

Sunday 3rd May 2020

Welcome(Morag)

As we take this time out of our week to join together as the people of God in this time and place.

This week my plan was to film this welcome outside at home near the river or up in the hills with the sheep but the weather has turned against that, it will be something to look forward to in the weeks to come, I'm sure good weather will come back to the Doon Valley soon, I am an eternal optimist.

Our call to worship this morning is Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—

where does my help come from?

²My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

³He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;

⁴indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

⁶the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;

⁸the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

Let us worship God together

This week we have moved to the Church in Pergamum. In the last two weeks we have heard the good news about the Churches in Ephesus and Smyrna. They work hard, persevere, have not grown weary but there are things they need to reconsider. They have forgotten their first love of God and that they are rich but some will be tested.

Pergamum lay about sixty miles north of Smyrna and fifteen miles from the coast of the Aegean Sea. For some four centuries, beginning in 133 BC, it was the capital of Asia. Like Ephesus and Smyrna, it was a wealthy city. Pergamum boasted a library

of about 200,000 volumes, but it rejected God's written Words, and the wisdom of Christ. Here, Jesus addresses the church at Pergamum through the apostle John.

You have heard me say before that I have so many books that I am banned from bringing in more to the house before I move into a manse. There are many books I have read, some have been on the to read pile for a long time, some being read now when I have a bit more time and some that I bought and I suppose I will never read. But there is one book that I treasure. Here it is...

It's not just my Bible for I have loads of them, it was given to me by my family when I started training away back in 2006. I open it and see the handwriting of my nephew and my niece who were only 10 and 6 and it reminds me that God's word has sustained me through this time. You too probably have the same and when I open it I see the pages worn and the writing on some tabs has all but gone but many times I have gone and read it in time of trial and times of celebration and still it speaks to me. The things of this world change constantly around us right now but the word of God lasts forever.

Today we hear

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ²³ I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

A double edged sword would separate and slash we are reminded of this in Hebrews 4:12

²For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The Church in Pergamum was being told that they had been judged and that they had stuck to their faith and that Jesus knew the thoughts and attitudes of their hearts. They had not renounced their faith in Christ and have remained true to his name. But again it's good news-bad news.

Bad news is there are people among them who hold on to old practices and worship things they did before they came to faith. There are folks among them who hold on to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. They were a sect who had followed Nicolas and they still offered sacrifices to idols and came to Church and professed to be Christian. John writes that they were to repent and that the word of God would fight against them. The Church at Pergamum looked like it worshipped Christ but some of them still held on to the practices of the past. They hadn't let Christ in to the whole of their lives.

In this lockdown time when we have time to read our Bibles more and have more time spend with God, we can examine what our lives are like and what does our walk with God look like. Are there things that have crept in that we know are not good for us and hold us back from our walk with God.

I was asked a question this week: What things do you want to leave in lock down and what new things will you take out with you?

A great question to ponder on and I'll let you think through your own thoughts. Write them down, go back to them. I am writing my Covid19 journal. I'm sure in years to come I will look back at where God has taken me from this point. What will I take with me, I will take a sense of permission to try new things, I've been bread making, I know even I, starting my sourdough starter, learning to feed it and nurture it and wait until it's ready to be used and then have a loaf that we could eat. Who would have thought I would have tried this. My skills in the kitchen are vastly improved by lockdown. It's because I have time, I'm not travelling here and there, I'm not out at night. I have time to rest and be still. Time to spent reflecting and being with God. It's what I will take with me.

Henri Nouwen says:

I am so afraid to open my clenched fists! Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to? Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands? Please help me to gradually open my hands and to discover that I am not what I own, but what you want to give me. And what you want to give me is love—unconditional, everlasting love.

It's what our passage says today, the things that have held us back, the practices we got into that keep us from God. Go back to God and let him carry the things we were never meant to. We were never meant to work ourselves into the ground but let the word of God speak and direct us, to let the love of God change us and we give whatever hold us back over to God, who holds all the things we can't.

John leaves us with these words

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

In these time when we seem to be in a bit of a wilderness experience ourselves we are reminded.

Exodus 16:34

³⁴As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. ³⁵The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

The Israelites ate Manna until they reached their settled land. God provided for them everyday and they saw what he had provided, collected enough and he sustained them through that journey in the wilderness.

We hear that to the one who is victorious hidden manna will be given to them. For us that is the comfort and communion with the Spirit of Christ. This will sustain us though all times, Christ is with us in all our wilderness experiences and we will always have more than enough to get us through. A comfort for us in these times, the one who is victorious will also get a white stone. A white stone an ancient custom in trials of law that the one acquitted would be given a white stone to signify that their guilt had been wiped away. That their sin had been forgiven. A new name and a new family for them. Christ welcomes us into his family. We are children of God, forgiven, healed and restored to a new life in him.

What will we take forward with us out of lockdown?

Christ is with us and in us and before us. This week and always.

To God the Father
God the Son
God the Holy Spirit
Amen.

Blessing(Morag)

As we go into another week in lockdown, we are encouraged that God is with us no matter what we face this week I'll leave you with the blessing.

The peace of God that is beyond all understanding
Guard your hearts and minds
In Christ Jesus

And the Blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you and all those that you love
Now and forever more

Amen.