

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 2nd August 2020

A SPIRIT OF DISCERNMENT by The Rev. W. Gerald Jones

On television quiz shows the winner usually walks away with a handsome cash prize. When asked what they might do with the money, the reply is almost invariably a holiday of a lifetime. At present, with the imposition of quarantine restrictions on holidaymakers returning from Spain, and also the Canary and Balearic Islands, caution is essential for aspiring travellers. In a word: they need 'a spirit of discernment'.

At the outset of his reign, King Solomon (1 Kings 3:3-15) encountered God in a dream at the chief shrine at Gibeon. God asked Solomon what he would like, to rule his people wisely and well. Without hesitation, Solomon asked God for 'a discerning spirit' - for sound judgment - so that he might distinguish good and evil.



God approved and granted Solomon's request, as he had not asked for riches, reputation and the death of his enemies, but something crucial to his role as a successful monarch.

What Solomon asked for was mishpat, a Hebrew word meaning 'discernment' or sound judgment, particularly in relation to listening and understanding. Like King Solomon, we need 'a spirit of discernment' today. We live in an age which has seen a huge explosion in knowledge, and which expands daily at an unprecedented pace. How much of what we hear is fact: how much is fiction?

We need a discerning spirit to try and sift out information from misinformation, and to make proper judgment accordingly. Like King Solomon, we need a strong dose of mishpat - a right judgment in all things, whether it be in scientific, moral, ethical, environmental, personal or other matters.

Scientists worldwide are seeking a vaccine against the virus that has wreaked havoc on our world. This will require a robust spirit of discerning and understanding, for what they produce must be thoroughly effective, not an inferior medicine spawned from a laboratory to appease public pressure.

Fundamentally, discernment is the ability to judge well. Whether it relates to the choices we make, to the people we meet, or to the circumstances we face, discernment is the gift of being able to recognise the consequences of our decision-making. Discernment is a strong Biblical theme: St. Paul (1 Corinthians 12:8-10) lists it as one of the many gifts given to distinguish true spirits from false ones, while in Hebrews 5:14 there is the need to discern good and evil. In a world, saturated with information and 'expert' opinion, discernment is indispensable.

**KEEP
CALM
AND
DISCERN
ON**

In 1947 Peter Marshall, a Scot who became Chaplain to the US Senate, said in one of his daily prayers: "Give to us clear vision that we might know where to stand and what to stand for— because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything". This is a plea for discernment. Indeed, it was John of Damascus (675-749) who said that discernment "is greater than any other virtue; and is the queen and crown of all the virtues". As with King Solomon, may God grant us 'a spirit of discernment' for the living of these days!

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." PHILIPPIANS 1:9-10

The miracle of the loaves and fishes, feeding so many from so little, must have greatly increased the reputation of Jesus in the eyes of both his disciples and the thousands who were fed. Jesus was sad the following day that people had not understood the significance of the miracle, that he himself was the real Bread come down from heaven. Many deserted him thereafter.

More recently a similar miracle, though on a smaller scale, was reported at a rubbish dump in Mexico, where many poor people searched among the rotting debris for trash which they separated into cans, bottles, cardboard etc. and sold on to the local co-op which in turn sold it on. They lived in the dump and worked seven days a week for five dollars. In 1972 a prayer meeting at El Paso, decided to provide a Christmas meal for the poor who lived and worked at the dump in Juarez. They prepared enough food for 125 people but 350 turned up! There was not enough food for everyone but what they had they would share as best possible. All 350 were fed and people took some home and came back for more. There was still a lot of food left over which was then taken and distributed to three local orphanages. This true story is an inspiring one of faith rewarded in a rare way. People recognised the significance of the miracle was beyond the physical. After the miracle on Christmas Day 1972 a strong Christian community grew up at the dump.



To Christians in the more affluent west, the miracle of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 14 and his subsequent claim to be the Bread of Life (John 6:48-51) are powerful reminders that we have been provided with an abundance of spiritual food for our souls. Currently as we exist in the uncertainty and anxiety affecting so many lives, the assurance of the presence of God among us, nourishing and filling us with his peace, is something we can spread among those searching now in perplexity for a deeper meaning to life.

Ellen Hawkes

Lynne Rankin Maybole Parish Church

This week, we at the kirk, are starting to consider what a return to Sunday services / services of worship might look like in the "NEW NORMAL"

New signage, new In and Out doors, separated and distanced seating, hand sanitizer everywhere, A sign in sheet for trace and protect and one minister only talking - no singing, no close chatting to friends over a cuppa - will it still feel like a meeting of the family of God?

Rev. Jock Stein penned this Prayer of Approach for this Sunday, the 9th after Pentecost.

Lord God, this coming to worship is a serious business.

The world is out of joint, and our lives are out of joint.

Generally we do our best, but You see what we are really like.

Sometimes we know very well we have gone wrong, sometimes we just know that Your holiness is beyond us.

And yet Your compassion is over all You have made. Have mercy on us. Forgive what is wrong, strengthen what is right, and guide us in the right way, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Lord God, this coming to worship is a glorious business.

All creation is made for Your glory, and we voice that now.

Your Spirit plants hints of glory in our hearts, and we delight to offer You our praise and worship.

Help us in our song to give You honour, in our silence to wait for You to speak, through Jesus Christ, Your living word.

Lord God, this coming to worship is a hopeful business.

We come with our concerns and our fears, with people on our hearts, stalked by troubles and worries.

Open Your generous hand, to satisfy our desire, to renew our faith that You are kind, and close to all who call upon You, as we do, trusting in Jesus who bears our burdens, and carries our sorrows.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen

This week whether you worship in a church or at home, may your worship be "Serious, Glorious and Hopeful".



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

There have been times during the last four months when it seemed to be hard to find good news. I know that there were many who gave up on all the daily briefings because so often they left them feeling helpless and a bit depressed. Gradually stories began to filter through that were a bit more positive. We began to hear about the efforts being made to help the more vulnerable by volunteers doing their essential shopping or collecting prescriptions so that they could stay at home in relative safety. As people were placed on furlough, or worse actually lost their jobs, food banks across the country stepped up to the mark. In many communities free meals were supplied. From time to time there were little items at the end of the news that made us smile if not raise a laugh. It all helped us to cope. This week there was the story of the St Bernard that had to be carried off the mountain. It was rescued rather than being the rescuer!



This week I received a good news story from an unexpected place. In South Africa the Crossroads Orphanage has been through a difficult time. It is far from easy to care for children from infants to school leavers at any time, far less than in a pandemic, and orphaned children are a very real issue at times out there. The Christmas message told of a particularly harrowing incident when a new-born baby was found abandoned naked in the bush, presumably an unwanted girl, though the child's sex was not specified. Thankfully, the child was found and taken in to be cared for and in later reports was doing well. Though officially supported financially by Child Care South Africa such is the state of government there that grants are often as much as six months late in being delivered. Despite that the work has gone on, thanks to the support of friends across the world.

While it was hard here things were considerably worse in other parts of the world where the virus took hold and welfare and health services were poor or non-existent. To begin with it appeared that South Africa had coped well, but then for a variety of reasons things deteriorated. For the vulnerable life had been hard there before the pandemic, now things are much worse.

The good news came in the latest report from the orphanage. So far during the lockdown the children have been well, even free of the regular winter sniffy nose and cough. The caregivers were very accommodating during levels four and five lockdowns during which time they stayed locked down with the children – considering the children's safety first so that in spite of all the changes put into effect the children have remained happy and healthy.

Teachers have kept them up to date with schoolwork for the school going children. It has been quite something to keep up with 10 children's curricula – all at different levels. However, so far, so good. The children naturally long to see their friends and teachers again but have all done extremely well under the circumstances. We are very proud of them.

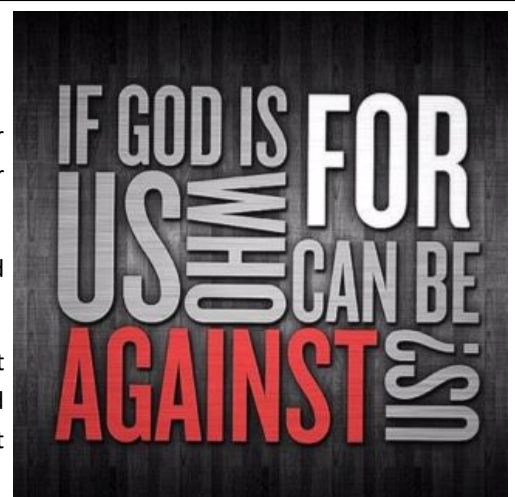
Unfortunately, in South Africa, as in many other countries, it has not proved possible to maintain the initial progress and the virus is again taking hold. The Crossroads Orphanage is very much in need of our prayers and support as they now face an even more uncertain future. If anyone would like more information please get in touch with me. What they face is a stark reminder of the potential pitfalls that we could face in the coming weeks. The problems associated with the reopening of the hospitality industry and the re-imposition of quarantine on travellers from Spain must make us aware of our own heavy responsibilities at this time. We really do not need any more bad news.

**No created thing can ever come between us
and the love of God made visible in Christ**

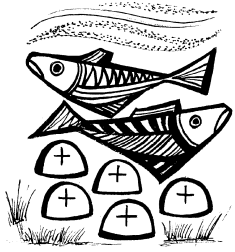
Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked.

These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.



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



The gospel of the loaves and fish used to make me think of my Mum who could make a pound of mince stretch to feed the 6 of us plus any number of unexpected visitors, and still have some left over.

But now it makes me think more of what it takes to be a true Christian, selflessly committed to helping others.

My aunt was a head teacher and weekends were often spent with her making book cases and indoor shoe racks out of old crisp boxes, and other much needed resources for her beloved school and pupils. Dinner was disappointing. Tinned potatoes, tinned meat and tinned fruit.

For her food was fuel to feed her brain and give her energy to support her school and any number of good deeds that she was busy with: mixing concrete to fix a step or cracked pipe for a neighbour, running up dresses on the sewing machine or fancy dress costumes, sanding and varnishing bits of wood to fix, mend or enhance something, playing and tuning organs at local Churches, supporting charity fundraisers, organizing everyone (including the Bishop) and everything, to a good end.

It is all too easy to be a Christian in name only. Doing the bare minimum to qualify.

It can be exhausting and overwhelming to be a truly active, fully committed disciple of Jesus. Like Jesus at the temple we too need to be constantly busy about our Father's business.

And to do this we need to feed on the bread of life and the Word of God, so we can constantly spread his love and kindness through our actions. Drawing strength and sustenance from our faith and the word of God will enable us to use our skills, talents, kindness and compassion to benefit others.

It is through our Christian actions that we give and receive friendship, happiness, love, peace and hope. And with Aunt Cissie we also had so much fun!

For it is in giving that we receive...." St Francis of Assisi

