

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 9th August 2020

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

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" Matthew 5:9

This week the world lost one of the greatest peacemakers of my lifetime, a very ordinary man called John Hume, living in a care home with dementia and looked after by the community. The legacy of this ordinary man who loved crunchies and cream eggs, his family, singing and the place where he lived, will last for generations. The hand of history was not only on his shoulder, it was at work in his daily actions for peace. So many people are alive today because of him, and many more across the world have hope because of his unshakeable belief and faith in the possibility of peace. Unlike Peter walking on the water towards Jesus, John Hume never lost faith in the power of dialogue to achieve peace. For him it was simple, peace was about improving relationships- not lines on maps or violence.



There is a Trading Standards maxim: if it sounds too good to be true; then it is too good to be true. For many of us living in Northern Ireland in the eighties, John Hume's mantra that talking was the way to achieve peace seemed naïve at best, never mind too good to be true. My job was to manage 30 community and play centres sited in and around the peace lines in the city. There was no peace along these artificial borders, instead they were a focus for fear and violence. Everyone wanted a better life for children and families. Few of us could even begin to imagine what a good outcome might look like as we heard about the latest horrors and atrocities on the daily news.

We were all sinking in the waves, no matter how hard we tried to find forgiveness and faith that Jesus could help resolve the enduring conflict. In the end he chose an ordinary man who like many of us had initially struggled to find his true vocation. Psalms 85: 9, I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me: for he will speak peace unto his people.

Fr Farren, who gave the homily at the funeral Mass, said the long-standing politician always "made peace visible for others. He never lost faith in peace and he never lost faith in his ability to convince others that peace was the only way".



The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama said "Although my fellow Nobel laureate is no longer with us, his message about peace and nonviolence in the resolution of conflict, no matter how protracted or difficult it may seem to be, will long survive him. He lived a truly meaningful life."

Lord help me to find my true vocation in life

And grant that through it

I may find happiness myself

And bring happiness to others.

This Sunday the gospel in my Church relates one of the most awesome events in the life of Jesus, pointing to the cosmic power which God wields. We still marvel today when we think of Jesus walking on the storm-ravaged waters of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were terrified when they saw him and their fears perhaps prevented them from recognising Jesus in such unnatural and frightening circumstances. Peter managed to summon some courage which deserted him when he actually got out of the boat. The strength of the wind and the inconsistency of the waves undermined his faith and caused him to cry out in desperation to Jesus.

How very much Peter reminds us of ourselves. He has to reassure himself it really is Jesus and that if he gets out of the boat, Jesus is o.k. with that. Being in the midst of any overwhelming experience, however, can show up how deep our faith really is. Even then, the strong arm of God responds to our urgent appeals.

It doesn't matter whether we see Peter as impulsively foolish or very brave. What matters is that Jesus steadies him while acknowledging his lack of faith. How often do we need a reassuring hand when things get a bit much for us? Faith in the closeness of Christ and reliance on his steadying hand are a sure rock when we call out to him in crisis. In the current hazardous situation of Covid-related fears, the warming up of our earth and global economic emergencies, he is with us stretching out his hand when we call. Our faith helps us extend the hand of God to others, for it is in us and through us that he reaches out to the needy, to those most threatened by the storms of life.

What we have to remember is that if we want to walk on water, we have to get out of the boat!

It takes courage at times to walk with God, but trying to go it alone, no matter how good our intention, is so pointless, when we can call out to God to steady us.

Someone once said that living the Christian life 24/7 is as hard as walking on water and currently just keeping our head above water is so much easier with Christ's help. The strong hand of our God keeps us upright and ready to walk wherever life leads.

As the song says 'Put your hand in the hand of the man who walks on water!' Now is the time to grip that helping hand more firmly than ever.

Ellen Hawkes



Celebrating Saint Oswald



This Sunday at St Oswald's, we will be celebrating our patronal festival—the Feast of St Oswald of Northumbria. This will be a particularly important service as it will only be our second since the easing of lockdown restrictions. Our first service was last Sunday, and although the precautions and physical distancing seemed daunting at first, it is surprising how quickly we all adjusted. There was a feeling of great relief at being able to worship together and take Holy Communion as the people of God, as well as reflect on the toll that this pandemic has had on the lives of so many.

For our patronal festival, we were delighted to receive a new icon of St Oswald that was painted by the Rev Mary Jepp, former rector of Holy Trinity Church in Kilmarnock. St Oswald was a 7th Century King who, with St Aidan, introduced Christianity to Northumbria. The village of Kirkoswald takes its name from the church that was built following St Oswald's victory in battle there. St Oswald died in battle on 5th August in the year 642. You can see a short video of our priest, Fr Jim Geen, blessing the icon on our Facebook page.

Collect for Saint Oswald:

God of Life, who so kindled the faith of St Oswald with your Spirit that he set up the sign of the cross in his kingdom and turned his people to the light of Christ: grant that we, being fired by the same Spirit, may always bear our cross before the world and be found faithful servants of the gospel; through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

St Oswald's Church is now open for private prayer Monday—Friday, 10am—1pm and Sunday services are at 11.15am.

Matthew Wyllie

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

Later this month there will be the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War with the Japanese surrender. Then it was a time for rejoicing. Now it will be a time for commemoration. Unfortunately, as with so many recent anniversaries, any commemoration will be affected by the pandemic.

While there was much rejoicing 75 years ago that all hostilities had ceased, for some it was not such a happy time. There were many for whom the days that lay ahead would bring a parting from loved ones. During the war thousands had come from all over the world to join the fight. Naturally many had formed relationships. Soon they would be going home. They would re-join families and meet up again with friends and colleagues but the partners they had met found themselves faced with a difficult decision. Should they stay and so end the relationship or did they go too and leave their families behind?



Back then it was a much more difficult choice than it would be now. In many respects the world was a much bigger place. Travel was at a much more leisurely pace. It took a week to sail to America or Canada, six to eight weeks to reach Australia or New Zealand, not the hours it takes today. Nor was there the instant communication to which we have now. Surface mail to the likes of New Zealand could take 10 or 12 weeks while airmail took 10 to 12 days. For most people phoning was out of the question because of the cost. It is all so different now when contact with family down under can be instantaneous.

During the months that followed many found themselves at a crossroads as the overseas servicemen began to go home. Many chose to follow and begin a new life. How they felt is perhaps easier for us to understand today for in many respects we are finding ourselves at a crossroads. As we move through the current lockdown we find ourselves at a spot where two ways part. We are confronted with a choice and as with most choices we know that one way will be the right one, the other almost certainly wrong.

Mark tells us how Simon and Andrew, James and John were working on their boats when Jesus passed by. As the story is told he said to them out of the blue, "Follow me". What were they to do? Do they abandon everything to go with a stranger or they take what seems to be the safer way and carry on as fishermen? The right choice is never simple.

Yet for us the choices facing us are in some ways very simple. and could even be more significant than the one facing so many all these years ago at the end of the war. Today what we decide could literally be a matter of life and death for someone. As the restrictions are eased the temptation to cast caution to the winds can be great. Over these last months we have stayed at home. Now it is possible to go out and enjoy ourselves once more. Events of this last week point to the danger of selfish and irresponsible behaviour. The virus has not gone away. If we drop our guard it will come back to bite.

To most of us the way to choose seems obvious. We need to continue to be responsible to protect ourselves and perhaps more importantly to protect others. Yet it is tempting to think that what we do cannot possibly make much difference, but it could. The right way to take now is to continue to be careful, to maintain high standards of hygiene and observe social distancing. What we do really does matter. If, as we are commanded, we do love one another, the way ahead just now ought to be clear. Remember the FACTS and follow them and we shall know that we are making the right choice.

I can't believe the school holidays are over already. And it has rained most of the five weeks. A proper Scottish summer. And it is with a certain amount of trepidation that staff and pupils look forward to the year ahead. I popped in this week for exam results day and was surprised at how quickly hand sanitisers and face coverings have become normal. And staff seem quite accustomed to 2 metre distancing. Human beings it seems are nothing if not adaptable. Yet another thing to thank God for.

Also this week a few of us involved in the Parish church began proper discussions about our reopening. It is an exciting and daunting time. With so many regulations and health and safety checks required, but we will persevere. I am less worried about it now, as I attended my first lockdown funeral this week and was surprised at how like real worship it felt. Yes, everyone was seated apart and masked but there were wonderful bible readings, thoughtful prayers, reflective music with no singing, and a sense of being together with others in God's presence. It was very comforting. And although I know many will still have very reasonable health concerns about attending worship, I am also convinced that the benefits of attending a praise service to my spiritual health and well being were worth the risk to me. But whether you are worshipping this week at home or in church, I hope God answers your prayers, keeps you safe and keeps you and your loved ones well.

Lynne Rankin

WITH ALL OUR MIND

This week our children return to school. After much discussion, there will be no social distancing for the children, though teachers must maintain a physical distance from those in their classroom.

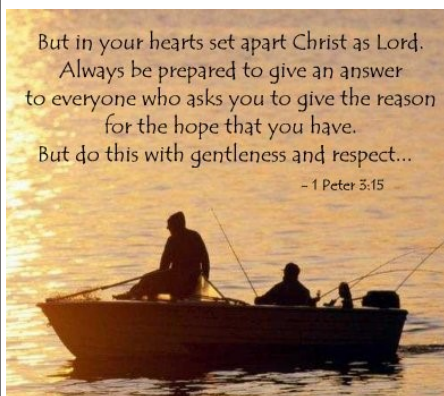
Education is now regarded as a lifelong process, with "every day a day in the classroom", while governments appoint ministers to encourage the continuity of learning.

In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5), Moses commands the Israelites to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and strength. In St. Luke's Gospel (10:27), however, Jesus adds the word "mind" to those things quoted in the Old Testament text.

The lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan, asking Jesus how he might inherit eternal life, is told to love God with heart, soul and strength—and also with his "mind". Why Jesus added "mind" to the Deuteronomy list is unknown, but what is certain is that we are required to love God with every fibre of our being, the "mind" included.

And he answering said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

To love God "with all our mind" means that Christianity is much more than an emotional experience. It has an emotional aspect to it, and many people find great pleasure and emotional satisfaction in working out of their faith. There is also an intellectual side to Christianity and its expression. Historians inform us that Christianity captured the ancient world not only because of the zeal of its adherents, but because they could out-argue their critics and opponents.



In the context of today, we need to reflect on our faith carefully and critically, and, like the first Christians, out-argue those who dismiss religion in general, and Christianity in particular, as fantasy and superstition. In the New Testament, the writer of 1 Peter 3:15 tells the addressees that they must always be ready to make a defence (apologia) of what they believe when challenged to do so.

Christians must be prepared to do this today. Reason is a God-given gift, and we must apply it to examine our convictions and why we hold them, as well as carefully reflect on the nature of God, the person of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

It has been said that the Church is "a great community of learners", and if Christians are to have credibility in this increasingly secular society, we have to scrutinise what we believe—under the Holy Spirit's guidance—and make our case convincingly. Whereas previous generations "walked by faith, and not by sight", this one "walks by sight, and not by faith".

In their thought-provoking book, *We Don't Do God* (2012), George and Andrew Carey argue that there is today "a hard-fought conflict between a secular spirit and the Christian faith", which requires Christians of all denominations to counter this through thoughtful reflection on what they believe, and apply it at a time when historic Christianity is waning.

In an age where education matters, let us learn to love God "with all our mind", and so give a reasoned defence of our faith when challenged. Otherwise, if we were arrested for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict us?

*Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
with all your strength, and with all your mind".*

Rev. W. Gerald Jones

"THIS IS MY SON,
WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN:



The Transfiguration of the Lord