

## Weekly Newsletter (58)

by and for the Christ Church and Pagham URC families

11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

### Musings from the Manse

This week I'd like to share with you another of Sheila Walkers' *'Contemporary Reflections for Praying and Preaching'*, which brings another aspect of the Gospel reading from John to our attention – it is called *'Peace that passes all understanding'*.

'Come in, quick – Did anyone see you? Come in and close the door in case they come knocking, seeking blood, more blood... "You too were with the Galilean, and you, and you – we know your voice, and the cut of your beard."

We deplore Peter's denial, of course we do, but we – what would we have said, the rest of us, in his shoes? And what would we say now, especially now, numbed as we are by his death, our King, 'The King of the Jews'? So come in, quickly, come in and lock the door and let us draw close, sharing the fragments of our shattered dreams, drawing some small comfort from our togetherness, licking our wounds, keeping the world at bay while we wrestle with our belief, our unbelief, our disbelief; or simply weep in a world, for a world that seems oblivious to its loss.

So far we have come, so far from those ordinary days on the lakeside - mending our nets, going about our predictable business, passing the time of day; so far we have come – for what? To slope off under cover of night back to travelling the squally lake for fish, hauling heavy sodden nets till kingdom come – we who have seen water walked on, fish multiplied, Christ the light?

I, for one, James son of Zebedee, have no wish to go back - back to my boats and my father; nothing against the old man, or his trade, but I would not, could not, settle; I have seen and heard and thought too much ... And the others, Andrew and John, concurred.

And Peter paced, haunted still by the words that betrayed his fear and his friend; me and my big mouth and my faithless heart, (for out of the heart the mouth speaks). If only, if only – I know it would be different next time, now that I have been shocked awake; - if only – I could show how much I loved him, love him still.

And Thomas – where is he? Thomas, patron saint of pessimists, kin to Eeyore and the Marshwiggle of Narnia, gloomy Galahad, stubbornly, utterly loyal, telling Jesus, "No good will come of it, I'm telling you, this going back to Bethany, but if you must go, then let us all go too; madness – but I will lay down my life for this madness." Thomas – where are you, could you not bear to be here? In you, too, something has died and you take your pain to nurse it alone until you can find a way of being in the face of emptiness. And into this black hole, this great absence, absence of hope, of healing, absence of ease, absence of sense, of story, absence of peace, suddenly **JESUS** is present, jostling my arm; I **felt** him, heard him say that ridiculous, impossible word – **Peace**.

You spent three years confounding our expectations, chipping away at our certainties, stretching our credulity, daring us to imagine the unimaginable, believe the unbelievable, perform the impossible, bring heaven to earth – and we were caught up, held, irresistibly, yours, slow, but beginning to glimpse, to hope, to catch on – Could it be? Yes! yes, and yes.

But then -the slam of death in our faces, finality of crucified flesh. Oh no! no and no ...

Jesus, you were all that held us together, and we are poised, for a moment, in the slipstream of your passing - held in tension before falling apart.

And you say **PEACE**? Who – what are you, anyway? If you are **Jesus**, crucified, dead and buried, and this very day, the third day, you are **risen**, then oh! Not peace, but a glorious, earth-shaking **SHOUT!** Celebration that all is not lost, but won. Laughing, and crying for relief, and release from the knots that tied themselves round our guts, our hearts and minds, chattering to hide our great embarrassment in the face of too awesome a revelation ... If he is risen, then we, we - ?

**Peace**, he says, I was coming to that: **PEACE**. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

**PEACE? You call that PEACE?**

Sent to bind up the broken-hearted with all the heartbreak that entails; sent to heal the sick, with and without medicine, disinfectant or thanks; sent to bring release to captives who swear and spit, clinging to the security of their chains.

**PEACE? You call that PEACE?**



Sent to pull the rug from under the feet of the self-important, to be the light that reveals hypocrisy and greed; to be the salt that stings before it heals; sent without two pennies to rub together, no insurance, no reserved seats, no emergency rations, sent to be sheep among wolves.

**PEACE? You call that PEACE?**

Sent to comfort the disturbed, but to disturb the comfortable. Sent to expose what men would cover, and cover what men would confess with forgiveness; sent to blow the whistle on men's righteousness, and hand them his own on a plate.

**PEACE? You call that PEACE?**

And yet, and yet, I think I will have no peace unless I go where you send me.'

Whenever we read a piece of Scripture and reflect on what it says to us, it's always good to have another's thoughts, another facet which might bring the words alive for us - words that will help us to think and then to do! As we try to live in a post Easter world, may the richness of the words and the stories and the light of resurrection continue to guide us.

Yours in Christ, Helen <><

**Word for today** John 20: 19-31

'A week later his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

'Peace be with you.'

Then he said to Thomas,

'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'

Thomas answered him,

'My Lord and my God!'

Jesus said to him,

'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

*(John 20: 26-29)*

**Meditation of Thomas**

Did he condemn me for doubting? Not a bit of it – he understood, and answered.

Perhaps I should have believed earlier – after all, I had my fellow disciples' word that Jesus was alive – but you can appreciate I wanted to be sure. Don't forget, we were grief-stricken when he died, numb with despair, none of us listening when Mary and the others rushed back from the tomb declaring it was empty and the Lord raised – no, not one.

We feared it was wishful thinking, a beautiful but sad delusion, for though Jesus had spoken of rising again, we never imagined it could really happen. It was just my luck not to be there when he appeared again and, though I longed to accept he was truly alive, I didn't dare to trust - lest it were all to prove a ghastly mistake.

I couldn't have lived with more disappointment - not after what we'd been through already - so I closed my mind to the idea until Jesus stood before me, inviting me to touch, and feel, and know.

Seeing is believing; isn't that what they say? And so it was for me. So how, you may ask, can anyone possibly believe without seeing?

Well actually they **can**; for even though he's gone from us now, returned to the Father, I know he's with me still, every moment of the day – here through his Spirit in his risen power.

I can't see him but I can feel his presence - for ever by my side. Not that you have to take my word for it – I wouldn't expect that. Respond, and discover the truth for yourself.

Do not doubt, but believe!

This newsletter was written, and the accompanying service recorded, before Friday – when we received the sad news of the death of HRH Prince Phillip.

The United Reformed Church Daily Devotions sent Helen  
'*Liturgical Resources following the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh*'.

These were sent to you later in the day on Friday. Please check your emails if you have not seen them.

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

we have faith in you –  
in who and what you are,  
what you mean,  
what you have done  
and what you will yet do.

But we also have doubts –  
things we don't understand,  
that we cannot make sense of,  
that we struggle to accept.

Alongside our belief is unbelief,  
alongside trust, uncertainty.

Accept us, we pray, despite the warring voices within.

Deepen our faith and respond to our doubts,  
assuring us of your living presence and constant love.

Though we will never have all the answers,  
teach us that, in you, we have the one answer we really need.

Amen.

*adapted from 'A most amazing Man' by Nick Fawcett*

## Gathered for Prayer....

Gathered for Prayer continues to meet at **9 am and 7 pm each Wednesday**. All are welcome!

Here's the link....

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5742722693?pwd=R3BEQ3pPV0ZJNndRWVVKwWVdvd6QT09>

Meeting ID: 574 272 2693 Passcode: xsX5UM

## Other news....

I hope that some of you were able to follow along with the Havant Passion Play short films through Holy Week. They were very good and I expect you can still get them on YouTube. Perhaps, next year, we can arrange a coach/bus to Havant Park where they are normally performed!!

## Song from Ed Martin

Taking my cue from Charles Wesley, who, when a mob hauled his brother John off to the magistrate's house in the middle of the night in an attempt to make him stop preaching, wrote a collection of "Hymns to be Sung in a Tumult" (one of them is "Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim" -- Singing the Faith, 340),

I have written a "Song to be Sung during a Pandemic". It's called

### "Where is God? (God is with us)"

Where is God, when a breath can be lethal, when a touch can kill?  
Where is God, when a hug runs the risk of making loved ones ill?  
Where is God, when a mask hides expressions showing that we care?  
Where is God, when it feels there is danger lurking ev'rywhere?

*Chorus:*

Where is God, when a dark apprehension overtakes our mind?  
Where is God, when a sense of assurance is so hard to find?  
Where is God, when enforced isolation leaves us so alone?  
Where is God, when delight and enjoyment are almost unknown?

*Chorus:*

*Bridge:*

*Chorus (x2)*

*Chorus:*

Emmanuel. God is with us.  
Never alone. He's always at our side.  
Constant companion,  
no matter what assails us.  
His Spirit in us to comfort and to guide.

*Bridge:*

He's our refuge, he's our shelter,  
He binds up the brokenhearted.  
When our spirits fail within us  
He gives strength in place of weakness.

*An audio mp3 file  
and a pdf file of the sheet music  
are attached to the email  
with this newsletter.*