

ST BLANE'S NEWS

MAY 2020



A Letter from Rev Gary Caldwell

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is pretty amazing how quickly we have got used to living in these strange days. That doesn't lessen the fact that, for some, things are really tough but, even in difficult times, we get into a way of living.

Last time we thought about the word Hope

H – He has risen

And were reminded from H that Jesus has risen and His resurrection makes all the difference. This time I want us to think about:

O – Open your eyes

Opening our eyes to who God still is. The world, our lives may have changed for the time being and for a good while yet perhaps, but God hasn't changed and neither has His promises to us.

There is a good chance that this time has stopped you doing things that you would normally do, many are still working hard at home of course but just about all of us are not doing the other things in life that keep us busy.

Some people are using that time to do new things and maybe even boring others about what they have achieved. Others, including myself may have had lots of plans but have settled into a life when we have more time but yet we are wondering what we are doing with the time.

Today I want to challenge you to have a moment in your day where you simply stop and open your eyes to God.

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." Exodus 3v2-3

One day Moses stopped his daily work and noticed a bush that was on fire yet it wasn't burning up. He goes over to the bush and encounters God. I read recently one writer saying: "There seemed to be a cause and effect relationship between Moses' willingness to pay attention and God's willingness to speak. When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look at the bush, God spoke because Moses stopped, paused, noticed and turned aside."

Stop and spend time with God, pray, read his word, listen and speak to God. It is often when we make time for God that God speaks. The same writer continues "The practice of paying attention awakens us to what is extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary". Open your eyes to God and then listen to what he says.

Things to note

- I hope you have discovered the services on You Tube. Search for the Dunblane St Blane's Channel and we will broadcast a service live every Sunday, you will also be able to watch it again.
- We have tea and coffee on Zoom (video conferencing) each Sunday at 11am. Many of us are finding the opportunity to chat after the service really helpful. Please join us, it's dead easy, download Zoom on your laptop, computer or device. Sign in and join the meeting at 11am (ask Gary for the meeting id and password)
GCaldwell@churchofscotland.org.uk
- We are also producing a 60 second sermon each week, a new one every Monday. Please pass the word to family, friends etc. They are hopefully very accessible, a little more evangelistic and perhaps a conversation starter to talk to others about faith.
- We also have audio of the latest service available on 01786 641133 (available from mid- afternoon on Sundays). If you dial this number you can press 1 to listen to the whole service, 2 the hymns, 3 the reading, 4 the sermon or 5 the prayers. You will be charged at the local call rate.
- We are also having a time of chat and prayer on a Wednesday on Zoom at 7pm for 40 mins. Be really good if more people joined in.
- The website has been updated - please pass any comments to Michael Yuille.
- Clearly our governments are starting to work out ways of ending lockdown. The Church of Scotland is also doing so nationally and some of our elders and others are starting to work out when and what we will do. We will keep everyone informed, but please be aware that it is likely that things will understandably be different as we follow the guidelines.

Praying that you may be filled with hope as you open your eyes to our amazing God.

Gary

National Church Update

General Assembly 2020

This of course has been cancelled. The new moderator still takes over but will be based at home. I had the unexpected privilege of being on the nomination committee. The process begins with seeking nominations from individuals. The committee is chaired by the previous moderator and composed of commissioners at the Assembly specifically nominated for this purpose. Thereafter everything is for obvious reasons confidential. We have to work to a very tight timetable which is a further challenge. The process of filling the committee is about to change.

Rev. Dr Martyn Fair was our choice and, by the time you read this, will be our Moderator. Information about him is readily available but, suffice to say, he is a very experienced and dedicated parish minister who will be a credible and inspirational voice of leadership and direction.

121 Reorganisation

This was continuing apace prior to lockdown. The two Forums or Fora (take your pick) replacing the 4 Councils have been populated and are up and running. **Faith Nurture Forum** replaces Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Councils and **Faith Impact Forum** replaces World Mission and Church and Society Councils. The Forums are approximately half the size of each council. The reduction in the head count in 121 is also well underway. Do remember those who have lost their jobs and are doing different jobs.

Dan Gunn

Presbytery Update

As with individual churches presbytery is not operating at present. However prior to lockdown a lot was happening. Two informal unstructured get togethers have been held thanks to Zoom!

New Church – The union of St Columba’s and Allan Park South is now in place. A service to celebrate the new church had been planned for 1st April.

Presbytery reform –Under the radical action plan the objective is to reduce 43 mainland presbyteries to around 12. There is a specific challenge to Stirling - because of our geography we are surrounded by a remarkable number of presbyteries. The options have been narrowed down to two going north or south. Watch this space.

Worship Training –this was a great success of 2019 given the numbers involved and the positive feedback from the participants. Next steps are being planned.

Presbytery Planning –notwithstanding the merger, a revised plan for our current churches is required. Progress has been slow. A draft plan for the 9 churches of the Carse had been issued before the lockdown. I am particularly involved being a member of the planning group and as Interim Moderator for Aberfoyle linked with Port of Menteith.

Local Church Review -this process built on encouraging churches to review their situations in a structured way is well underway with timescales now extended.

Do remember members of presbytery in your prayers and in particular those ministers who live on their own.

Dan Gunn
Presbytery Elder

The Woolseys

Remember (or tried to forget) The Woolseys, who retired to their grass roots in Northern Ireland in 2003?

A lot has happened since then, but a Malawi link with the 25th BB is significant. Our youngest daughter, Jacqueline, married Gary Brough from Kirkcudbright, and after a successful marketing and fundraising spell with EMMS (Edinburgh), in late October 2018, he took up a Mission Partner post with CoS in Mzuzu, Northern Malawi, working with the Livingstonia Synod's Church & Society Programme.

The whole family (G, J, Eilidh(6) and Morven (2)) moved to Malawi in early January 2019. As part of our 50th wedding anniversary (August 2019) celebrations, we spent Christmas and New Year with them. What an insight into the challenges the church is facing in what is the poorest region of Malawi.

We now keep a keen interest in what the 25th is doing in/near Blantyre. If anyone would like to be on Gary's CoS Prayer Partner list, please feel free to email him - gary@broughs.co.uk . We would also be pleased to hear from old (!) friends – jackwoolsey@talktalk.net.

Jack & Muriel, who will never forget their ~30 years association with the St Blane's family.

May you enjoy God's richest blessings in the years ahead.

Encourage each other

Over the past month the following encouragements have been sent in by various members of the Prayer Chain, and distributed in a weekly email. These are gathered together below to share with you.

1. Early on with the COVID 19 restrictions, I was concerned about income and I read this verse which reminded me of the truth of where all things come from:
Deuteronomy 8 v17-18
'You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me". But remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms the covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today'.
2. In the demoralizing conditions of a Japanese internment camp, when 1,800 people were packed into a space measuring 150 by 200 yards Eric Liddell wrote a prayer part of which is below:
"Father, I pray that no circumstances, however bitter or however long drawn-out, may cause me to break thy law, the law to love thee and to my neighbour. That I may not become resentful, have hurt feelings, hate or become embittered by life's experiences, but that in and through all, I may see thy guiding hand and have a heart full of gratitude for thy daily mercy, daily love, daily power and daily presence."
3. The following contribution was sent by someone who feels it speaks volumes - especially for people on their own.

I know my Father cares for me
As through this world I tread,
And though at times the way seems dark
By Him I'm safely led.

The griefs and trials that arise
Are tempered with His love,
And each new cup that I must drink
Is measured from above.

For He has said Dear child of mine
Thy times are in My hand,
Just trust in Me and never fear
My heart your way has planned.

So I will simply rest in Him
Whatever may betide
Assured of this He knows the way
And with me will abide.

4. I like reading Hebrews and the following is most suitable for our situation today:
Hebrews 13
Never will I leave you
Never will I forsake you
So we say in confidence
The Lord is my helper I will not be afraid.
5. At our Bible study zoom group we were discussing embracing down time and we looked at 1st Kings Chapter 19. Elijah journeyed into the wilderness - he needed downtime but the Lord was working his purpose out with him and we encouraged each other to embrace down time during this time.
6. *I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.*
I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me,
Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

*They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait
for him."*

*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who
seeks him.*

It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations Chapter 3 verses 19 to 26

7. **“On being good Neighbours”**

Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves. This is so very true, for the happiest hearts are those who are always trying, not how little they can do but how much. If only we can give a kindly word, a cheery smile or a helping hand when most needed, we will be doing something worthwhile.

8. Just wanted to share a verse that I find helpful. Romans 9 v 35
*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or
hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or
sword?*

Worth remembering when we are worried.

9. **A prayer**

Father God, we thank you we can still worship, have fellowship, sing, and praise You, though in ways we don't normally use. We thank You for all the ways we are able to support, help and encourage each other. We are out of our normal church routines but help us to continue to live in fellowship with You for we ask in Your name. Amen.

10. An imagined conversation

Satan: "I will cause anxiety, fear and panic. I will shut down businesses, schools, places of worship and sports events. I will cause economic turmoil."

Jesus: "I will bring back together neighbours, restore the family unit, I will bring dinner back to the kitchen table. I will help people slow down their lives and appreciate what really matters, I will teach my children to rely on me and not the world. I will teach my children to trust me and not their money and material resources."

(Based on the Screwtape Letters 1942 CS Lewis.)

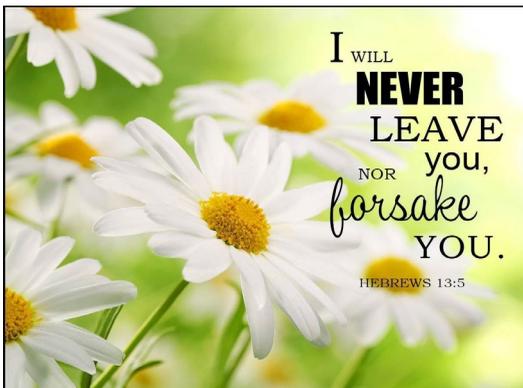
11. I have been thinking of this verse a lot:

"The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."

(Exodus 14:14)

It is quite appropriate at this time.

12.



Walk in the Light

Shopping has become a different experience. People stand patiently in queues stretching round supermarket buildings, generally in silence. Inside the store there is little noise, no hubbub of chatter amongst the shoppers. Silence prevails. Some wear face masks, others are muffled behind scarves and anyone who coughs is regarded with immediate suspicion. Such is the impact of this corona virus pandemic and the advice that seeks to minimise its impact; the impact of an illness for which there is no known cure, no vaccine and which can kill. Isolation is the main treatment available to us to stem the spread of the disease. Yet coming together to shop for essentials does not bring an opportunity to converse; people are frightened, worried, scared, concerned, isolated. Worries about the future abound; a darkness stalks the land and our lives.

There is light; the recent weather has brought bright sunny days that tempt us to believe all will be well. Individual and collectively people are carrying out acts of selflessness, helping those in need, raising money for charity - who cannot have been moved by the fund-raising of Captain Tom! Churches, though closed to worshippers continue online, in virtual gatherings, talks are made available by telephone or by podcast, proving that God's people are his church, even without a building being available to them.

Light is found in the Bible. In the book of Isaiah at chapter 9:2 we read
“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: light has dawned upon them, dwellers in a land as dark as death”

In his first of three letters, the Apostle John writes

“God is light and in Him there is no darkness” (1John 1:5).

That passage and the verses that follow remind me of the song “The Spirit lives to set us free”. You can find it in Mission Praise at 664. In that song the phrase “walk in the light” occurs twice in every verse and,

in the chorus a further four times, concluding with “walk in the light of the Lord.” The repetition emphasises the message - walk in the light of the Lord, for in Him there is no darkness. The last verse further emphasises the message:-

**“The Spirit lives in you and me, walk, walk in the light;”
“ His light will shine for all to see, walk, walk in the light.”**

Other songs come to my mind with similar messages; the great “Shine Jesus Shine” is one such song, with the last line of the chorus in effect a prayer “Send forth your Word, Lord, and let there be light”.

For me, these words sing out in my mind and remind me that, while this earthly world can seem very dark, just as it is now, God’s light still shines brightly. In John’s Gospel we read:
“The light shines on in the dark and the darkness has never mastered it.” (John 1:5)

What a great hope we have in our God and in His Son, our Saviour.
May the light of His love brighten our days at this time and for ever.

Amen

***Michael Yuille
28th April 2020***