

## Weekly Newsletter (61)

by and for the Christ Church and Paghams URC families

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021

### Musings from the Manse

Dear Friends,

This week's 'Contemporary Reflection' (from Sheila Walker) focuses on the Gospel reading below, but mainly the passage from the book of Acts – chapter 8, verses 26-40 – the passage about Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. She poses a very good question to us: '*How close, to hear the whisper of God*' – and if/when we do hear it, are we prepared to do its bidding? She calls the reflection '*Moonrakers*' – which only reminds me of the James Bond film from 1979 – though I suspect this wasn't in her mind when she chose this as this reflections title! See what you make of it....



What was it that drew them to the water, the moonrakers, kept them trawling for treasure, kept them coming, again and again, even though they found nothing but muddying silt?

Why, when the fractured waters settled, there is - was again: magnetic gold disc, pure, pale prize: could it really be only moonshine?

What was it that drew them to Jerusalem, Chancellor of the Exchequer, too, all that way to worship, kept them coming again and again, even though they found nothing but questions? Why, when the desert sandstorm of words settled, there it was again - flash of light on living water, the Word behind the words, light to our path; could it really be only a mirage?

And what is it that draws them now, keeps them coming, faithfully attending week by week, or every now and then - even though they seem uncomprehending? Why, when the Church has done its worst, (or best), there it is again - whisper of God that cannot be explained away; can it really be only interference?

Always at work. Holy Spirit, whisper of God.

At work in the world; at work in the word; at work in all sorts of unexpected people, people of every colour, race and social status, every sexual orientation ...

At work in Philip. That was impressive. '*An angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza ...*'

**How did he know**, for heaven's sake? Headed paper? Business card? James Bond lookalike? email from angel@heaven.com?

Then again, '*The Spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it.*' No sooner said than done: off he went.

**How did he know?**

Always at work. Holy Spirit, whisper of God.

How close to hear me whisper? Close enough to feel my breath, and my hair brush your face; to dare to touch and be touched if you would share my secrets.

How close to hear the whisper of God?

How close is the branch to the vine? Philip knew, knew how to breathe his very life from the living words of the living Lord, sap rising, flowing, reaching, to his ears to alert them to the whisper of God; to his feet to speed him to the scene of action; to his lips to fill them with words of life; to his hands to baptise the new believer: fruit of the vine: one Ethiopian eunuch, sowing and African harvest.

Always at work. Holy Spirit, whisper of God.

Today, here, now - how many Ethiopians? In how many chariots? On how many desert roads? And where are we? Are we listening?

Are we listening to the one who slips into church to light a candle? To the one who goes to relaxation classes? To the one who has the card of praying hands? To the one who sometimes wears a crucifix? To the one who bought the book on Hinduism? To the one who does the flowers on the grave? To the one who shouts too loud their atheism? To the one who always watches Songs of Praise?

And where are they? Inside church, hanging on by a thread - hoping against hope that, if they stay there long enough, something will rub off, some switch will flip that will somehow make sense of it all?

What are we saying to them? Are we reading our book from a distant pulpit or have we climbed down, climbed down into their chariot, read **their** book? Are we feeding stones instead of bread? And how much longer will they stay before they join the sad statistic of those who have slipped sadly away?

And where are they? Outside church, anywhere **but** in church; pushing prams, drugs, supermarket trolleys; pushing their luck at the races, pushing past me on the motorway; pushing this door and that, in a world of darkness and decay because the light is boxed up in the light-bulb factory and the salt in its packet and the good news hidden away on the back page of the book they'll never finish because the battery in their torch ran out.

Today, here, now, how many Ethiopians? In how many chariots? On how many desert roads?

Lord ... he's so different from me, I wouldn't know what to say ... and you know that anything other than a four-wheel drive makes me feel sick ... and as for deserts! Well, I mean, we might **both** end up getting lost...

Maybe – I need to study some more, pray some more, set up an Alpha course – maybe.

And maybe you need to get on the road. Train on the job.

Always at work, Holy Spirit, whisper of God. Listen ...

Always at work. Holy Spirit, whisper of God.

**Power of God.**

Receive ...

Ready to go

now.

What questions did this reflection pose in you? How will you find the answers?

May the Spirit of God always keep us on our toes – ready to go where we are called – ready to receive the power of God to perform His will – ready!

Yours in Christ, Helen <><

## **Word for today** John 15: 1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.' (*John 15: 1,2*)

## **Meditation of a vineyard owner**

'He knew what he was talking about, Jesus. Growing grapes is no easy business, certainly not something you can leave to take care of itself. The vine has to be pruned carefully, dead wood cut out, healthy growth encouraged; and then there's the training of stems to see to, the protecting from pests, the feeding, watering and weeding before harvest can finally come. It's about the vine and the grower - the two working together - and that's what we need to remember in terms of the **true** vine, and growing in him.

Too easily we make it about **us**, **our** efforts, **our** attempts to bear fruit – believe me, **I** know, for I've done it all too often myself. But that's like saying a grape can grow on its own, or that **we're** the vine ourselves – the whole perspective hopelessly skewed.

It's God who gives growth - not us - and it comes through being in Christ, not through anything **we** might do. You can't produce a crop alone, however hard you try; at least not fruit of the Spirit.

Remain close to him, nourished and nurtured by his love, for then, and only then, will your life yield the harvest he seeks.

## Prayer

Loving God,

we like to think we are productive in your service, that our discipleship is truly fruitful,  
but in our more honest moments we know that is rarely the case,  
so much in our lives instead being dead wood.

We promise plenty but deliver little, whether through disobedience or negligence –  
through rejecting your will or failing to make time for you  
so that you can nourish and nurture our faith.

We forget that real growth comes - not through our own efforts,  
however sincere -but by your grace.

Forgive the barrenness of our commitment and help us to be truly one with you,  
so that we may grow in faith and bear lasting fruit of your Spirit.

Amen.

*Word for today, Meditation and Prayer from 'A most amazing Man' by Nick Fawcett*

## Gathered for Prayer....

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

Here's the link....

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5742722693?pwd=R3BEQ3pPV0ZJNndRWVKeWdvand6QT09>

Meeting ID: 574 272 2693 Passcode: xsX5UM

## This week's Pandemic Prayer from the URC ...

Loving Lord Jesus,

You told the disciples not to be afraid on the first Easter Sunday.

Help us not to be afraid as the restrictions are eased  
but to trust in Your strength.

Give us the strength we need to move towards the uncertainty of a new normal.

Enable us to speak of you to those in distress and those who are afraid.

Fill us with The Holy Spirit and empower us to live our lives for You.

Amen.

*John Collings, Lay Preacher, Rutherglen URC*

## Thy Kingdom Come – global prayer movement for the days between Ascension and Pentecost.

You may have already received your copy of the 'Novena – Praying from the Psalms' – and I hope that you've been able to find out more information about 'Thy Kingdom Come' and are **ready to begin on 13<sup>th</sup> May**– if you haven't, it will be with you soon.

I also mentioned last week that I have copies of the 'Prayer Journal' for this year – still sitting in a box on my study floor, waiting to go to good, (or not so good), homes! Please let me know if you would like one.

A new for 2021 Hymn, (in conjunction with L.I.C.C.), has been published, set to the tune of 'Abide with me' – which can also be found on the website – but which I hope to use in our recorded worship during Ascension and Pentecost.

There are so many resources I could tell you about – but I'd like you to find out about them for yourselves. What works for you? What would you find helpful? How might we engage with them better and be better prepared for next year!!

So, tell me how 'Thy Kingdom Come' would work for you. We pray this phrase every time we say The Lord's Prayer – but do we pray it for ourselves, or do we pray it for those we want to see coming to faith in which God's Kingdom becomes a reality for them?

Many questions ..... I look forward to hearing the answers you have!!

Helen <><

Many thanks to all who donated to The Leprosy Mission's appeal for Mozambique. Two hundred pounds was sent via our church and others donated directly to TLM. All will be doubled by the UK government.

*Linda Hawker*