are worried about their businesses, their finances, and other ways in which this pandemic has impacted on them. Some fear a second wave of infections, while many wonder what the 'landscape of life' will be like when all restrictions are relaxed.

In St. Matthew's Gospel (6: 25-34), Jesus bids us to 'Take no thought for the morrow', or, as another translation puts it:

*"Do not be anxious about tomorrow;
tomorrow will take care of itself."*

We must not assume that Jesus is in any way advocating a thoughtless, careless, reckless attitude to life, where the future is of little or no importance. Jesus is telling us how to treat that innate nervousness, anxiety, fear and needless worry that may ruin our living in the present.

This is not an invitation to disregard the future, but a call to live in such a way that we are not overwhelmed in the present by unnecessary worry. In short: Jesus beckons us to live one day at a time.

God has given us life.

If God has given us life, we can trust him to sustain us throughout its course. Just as God looks after the birds and flowers, so he will look after us in such a way that worry will not "add a cubit" to our earthly days.

In the unfailing providence of God, nervousness, worry and anxiety are pointless, and betray a trust in him who is our refuge, our rock and our everlasting hope.

We need to learn, or re-learn, the art of living one day at a time!

This is difficult to acquire, for we live in an age of constant pressure to make plans for the future, and pursue them with every fibre of our being. In many and various subtle ways, we are forced to look ahead and order our lives in a way that often goes beyond the sensible and the responsible, and without regard as to whether our goals and intentions can be fulfilled. There is so much pressure to organise for the future, that our wellbeing is often adversely affected in the present.

If we could live each day as it comes, our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing would be so much better. It is repeatedly Jesus's advice that we should be able to take the demands of each day as it comes—without being "cumbered with a load of care" as to what the future may bring.

*"One day at a time sweet Jesus
That's all I'm askin' of you.
Just give me the strength
To do every day what I have to do."*

These words are from a popular country and western-style Christian song, written in 1974, and recorded by more than 200 artists. Its message is simple but sincere. Take one day at a time, and leave the future to God's unfailing providence.



Let us put these words to good and lasting effect in our own lives. Let us cast off the mantle of nervousness, anxiety and fear that threatens our appreciation of the present, and by focusing on today, nourish our body, mind and spirit in a healthy way - even in a pandemic!

*"Do not be anxious about tomorrow:
tomorrow will take care of itself."*

The Rev. W. Gerald Jones

The gospels give us a picture of Jesus as one who lives, loves and works among ordinary, humble people. These are the ones, not the learned and the wise, most open to his message and who are able to accept it as coming from God.

These are the ones to whom he will reveal his Father as their Father. The message of Jesus was, and still is, aimed at the places where human life exists in all its complexities, failures and struggles.



In our present circumstances, it is among those most suffering and struggling that Jesus would be found. As his hands and feet, the Christian community here in Maybole has an unparalleled opportunity to walk where he walked—with those most threatened by changes in the economy, the job market and financial instability in our own parishes and in the wider community.

With health and social care workers, we can be hands on as local churches, and in the wider field we can try to make our voice heard in local and national government policies.

As Christians we call God, Our Father, knowing him in a father-to-child relationship, which is really rather awesome. It is a relationship of rest, of safety and peace and it is open to all, freeing human beings from burdens which otherwise might overwhelm.

Perhaps the question we should be asking now is ‘How can we work as Churches Together in North Carrick in a new and ever more productive manner, as Jesus once did among the needy in Galilee?’

Perhaps outside of church walls, the market place around us is where our faith will be enabled to bear fruit that will last, moving hearts away from consumerism and alternative philosophies of human life.

Ellen Hawkes

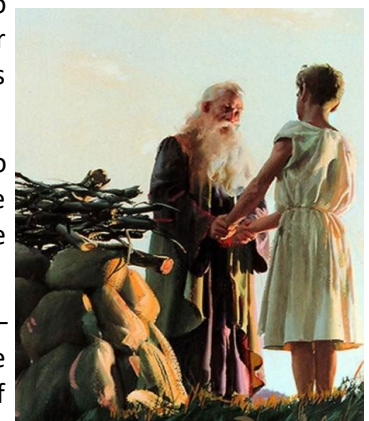
Sometimes someone else’s eyes notice something you don’t.

My inspiration today comes from the Rev MaryAnn Rennie, Minister of the Abbey Church of Dunfermline and her reflections on Genesis 22 1-14.

Genesis 22:1-14 tells the story of the testing of Abraham through God’s request to sacrifice his son, Isaac. It is a story bereft of detail and is made more sinister because of that. It is dramatic because there is no drama. Hebrew story telling at its best, a passage full of unbearable tension and suspense.

To our ears God’s request is outrageous. The logic of requesting a child’s life to demonstrate loyalty does not fit with the God of love we encounter in the Gospels... But Abraham acts out of fear (awe) of God, prepared to follow the divine command even when he could not see the logic.

In this passage we see Abraham forget self, completely surrendering all to God – trusting solely on grace. The text is really about worship. We should not ignore the potential sacrifice of Isaac, but we can reframe our focus to an understanding of what is expected of us when we are drawn towards worship.



We should be prepared to lay aside our most precious possessions, committing our whole being to the presence of God. It is an opportunity to trust and rely on God’s grace and intention for us.

I was struck by Rev. Rennie’s thoughts here, especially as we start to consider the ways we may, over the coming months, be easing back into church worship. I know worship itself has never ceased, but how do we prepare for congregational services in the New Normal that lies ahead?

Following Abraham’s example may be a start – and no I don’t mean sacrificing our children (my son Joseph Isaac will be glad to hear), but setting aside our possessions, our distractions – committing ourselves completely once again to God’s service and resting in his Holy presence. Dedicating ourselves and our families to His will.

Wherever, whenever we worship now and in the future, go with God.

Lynne Rankin