

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 26th July 2020

THE GIVING OF HOSPITALITY

The summer months are often 'the wedding season'. This year, marriage services are victims of the virus, and have been rescheduled or postponed. A marriage service is still a significant event in a community, usually followed by a lavish reception or simple celebration.



In St. John's Gospel (2:1-11), we find Jesus at a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, a village near Nazareth. The disciples are also present, and his mother Mary is in the company. The proceedings seem to be running smoothly until disaster strikes. The wine runs out!

For this to happen in Jesus's day was no mere misfortune, but a crisis of major proportions. This is not because the people were wine addicts (drunkenness was a disgrace), but because wine signified social acceptance and genuine hospitality.

In the culture of that time, the provision of hospitality was a sacred duty. The ancient Greeks and Romans were bound by the Sacred Law of Hospitality to offer bread, water, lodging and protection to any traveller who came to their door. The stranger was recognised not as a nuisance but as a welcome guest, and was permitted to stay as long as they liked. Indeed, the Greeks saw the stranger as sent by God, the host rejoicing that "Heaven had sent him guests".

For the wine to run out at a wedding reception would be a humiliation for the host, and for the bride and bridegroom, and a gross embarrassment for the guests. Jesus was summoned to render assistance, and he rescued the function by turning water into wine in a massive quantity!

Hospitality is a constant and consistent theme in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to remember that they once lived in oppression in exile in Egypt, and that this experience must motivate them to provide hospitality to foreigners, and to welcome the stranger as a fellow human being.



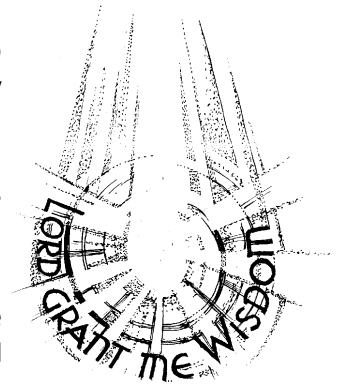
In the New Testament (St. Matthew 24:34-46), Jesus laid down the general principle to love one another sacrificially, as serving one another is akin to serving him. In 1 Peter 4:9, Christians are urged to "be hospitable to one another without grumbling", which further implies that from a Christian perspective, the giving of hospitality ought to be a blessing rather than a burden. Few today would regard the provision of hospitality as a sacred duty in the way that the ancients understood it. Yet Christ calls us to create communities of radical grace and extravagant welcome.

As Christians in the 21st century, let us remember that the giving of hospitality has a sacred dimension, and that we should welcome the stranger with kindness and generosity, treating them as a friend. As Hebrews 13:2 puts it, "Do not neglect to show hospitality; by doing this, some have entertained angels unawares." By giving hospitality, we are in fact ministers of God's benevolence—in essence, we reveal (or deny) His hospitality to those who seek it. How do we offer hospitality? Graciously or grudgingly? Is it a blessing or a burden? As the hospitality sector struggles to recover, this surely merits our consideration!

*"Do not neglect to show hospitality;
by doing this, some have entertained
angels unawares."*

The Rev. W. Gerald Jones

One of the things we can learn from Jesus is how he got his message through to people. We are told that he spoke with authority. He used parables to teach about so many things and today they still bring wisdom to our 21st century lifestyle. Being fully aware that man's limitations and conditioning would not change much, Jesus trusted that a good yarn would pass on the message better to most of us than speaking in terms of philosophy or theology. Centuries later they would even inspire great works of art such as Rembrandt's Prodigal Son



Unwilling to water down the truth, often unpalatable to our ears, he was nevertheless willing to tailor how he presented it. He explained to his disciples that parables were simply tools required because people's minds were dulled (perhaps by previous social or religious convictions).

Today not much has changed. Perhaps, subject as we are to multiple media suggestions, we cling just as obstinately, if unconsciously, to pre-conceived ideas or are unaware how much we can be influenced by other people. Maybe closed ears are not as uncommon among us as we might imagine. It is still hard to get the message into the marketplace.

In his parables Jesus likens our faith to treasure which in value outdoes any other possession or opportunity afforded by life. He considers it worth much sacrifice, something which we should seek unceasingly to search into and nurture.

The present pandemic may have made us even more sure where our treasure lies. Earthly banks hold nothing to compare, nor is this treasure related in any way to worldly successes nor reduced by the more negative human experiences of fear and uncertainty. Knowing Jesus as we can, as companion and brother, as well as Lord, we are rich beyond measure.

Jesus' parables, when applied or adapted to suit present day circumstances, are exactly tailored to our specific needs.

Ellen Hawkes

Lynne Rankin Maybole Parish Church

Hi all, when I reread my article for last week's comfort newsletter, I thought I came across a bit down and that's not really like me. I am more a positive people person. So I've spent some time this week contemplating my mental health and well-being—after all we have just survived, what for many of us, will be the most restrictive five months of our lives.

The freedoms and basic human rights that we have daily taken for granted were cut back and we were left in isolation, within the confines of our own homes.

No wonder if our mental health and well-being are adversely affected. And yet I found solace as so many of us have, in scripture. The comforting words of the psalms, the inspiration of the gospels, the life lessons of the book of Acts. And of course time spent in prayer is never wasted.

But one thing which stood out for me was the power of the human mind. One of the trailers on the BBC during the pandemic showed an elderly gentleman still smiling saying "in my mind I'm free, I can go anywhere". It was for me one of the most powerful images of this difficult time.

Our Creator, our God has given us so many great and wonderful gifts—our family and friends, our church communities, our wonderful planet and our amazing bodies. But he has also gifted us with a wonderful mind that can travel anywhere in reality and in our imagination.

We need not feel hemmed in or anxious about travelling forward if we put our trust in God. And thank Him again for hearts and minds to love and serve him.

My picture this week is of my car, which is an odd thing to have as I can't drive, but it is also a symbol of the freedom we are getting back gradually as we ease out of lockdown.



Have a good week folks,

Lynne

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

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh in 1850 and died at his house in Apia in Samoa in December 1894. He is remembered now as a novelist, poet and travel writer. Most will be familiar with many of his stories—Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae. What is not so well known is that he became a story-teller because he was plagued by poor health which prevented him from following his father and grandfather in the family business. They were engineers specialising in building lighthouses.



One of the most interesting of Stevenson's books is probably the least well known. Using his grandfather's records, he set down the story of the building of the Bell Rock Lighthouse. It is an epic tale.

The Bell Rock got its name because in the 1200s the Abbot of Arbroath had a bell placed on the Inchcape Reef to warn shipping of the danger. It lay across the shipping route into the Tay and the Forth and was exceptionally dangerous because most of the reef lay just below the surface, only the Bell Rock showing at high tide. The Abbot's bell only lasted a year until it was washed away in a storm.

Over the years, many ships ran aground there with great loss of life. It was the loss with all hands of HMS York on the Inchcape in 1804 that led to an Act of Parliament authorising the building of a lighthouse. Work began in 1807 and in 1810 the light was commissioned. The difficulties and dangers were clearly documented in the diaries kept by Robert Stevenson. His grandson showed his literary skill to the full by turning them into a story of courage, heroism and hard work. Since the light was built the sacrifice and hardships endured by the builders have had their reward as there have been no more strandings on the rock. The Bell Rock light still stands proud after 210 years warning of the hidden danger lying just below the waves.

Today we are very much aware of the hidden dangers we face. As I write there are reports that the relaxing of restrictions may be resulting in an increase in reported cases showing that we are not out of danger yet. If there is to be a blip now that might not be a bad thing, as long as it awakens us to the need to look ahead to prevent a second surge of the virus. In the Gospels there are two commands which we should do well to keep in mind today. In the Sermon on the Mount we find the Golden Rule—Do unto others as you would have others do to you—and in St John's Gospel there is the great commandment to love one another. These must surely be our guide as the restrictions are relaxed. Our behaviour must be as much about caring for others as pleasing ourselves. What we have come through makes it vital that we learn the lessons of the past four months. This is where hindsight can be a useful tool. We can see where there were times when too little was done, times when mistakes were made. It is all revealed now. But we have to use hindsight not to criticise but to learn. It is now clear that the biggest mistake made was to ignore the findings of exercises that were conducted by the British and Scottish Governments in 2016 which showed the need for adequate preparation for a future virus outbreak. The exercises had been prompted by the SARS threat which thankfully came to nothing. Covid-19 has followed a completely different pattern, but it is arguable that things could have been different had preparations for a pandemic been put in place as had been recommended.

The loss of around 250 lives in 1804 led to the construction of the Bell Rock Light. Over its 210 year of operation countless lives have been saved. Now we all have to ensure, individually and collectively, that the enormous toll of Corona virus leads us to do everything to limit the spread of the virus until a way can be found to protect future generations as happened with scourges like smallpox in the past.

From Marguerite Hunter Blair, Our Lady and St Cuthbert's

At the start of lockdown there was great excitement when the media carried stories of an enormous unclaimed lottery win, with a ticket bought in Ayrshire. It was hard not to reflect on what you might do with such a sum, even if you hadn't actually bought a ticket.

But some of the most precious things we want or own in life cannot be bought or replaced with money, not even with an enormous lottery win. I am thinking of memories, photographs, children, grandchildren, lifelong friends and companions, love, hope and health—I am sure you can think of many others.



Job said that the price of wisdom was beyond pearls. In the parable of the merchant looking for fine pearls, the merchant sells everything he owned to obtain the finest pearl. This parable teaches us about the discovery of the most precious wisdom of all, the wisdom of Jesus that leads us to God. Something else that money cannot buy.

This wisdom is beyond the price of pearls and it is worth more than all the material things we own.

The lottery ticket reminded me of reading my daughter's jotter at a P3 Parents evening. 'If I won the lottery' was what they had been asked to write about. "I would buy enough food to feed all the hungry people" she wrote, "and then I would buy myself a hamster".

Twenty years on and still no hamster!

O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.