

Worshipping at Home. Week 23.

Monday: Weeds and Flowers?

A story passed onto me: 'I have killed so many plants. As a child, going to a convent school, one evening I was tasked with weeding a small flowerbed by one of the senior nuns. I have never tended to a flowerbed before. Mom or Dad weren't gardeners. "How will I know which ones are the weeds?" I asked in a concerned voice not wanting to pull out any of Sr. Finbar's precious flowers. Everything was in infancy. "Oh," she replied "Just leave the pretty ones and take out the rest." Happy with my simple instructions, I set about my job intent on doing it well. When I finished, I returned to Sr Finbar so she could check the job was done right. She came out to look at her newly tidied flower bed and when she saw the job I had done, her jaw dropped. "You took all the flowers out and left all the weeds." I was distraught. "Oh I'm so sorry. You said to leave the pretty ones. I left the pretty ones", I said, "Am I in big trouble?" She paused and then laughed. "No," she said, "you're not in trouble. But you just taught me. Everything really does have its own beauty. I just didn't see it there before. No harm done. Thank you."

Dandelions are some of my favourite flowers to be honest. Smiling heads on them.

Psalm 104:24 *O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*

Prayer: Lord, help me to see beauty and delight in things and people that are sometimes discarded as not worthy. You love all that you have made. Amen.



Tuesday: Keep the light on

I heard of one little Church which, during lockdown, has kept a light on in church. It may not be the best thing environmentally but in the full scheme of things it had a positive message. A poster on the Church door explained why ...it was a sign, the Church was still alive and well, the doors may be shut ...but the Church as such remains open. It was a sign that no matter what, we do not give up, that no matter what – **the light of Christ continues**, and nothing can put it out. It was also a reminder to me that it is often the small things that make a difference. Also, leaving the light on was such a simple thing. It didn't demand great effort or planning ...it was something within easy reach of the congregation. Sometimes we think that everything has to be done on a grand scale ...involving lots of effort, expense and time. Look out for the small actions that can make a difference.

Matthew 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

Prayer: Loving God, thank you that small things make a difference. Help me to notice what small action I can do today that allows your light to shine a little bit more. Amen.



Wednesday: Surviving the Beirut explosion

I read this, which I found very inspirational: "St Dimitrios Greek Orthodox Church in Achrafieh is less than a kilometre away from where the Beirut explosion took place. Father Youil Nassif rushed to the church to check for damage, finding the nave completely ruined. But the sacred altar space, protected by the "iconostasis" (wall of icons), was almost unscathed - including an oil lamp that had remained lit throughout the blast." The priest

from the church also said these words, "In times of crisis you search for signs and we need a light in the darkness. Please pray for us." We pray and remember the people of Beirut. And think also of how a tiny flickering flame keeps going ...even in the direst of circumstances. Our hearts and prayers are with the people of Beirut. And in our times of crisis think of how the small flame can keep going in our hearts and lives.

Romans 12:11 *Never let the fire in your heart go out. Keep it alive. Serve the Lord.*

Prayer: Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work and speak and think for thee; still let me guard the holy fire and still stir up thy gift in me. Amen.



Thursday: The Sunday feeling

It was wonderful to share in my first act of shared worship; it was at Stalybridge Methodist and was an outdoor service one Sunday morning. All the extensive Risk Assessments were in place and a huge thanks to all those who helped do them.

The chairs were set outside, and we even had a speaker to play some music ...oh yes and the sun shined! The allocated number of people were present, and a very simple act of worship took place. The traffic hurried by, passers-by came and went, and yet there was a very real feeling of worship ...the church garden, so well kept, helped and everyone felt a sense of being together. When I got home, I realised I had that “**Sunday feeling**”, which I hadn’t had all the time on worship on zoom. It was the feeling of coming home after worship, somehow difficult to describe, but there. I hadn’t noticed during lockdown that the Sunday feeling wasn’t there ...but I recognised it coming in from worship. Maybe it was that sense of being together in a physical way ...and having a greater sense of community. We continue on zoom ...it gives a worship feeling too ...but hope and look to the way we can begin to be together face to face in a safe and authentic way.

John 15:4-5 *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

Prayer: Thank you, loving God, for those times when I feel very much part of the community, when I feel a sense of belonging and togetherness – for you are with us always. Amen.



Friday: Surprise letter

I received a very lovely and encouraging letter from someone who had been receiving the worship notes. It brightened my day and reminded me of the importance of being in touch with each other and finding space for our spiritual reflection and food. With the letter was also a reflection called “an interview with God.” It began “**I dreamt I had an interview with God...**” In the interview questions are put to God ...and God replies. I wonder what question you might ask God if you had the possibility of an interview with him.

There is too much to quote but I just mention one or two replies that God gives in the interview:

“Learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness. Learn it is not good to compare yourself to others.

Learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it differently.”

At the end of the interview we hear, “God smiled and said ...just know that I am here ...always”.

Colossians 3:13 *Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Prayer: Thank you, Lord God, for the kindness and thoughtfulness of other people; for little surprises which help us on our way. Help me to see the opportunities where I can make a difference. Amen.



Saturday: Sleeping through the thunderstorm

We have had a run of very hot days, when the temperatures soared into the their 30s and the nights, if they didn’t go below 20, were called tropical. Some people enjoyed them more than others. After one very hot day, the forecast predicted that there would be a heavy thunderstorm that night. I went to bed expecting to be woken up by bouts of thunder and flashes of lightening. But when I woke up I thought the thunderstorm must have passed me by. Going out for my early walk I noticed some puddles so assumed there must have been a some rain. I was surprised then, when on my walk I met one or two people who mentioned the terrific thunder ...the amazing strikes of lightening and crackling of thunder. When I got home, I then saw headlines that Greater Manchester had been hit by a major thunderstorm. The experience reminded me that often we miss and fail to hear or see the very major things that are happening around us. We can, if not careful, close our eyes and hearts and minds to what is right there for us.

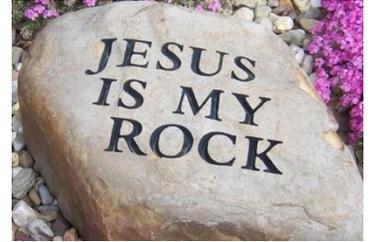
Matthew 11:15 *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

Prayer: Loving God, help me to see and notice the important things that are happening around me and to listen and respond as best I can. Amen.



Sunday Worshipping at Home 23rd August.

“A Name – A Rock – a Key”



Gathering for worship

Lord, your name is the name we look to; it is the name of hope and salvation - Jesus.

Lord, you are our rock, the one on whom we can depend, the solid ground, of our life and our faith.

Lord, you hold the key to life, you unlock the door of fear and despair and bring us into the light of your love and grace.

So we come from where we are to offer a prayer of thanks, that you have looked to us, and we pray that this time may be one of blessing and strength for the days ahead. Amen.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption
through the blood that Christ has shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the head.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more keenly felt than heaven:
there is no place where earth's failings
have such gracious judgement given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined,
by the glory of the Lord.

Opening prayer

Loving God, from our familiar homes surrounded by the ordinary things of life, in a place that feels comfortable and help us not to forget the wonders and greatness of your love.

Holy God, when we have many of the things that make our lives easier, and know the blessing of a home and place of safety help us not to take what we have granted, but to come with thanksgiving.

Surprising God, when so much of the day is filled with routine and daily tasks, help us always to be open to what new venture there might be for us ...for you are always leading us.

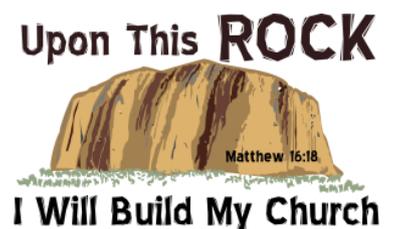
Thank you, God, for the privilege of being part of the amazing story of faith sustained by our ancestors. We put our hope in you to lead us into the future. Amen.

Bible reading: Matthew 16:3-20

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are

Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be¹ bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.



Reflection

This is a pivotal point in the Gospel, it marks a turning point. Jesus sets his way towards Jerusalem and here, amazingly, Jesus endorses Peter in this key role. Peter who has only been with Jesus a relatively short while, who is often bewildered by what is going on and who acts impulsively. He is the one Jesus entrusts with the keys to the kingdom to, he is the one who is to be the rock, he is the one who is even going to have a change of name. Here is a crucial and relevant understanding of how God works, what it means to be Church and how we are to build the kingdom. God hasn't chosen the completely fluent or well-educated, the one who has been through the necessary courses and presents in a respectable and polished way ...somehow this is not the way God is working, that is not the person of Peter ...Jesus is looking for something else and, despite everything, puts His faith and trust in Peter. We look at our lives, and our Church ...are we willing to work in this risky way, not have everything finished at the edges; willing to work where people are and believing in people despite the weaknesses and inconsistencies?

I wonder if the Church would be a different kind of Church if we took these things to heart.

We can also ponder for a moment on our own spiritual growth and understanding...can we imagine Jesus speaking to us these words of affirmation and endorsement?

We stand in the line and in the tradition of Peter ...so we can say with hope and confidence ...thanks be to God.

Prayers

We pray for ourselves that we may have confidence in our calling, that we might see those places when we can play our part to unlock the door to the kingdom, to see how we can be a rock, even though we sometimes feel weak and unsure, and to know above all we are held and known by your love.

We pray for those who struggle with faith and are full of self-doubt, for those who feel they are in the dark and locked into hopeless situations.

We pray for those whose futures seems insecure, and those who have lost job and income.

We remember those who have lost their loved ones – may each one know your hope and comfort.

At this time we pray too for the start of the Glossop and Tameside Circuit ...may we go forward with your strength, ready for all that you asking us to be and do. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Blessing

Loving God, you entrust me with sharing the good news and building the church, may I be willing, like Peter, to take the plunge and be brave for the Gospel. Amen.

Share tea and refreshment ...and enjoy the day.

God bless.



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Dear Friends,

It seems strange writing this letter, as I am writing it early, due to having a week off and trying to work out when this letter will go out to everyone. It will be for the last week of August. It is hard to say too much about how things are going with the Covid situation because one thing we have all got used to is that things change very rapidly. We have got used to being told one thing one day ...and then finding it is different the next day. This is how it will probably continue for a while. We will no doubt have to live with that sense that plans and arrangements made may have to be changed at the last minute. I am reminded that, in many cultures, at the end of a meeting with someone, and after a plan has been made to meet again, the meeting often finishes with the words “**God willing**” – giving that sense that nothing is absolutely certain but we put everything into the hands of God. I find that helpful, a way of acknowledging that in all our lives there is a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability about what may happen.

I also realise that we are coming to the end of these letters sent out only as the Glossop Circuit because very soon, September 1st, we become the Glossop and Tameside Circuit. We recognise the changes and opportunities that this will bring, and how we will need time and space to get to know each other better, to have space to listen and share stories, to work out the practical arrangements and no doubt to see what is going to work and what isn't. But we go forward with faith, with hope and confidence that in all things God works with us and for us.

We know that as we come to the end of August there is a huge effort being made to allow the safe return to school and college. At this time we pray, remembering all the staff and pupils who will be returning to Rosehill Methodist Academy, those who will be starting school for the first time and those who have left and will be starting life at secondary school. We pray for all schools at this time, and in all things may there be strength and help to provide a good environment for everyone in schools.

I very much hope that August has been a reasonable month, September comes and the Autumn time and despite the uncertainty that we have at this time, we can look to know and hold onto our journeying with one another, held in God's steadfast love and knowing that we are not alone. We very much hope, “God willing”, we will begin to be able to meet more often in face to face times.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

Hazel

23rd August, 5pm

Service on Zoom to give thanks
for the work of Vicky Jones as
Family and Children's worker.