

ST BLANE'S NEWS

JUNE 2020

A Letter from Rev Gary Caldwell

Dear sisters and brothers,

The longer something goes on the harder it becomes. Perhaps you are finding that if you have been shielding or sticking to the lockdown rules. Clearly for some, they give up sticking in and have done things that weren't advised but the vast majority of people have stuck by the guidelines giving us a good chance of fighting off this virus.

In these newsletters we have been working our way through the letters of the word HOPE

We have thought about H

H – He has risen

And were reminded from H that Jesus has risen and his resurrection makes all the difference.

Last time we thought about O

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 have His promises to us.

This time I want us to think about P:

P – Perseverance

Often when we start something new or have a new chapter in our lives there is the novelty factor. Not a sense of this thing is trivial but a sense that this is new, I want to do this. Think about times in your lives when that has been your experience. Perhaps the first days and weeks of lockdown were like that. But as time passes that novelty factor wears off and it becomes harder, hard work to keep doing something even if was enjoyable to begin with. It is then that we learn the joy of perseverance.

We have been looking at the last section of the book of Acts in our Sunday worship. Where Paul is going through trial after trial, tough time after tough time. We have seen his remarkable ability to keep going, an ability that comes not from him but from his experience of God. He met Jesus face to face and God drew close to him to encourage him in Acts 23v11. Paul knows tough times, Paul knows how to persevere in the Christian faith. He writes to the church in Rome:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. **Romans 5v1-5**

Paul writes to believers just like him and us and urges them to have the big picture of faith and life and a big part of that Christian life is to persevere, to struggle on but also not to struggle because that perseverance has a purpose, it produces in us character and hope.

Friends the New Testament tells us that as believers we will suffer. It also tells us over and over that we must persevere in the face of that suffering and more importantly it tells us how we do that as we saw in a service recently.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. **2nd Corinthians 1v8-9**

Paul writes to the church in Corinth of his despair leading him to even despair of life itself. But this happened so that we might rely not on ourselves but on God. Note in the passage in Romans above that Jesus is the way into faith, Jesus is also the source of perseverance and hope for Paul and for us. When we are in those moments when we are struggling, we rely on him not ourselves, he doesn't leave us to persevere in our own strength.

One of the good things about lockdown (yes there are some, count your blessings) is that there has been a real focus on daily exercise. When we were allowed out just once you could see people taking that opportunity and going for family walks. I've enjoyed being able to get out running again as well. I've enjoyed running ever since I was a wee boy in an athletic club running cross country races. I was saying to someone that I prefer to be running up rather than downhill although I have noticed that every manse I have lived in so far has been at the top of a hill which means you always end a run facing a hill.

As I have said before, life is like that as well, it gets harder as you get older, our bodies don't behave, we struggle physically, we lose friends through illness and death, things change in ways that we don't like. I think the path of life gets steeper towards the end. But what do we do,

we don't give up, we persevere in the strength of God, how do we do that? Well the writer to the Hebrews tells us

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. **Hebrews 12v1-3**

We persevere through looking at Jesus, considering what he went through, fixing our eyes on him and we run and do not lose heart.

So, don't lose heart - shielding, lockdown, covid-19 is not going to last forever. But much more than these momentary troubles, fix your eyes on Christ, persevere and keep going in his strength.

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.
- The Church is now open for Private prayer Mon-Fri at the moment from 10am-12noon, those times may vary (see Facebook page or website).

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

Gary

LET'S PRAY FOR:

OUR CHURCH

God of hopefulness and joy, give us a cheerful sense of our blessings. Make us content with all that You provide for us. Teach us that nothing can remove us from You as You hold us in Your kind and loving hands. Chase from our hearts all gloomy thoughts, and make us glad with the brightness of hope and faith in You; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Give thanks for the eternal relevance of God's word in every situation, not least the current coronavirus season.

Give thanks for the opportunities lockdown has given us to re-think our lives and to depend more fully on Him.

Give thanks for the ways family, friends and neighbours have looked out for each other during lockdown and gradual easing of restrictions. Give thanks for the ways technology helps us in our continuing worship and fellowship together.

Give thanks for the work of our minister and elders as they begin to seek ways to accommodate restrictions for the Church over the coming month.

Ask God for wisdom for all in the Church family as the restrictions are gently lifted; that we will have cautious good sense, and let's ask God to help us emerge from these times having a closer walk with Him and a strengthened desire to do His will.

Pray for God to give wisdom to the Government and church leaders making decisions around timing and methods of easing restrictions without endangering lives.

Here's a prayer for our Church children to pray, and older folk too.

A prayer remembering God is with us

Lord God, you are always with me. You are with me in the day and in the night.

You are with me when I'm happy and when I'm sad.

You are with me when I'm healthy and when I am ill.

You are with me when I am peaceful and when I am worried.

Today I am feeling (name how you are feeling)

because (reasons you are feeling this way).

Help me to remember that you love me and are with me in everything today. Amen

OUR COMMUNITY

Summer brings longer daylight hours and an explosion of new life in the bird, insect, and animal worlds. Give thanks for the natural beauty of our community area and the way so many people have begun to interact with it in new ways during lockdown.

Praise God for the innumerable blessings we witness in our community, too many to list here but so many through the endeavours of others.

Pray that employers in our community will be able to meet the new requirements for the provision of the Government's furlough scheme being extended through to October.

The Government has stopped landlords evicting tenants until the end of June but homelessness is on the rise. Pray for the local council to be enabled to give more support to youth advisers, homeless charities, and those not having anywhere to call home.

With the start of the Test and Trace system in Scotland, contact tracers have started work to track down people who have been in contact with those who test positive with coronavirus. The aim of the system is to lift blanket lockdown restrictions and move towards more localised, targeted measures. Pray that people in our community will recognise this as a "civic duty" and agree to participate voluntarily.

OUR WORLD

Christians have been asking for God to intervene in the midst of the pandemic crisis and also for ways to point people to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Praise God for the opportunity to sow and reap a harvest in the midst of uncertainty, and pray for heightened openness to the gospel.

Knowing that all are created equal, and all people bear God's image, Pray for racism to be eliminated from all our structures and relationships in society and for people across all ethnicities to be united.

A record 741 migrants landed in the UK in May. The small boats crossing the Channel are often overloaded and taking on water and when French vessels attempt to intercept them, migrants threaten to jump into the sea, or even throw children overboard. Their refusal to be rescued by French authorities puts lives at risk, so the French have no option but to shadow the boats into British waters, where migrants are safe, knowing they will be taken to Britain.

Pray for the Home Office to succeed in dismantling the organised crime gangs behind these crossings, and secure changed laws for the safety of migrants in open water.

If the world consisted of 100 people, 20 would live in a slum; 42 would never hear about Jesus; 49 would live on less than £1.50 a day. Pray for a fairer distribution of the world's resources. Pray for agencies such as MAF, Interserve, Wycliffe, and others, as they bring Christ's freedom and release to developing countries and please pray for the many missionaries working to preach the Good News to the poor in many countries.

Parts of India have recorded 50C lately. There are also rising Covid-19 infections and swarms of locusts ravaging crops. The temperatures are the highest India has seen in decades. Thousands of migrants are walking the highways after fleeing pandemic-ridden cities to try to return to their villages. Many have little food or water and will be among the most exposed to the heat. In addition to that, the heatwave has affected efforts to combat the swarms of locusts. Pray for the safety of those most exposed to the sun such as labourers, and for the elderly, sick, and pandemic sufferers.

Retiral of Michael Elliott

Michael Elliott has retired as Session Clerk after approximately 16 years of faithful service to St. Blanes. I say “approximately” because his late wife, Helen, was appointed as Session Clerk in 2000 but shortly afterwards began to suffer from progressive illness with the result that Michael was increasingly called upon to assist her in her duties. As his involvement steadily grew, the Session decided to make it official, and so he formally took over from Helen and has served ever since.

However, retiral does not come easily to Michael and so he will continue to maintain the congregational roll as well as organising the rotas for both communion and the door duties. We are sorry that the current situation does not allow us the opportunity to thank him personally, that will have to wait for another day, but in the meantime, we thank him not only for all he has done in his role as Session Clerk, but also as a tireless elder and pastoral visitor, which I’m sure will continue. Thanks again, Michael.

Our new Session Clerk is Alan Dunn whose details are as follows:

Address: 11 Strathmore Avenue
Telephone: 01786 823420

Dear friends in St Blane's and LeCroft,

Angela and I wanted to write sending our warmest love and appreciation to you all, and to thank you for your kindness and love to us both through the years.

Kenneth arrived in Dunblane in 2005, having moved down from Banchory, and after a few months visiting several churches in the area soon settled in St Blane's. We appreciated the preaching and the fellowship initially in the manse, and then later in the Connery home. We really enjoyed getting to know so many, and the choir was very patient with Kenneth!

2010 and 2011 were sad years for Kenneth, but the support both of Rev Alex Mitchell and many in the congregation was deep and meaningful.

Later in 2012 Angela arrived from Florida for occasional visits, sometimes coinciding with the monthly studies some of us were enjoying together on the Westminster Confession Of Faith. Kenneth had been asked to be an elder of St Blane's and as part of that realised that this fine historical document was part of what he had to agree to as the Confession of his faith. So it was appropriate to read and understand it. More deep and precious fellowship resulted in the 3 years we took to consider this, meeting 7 or 8 times per annum.

After we got married in 2014, we continued to live in Old Glassingall, and enjoyed visits there from many of the congregation, at various meetings, BBQs and more. Precious memories.

As Angela settled in Dunblane she got to meet and enjoy company with the ladies of St Blane's and I know we both enjoyed leading worship and serving with you all in the congregation. Rev Gary Caldwell was very generous inviting her to be in the Ministry Team.

During 2016, we felt the time had come to try to find a new home for us to set up together, and in August that year agreed to acquire a home in Kippen. We moved there in February 2017.

We continued to worship as you know in St Blane's, but after 3 years of travelling to Dunblane for worship, around the start of 2020 we thought it appropriate to move our place of worship closer to where we live and we started to visit other churches.

We are sorry that we have not been able to say goodbye properly to you all. In March, as many of you may know, we again visited the Apurina Tribe in the Amazon jungle that Kenneth had visited 5 times before, and where he had baptised the first believers. The church has really grown! This time he baptised a further 10 of the 17 new believers, and there were several conversions. Angela's preaching and music was enormously appreciated, there were services every day, and we prepared a diary of the trip. Covid arrived while we were away, and lockdown now continues. Thank you for your many kindnesses to us.

We pray that St Blane's and Lecropt will grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who died for us on the Cross, who rose again, and who sent The Holy Spirit to live in us. We will miss seeing you all each week but are thankful for continued friendship and wish you every blessing.

Angela and Kenneth Mackenzie

QUESTIONS THAT HELP US PRAY.

We often have questions for God, questions like:

Why did You allow this? What kind of good can come out of this? Is this fair? Why is this happening?

God's first question was to Adam in Genesis 3:9:

"Where are you?"

All the other questions He asked of mankind were similar, as if to say: What is going on in your heart? Who are you listening to? What are you believing about Me? God already knows the answers but wants us to be in a relationship with Him, and that means speaking with Him.

Responding to these questions can make us think and turn to God in prayer, prompting the kinds of conversations that God calls us to—the kinds that reveal purpose and meaning in ordinary life, the kind that can reaffirm faith and strengthen us.

In the Bible Jesus asked His followers lots of questions. Try flicking through the Gospels and looking for some of them.

When you're finding it difficult to pray, pick a question Jesus might ask you, and which resonates with you, and continue the conversation by expressing your response.

It helps to read the context around the question and maybe even imagine yourself within the Bible scene.

Here's an example:

Read Matthew 14:22-32 "Why did you doubt?"

When things are going well in our lives it's easy to believe in the goodness of God - His power and love and care for us.

But what about when everything seems to be going wrong? Isn't that when doubts creep in? Isn't that when Jesus might ask us where our faith is and why we doubt?

The response to Jesus' question would surely lead to prayer from the heart turning us back to trusting Him.



Bridge the Gap

It is amazing to realise that for three months now our lives have been so changed by the Coronavirus pandemic. Across the world countries have shut down; closures have ranged from shops to borders, from hairdressers to concert halls, from libraries to churches, all to stem the tide of infection and the incidence of Covid-19. So society has experienced major change, and the change has impacted on everyone. Whether it's working from home or home schooling (or both!), queueing to get into a shop, or staying safe, staying at home, isolation has become the new normal. For those on their own, the sense of isolation may be very real indeed. Cut off from family and friends, instructed to stay 2 metres apart and socially distanced, isolation has become familiar to us all.

It may be that some are close to family and able to see them, even from a distance. In our case, my wife and I have been lucky to be able to see one of our daughters and our grandkids, but our other daughter we haven't seen, other than on a computer screen, since Christmas. Like many, we long to be able to hug them, to convey our love for them through touching and holding them, bridging the socially distant gap between our nearest and dearest.

Touch was very important to Jesus in His ministry. It was one of the ways in which He showed His love for the people He taught, spoke with and healed. In Luke's Gospel we read:-

“At sunset the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness and, laying His hands on each one, He healed them.” (4:40)

We further read in Luke Ch 5 of a leper who approaches Jesus, saying, ***“If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” He said “Be clean!”.***(5:12-13)

At Ch 6:19 we further read how the people were all trying to touch Jesus because of the power coming from Him and healing them. Another instance is recounted in Ch 8:43-48 when a woman who had been ill for twelve years sought to touch Jesus' cloak, believing that if she did so she would be healed. Jesus knew He had been touched, even in a crowd. His response to the woman was so full of love –

“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

While touch is important in all these instances, underlying them all was faith. The leper had faith that if Jesus was willing, he would be healed. The crowds had seen Jesus touch and heal so they tried to touch Him, and the woman with the bleeding condition was told that it was her faith that had healed her. Just after that incident, occurring in the middle of the story of Jairus and his sick daughter, Jesus turns to Jairus and says ***“Don't be afraid, just believe...”***

These days it's not difficult to be afraid or anxious with all the media coverage of the pandemic and its consequences. But Jesus tells us how to bridge the gap, to overcome social distancing - ***“..just believe”***. Jesus, with His outstretched arms on the cross, weighed down by the burden of mankind's sin, bridged the gap between God and us and through Him we can bridge the gaps in our lives and communities - ***“..just believe”***. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote ***“You can rely on God”*** (2 Cor 1:18). This is the God who loved the world so much that He gave His only Son for us. That being so, He is quite certain to fulfil every promise He has made - Jesus is the guarantee of our reliance on God's *grace*, mercy and promises - ***“..just believe.”***

In the case of the woman healed by touching Jesus' cloak, Jesus drew the woman from the crowd as a testimony to the people of her faith. In Luke Ch 8, the man helped from the demonic possession wanted to go with Jesus but no, Jesus sent him away, saying ***“Return home and tell how much God has done for you”***. This man too, was to give his testimony to the power and love of Jesus.

So we might not be able to hug or cuddle those we love and from whom we are currently separated, but we can bridge the gap - we can tell them of our love, just as we can tell them of our love for our Lord and Saviour, who bridged the gap between us and His Father and sent the Holy Spirit to be with us so that we are not alone.

“Don't be afraid, just believe..”

Michael Yuille