

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 30th August 2020

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

The letter to the Philippians is a lovely little letter. From what Paul says to his friends there he clearly has a soft spot for them. Yet this is rather surprising given the treatment he received on his first visit.

Paul had been revisiting some of the churches he had established on the first missionary journey with Barnabas. This time his companion was Luke who has given us a clear account of the journey in Acts. It was not an easy journey for, while on his first visits Paul had made friends, he had also made enemies who now made life difficult for him. Again and again the apostle had to move on because of protests. Acts tells us that when they reached Troas the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from preaching there. The decision had to be made where to go next.



After Paul had the vision of the man from Macedonia asking for help the two decided to cross into Europe. Philippi was the obvious place to go. It was a Roman Colony where as a Roman citizen Paul could expect a warm welcome. Sadly, after an encouraging start, trouble arose when Paul cast out an evil spirit from a slave girl thus depriving her owners of a lucrative income. Paul and Silas were seized, flogged and thrown into prison in flagrant violation of Paul's rights as a Roman citizen. After a night in prison Paul complained and though he did get a grudging apology was banished from the city. Surely he would never wish to return.

Strangely what happened in Philippi was the start of the strong bond Paul had with the church there. He certainly was not a man to bear a grudge. He had been persecuted so often and had come to recognise how God had used him and his experiences for good. In II Corinthians Chapter 11 Paul describes in some detail all that he has had to endure for the sake of Christ.

Like Paul we have had a time of bad experiences over these last months. Nevertheless many of us have cause to realise that it is an ill wind indeed that blows no good. With all the things we would rather had not happened there have been many instances of good. Things that have inspired us, like the fundraising of so many and the love and care that have been shown to those who were in real need.

As we begin slowly to build up a new normal we have to try to see how God can use our experiences for good. It has to be our desire to make things better.

As we put the restrictions of lockdown behind us we need to be aware of how essential it is to think and act responsibly. Paul found grace to put his trust in God, come what may so that in faith he was able to write that he knew "that all things work for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Today, in faith, we can be certain that nothing, not tribulation nor distress can separate us from the love of God.

Thus we can go forward in confidence that God goes with us, He journeys where we journey and dwells where we dwell and will be, as Ruth declared, our God for evermore (Ruth 1:16).

Our God for evermore

From Marguerite Hunter Blair

How have your friendships fared during the past few months?

New research this week suggests that if we don't look after them our friendships can fizzle out after only three months. You might think that it has never been easier to keep in touch with friends and family with video calls and social media at our finger tips.

But that is not the same as investing time and energy in our friendships.

Sheridan Voysey is a writer, speaker and broadcaster on faith and spirituality. He recently wrote about the treasure of friendship and how important it is not to take friendship for granted. To be a friend is a holy calling as valid as parenthood or a career, he claims. Jesus called his followers friends (John 15,15) and this enduring friendship is precious and to be shared by us as part of our Christian calling.



A friend is someone we can talk to, depend on and enjoy. As Christians we can easily show genuine interest in others and their wellbeing, be dependable in small everyday things and make time for shared enjoyments. The uniqueness of friendship is that it is voluntarily maintained. The challenge is making the effort and taking the time when it's not convenient for us. While it has never been easier to stay in touch, it has been particularly difficult recently to be a good friend. Where once we may have popped over, met up or arranged trips with friends and fellow parishioners, it has been tough to nurture our friendships during these restrictive and anxious times.

We know that as Christians we must take up our crosses and follow Jesus, our friend. Working out what this means for our true vocation in life can be difficult. Extending the gift of friendship to others as He has done to us is a sure way we can follow in His footsteps.

“Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend.”— Albert Camus

We are all familiar with the ups and downs of life. Peter, so highly praised by Jesus at the moment he declared him as Messiah came a cropper immediately afterwards when he tried to divert Jesus away from the cross. He was simply unable to accept such a seemingly disastrous future. Yet in ways unknown to him the cross would be the gateway to conquering man's greatest fear, the finality of death.

Our world today is such that nobody can really forecast what we may face in the future. The unprecedented havoc and suffering caused by the Covid virus has led politicians, financiers and world leaders into territories unknown. We hear good and bad news, positive and negative predictions, all usually underpinned by too little knowledge and the unpredictability of a race against time. Yet through it all, our faith in the goodness and love of God sustains hope.

Like the first disciples we too have a lot to learn about trust in the face of suffering, fear and the threat of death. We may accept the reality but it is hard to endure willingly or patiently. We long for an end to uncertainty. The one sure thing we hold on to is that God is in it all, suffering with us and will give us the stamina and grace to endure. When the right time to make decisions comes, having entrusted things to him from day to day in prayer, we can be assured we will get the strength we need to move forward. Where possible we can do whatever we can to help restore confidence. Out of the ashes of this pandemic we can hope for a better world where human dignity is respected by all and justice prevails worldwide.

Whatever our particular cross may be here and now, as we shoulder it with the help of God's grace and learn from it, we become stronger and our hope for the future more resilient. Through difficult situations we often find new strengths and insights.

Mankind's history has hardly been consistently exemplary throughout the centuries. And since the advent of Jesus, establishing the Kingdom of God here on earth, to whatever extent we can, seems to be taking Christianity a longish time. Who knows what history will make of our time and space and how the pandemic might have resulted in influencing behaviour on our planet. What small contribution each of us can make is important. Surely as a whole the world's population of Christians can contribute significantly. Time will tell.

Time is a gift God gives to us, a gift we can return to him. For all of us worldwide, each day lasts 24 hours as sun and moon alternate. How we use it is up to us. Pandemic or not, time remains constant and hopefully our time can see a return to honouring God and his ways.

Ellen Hawkes

THE MANTLE OF INDIFFERENCE

As we reach the end of summer, and as autumn gently approaches, we may look back over recent months, with a new appreciation of the importance of health, and of the commitment made by so many to ensure our constant wellbeing. The vast majority has respected the regulations, while others have clearly flaunted them. This is said to have contributed to sudden spikes in Aberdeen and other parts of the country.

A further group will have been indifferent to the pandemic and its potential consequences - people afflicted with another virus called "indifference" or "apathy." Denis Duncan has written that "indifference" is a dangerous and infectious disease which, left untreated, can quickly develop into something worse, and is now endemic in every area of life.

In the Book of Lamentations (1:1-12), we hear that Jerusalem is doomed, and the reader is invited into the world of this frightened city, speaking as a person about "my sorrow", "my suffering" and "my distress." The story makes a plea to others to recognise its fate: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?"

Behind this question lies a fear that there will be those who will be indifferent to the city's pending disaster - they will have an "air of apathy", with little or no interest in the city's tragic tale.

There are those who wear "the mantle of indifference" today, and display their apathy in many ways. For example, apathy shows itself in the acceptance of, or in a casual attitude to, wrong-doing. The deterioration of standards in society, the insensitivity to grace and goodness, and the rejection of values once deemed necessary for our wellbeing, also testify to the apathy that has infected so much of our culture.

In 1795 Edmund Burke (British statesman and writer) said that "There is nothing so fatal to religion than indifference." Quoting John of Salisbury, Burke argued that "the torpor of indifference" is the real force Christians must contend with. Indeed, in our secular times, it is maintained that Christianity has to wrestle more with indifference, than with open hostility.



In the Book of Revelation (3:14-22), judgment is passed on the church at Laodicea, a city now located in modern Turkey. A wealthy, industrial and prosperous city, the Christians there have wavered in their commitment, and are neither hot nor cold, but only "lukewarm" in their faith. They have donned "the mantle of indifference", and, deceived by material success, are blind to their spiritual poverty.

Indifference and apathy are dangerous and highly infectious. They breed a casual, carefree, couldn't-care-less attitude of mind that allows all kinds of things to happen.

Even in these last months there are some for whom this pandemic has not been taken with the seriousness it deserves.

May God give us grace to cast off "the mantle of indifference", so that we stand for something - lest in our apathy we fall for anything!

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?"

Rev. W. Gerald Jones

