

LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
SCO20871 and SCO10035

Sunday 26th April 2020

As I've been thinking about some thoughts to share with you this week, the sixth Sunday when we've been unable to meet together, I came across this prayer/poem in a book called Lord of the Morning by Frank Topping. Although the book was published in 1977 I thought how appropriate these words are for us today.

BEING ALONE

In this morning hour

I am alone

With millions throughout the world who are alone.

Some are solitary in a kitchen

Or a bed-sitting room.

Others are in cars in traffic queues (perhaps not! Hilary's comment)

Or in the cab of a lorry on a road.

Sometimes it is good to be alone,

But loneliness hurts

Lord of life, help me.

Lord of life

This loneliness is a passing thing. (we hope and pray)

Soon I will be with others,

Companions, friends, family,

And I can hide from myself

In their company.

But there is a deep aloneness

That is hard to live with

When the soul seems empty.

Lord of life, fill my emptiness.

Lord, loneliness comes in many forms.

For some it is the emptiness of bereavement,

Widow, widower or orphan,

Divorced or separated by circumstance.

Lord, you know what it is to be alone, to feel deserted.

Help me not to wallow in self-pity,

Fill my emptiness with your spirit

Until the cold core within me

Is warmed by your love.

Lord of life, help me.

In this hour I ask to be given someone to love;

I don't want a hand to hold

But someone to love by caring.

This day must be full of people to love,

Even if only for a little time. Help me to lift others up.

Take over my life so that when I am alone

I will not be lonely

For you will live in me.

Lord of life, come now and help me.

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Those are words written well over 40 years ago but how close to the heart they are today.

Can I encourage you to consider that last verse and pray that in these moments as you read these words that God would give you someone to love.

I don't know who that person or persons might be. Perhaps it's a member of your family, a neighbour or friend, but equally it might be some person that you' don't know personally but whose story you've heard recently and for whom you feel led to pray.

Whoever this person is take a few moments now to pray for them in the quietness of your own home and your own heart. Imagine the circumstance that this person finds themselves in, reach out to them metaphorically and put your arms around them, whisper in their ear that they are not alone, they are remembered, cared about and loved by you and by God Almighty.

Take time to pray in silence

“He’s alive! He’s alive!”

Luke 24 : 13 - 35

These were the words that the two friends who were walking dejectedly along the road to Emmaus wanted to hear. But the content of their discussion seems to have centered around the events which had happened prior to the crucifixion of Jesus. So intent on their memories they could see nothing but their own pain and disappointment. Remember that for them it was only a couple of days since the crucifixion of Jesus, and there are all these wild rumours about the tomb and the disappearance of the body. These two are most likely heading out of town because they need a break from the tension of grief and the drama of the past couple of weeks; so they take a walk to the place called Emmaus, which means "warm springs," maybe to sit in some hot water and rejuvenate their bodies and their spirits before going home for a meal.

While they were walking and discussing together, Luke tells us that Jesus drew near and began to walk with them but their own agendas made them oblivious to anything else. Luke says that "their eyes were kept from recognising him." The three had an intense conversation on the walk to Emmaus; the disciples reported to the stranger all that had happened in Jerusalem these last days, and the stranger responded intensely to the news. "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe" . . . then he proceeded to interpret the scriptures to them. What an opportunity! -yet - they still didn't recognise him!

It takes sitting down to a meal together before their eyes are opened. And notice, they did not open their own eyes; "their eyes were opened for them."

Their eyes were opened to the story, which was much bigger than all the bewildered stories they had just told. Their eyes and hearts were opened to the big story of the wonder and grace of God. The two Emmaus pilgrims come to be known and embraced in their grief by the Christ who listens, resolves their pain by a caring, compassionate concern for them.

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Emmaus was not so much a **place** as a state of mind. The state of mind is escape - escape from pain, loneliness, longing, sorrow, bewilderment, grief. It is the place where we may spend much of our lives, the place in our lives where we are likely to say, "Why do these things have to happen to me? Or, even, why does God let this happen to me?" Perhaps this is the state that you are in just in these times and perhaps you are asking the same questions of God.

The road to Emmaus is that place where we go to escape whatever it is we need to escape. In normal circumstances it might be from our job - or lack of one, or from difficult people, or the demands of family, or fear or uncertainty over one's own health or the health of family or friends, or grief over life and love lost - any of these and more. In these days perhaps Emmaus is the place to escape from Covid 19. It is into these moments of life that Jesus is likely to enter - when life is most real and yet inescapable. God's grace does not usually come in a blaze of heavenly light with an angelic choir hovering around - God's grace falls in on us in the midst of the supper table, out in the garden or walking down the road, trying to make sense of life. God's grace falls in on us in the midst of the everyday and ordinary moments, in the plain and simple struggles to understand, in the middle of common conversations on long walks, during phone calls and driving in the car to do shopping.

The sacred moments of our lives are the everyday moments in which we can learn to open our spiritual eyes and see the redeeming grace of God moving along the road with us. The road; the conversation; the meal; the friends; even the stranger - are all ordinary but made incredible through the grace of God.

And life is filled with these moments when our hearts might burn within us. Grace abounds along the road of living; God comes to us and breaks through to us in the most common ways in the midst of the most mundane or breathtaking moments.

The brief encounter between Jesus and his friends on the road to Emmaus is a reminder to us that in any moment, in the midst of any experience, the resurrection may be experienced. For us to believe in the resurrection is not simply to put the literal idea into our minds and haul it out on Easter if we need it. It is not to have a piece of intellectual information or spiritual belief in our heads. To believe in the resurrection is to believe that Jesus is alive and wants to share his risen life with us.

Through prayer, our eyes were opened to see how our behaviour had closed us off to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; had in fact blinded us to the presence of Jesus among us as our risen Lord and Saviour. The grace of God helped us to recognise our ungraciousness towards each other. For the two at Emmaus, it was in the act of breaking bread and in the prayer of thanks given over the bread that they became aware that this was Jesus - for it was in that act that their eyes were opened. And having recognised Christ, they were filled with joy and excitement and return post haste to Jerusalem to share their good news with the others.

But the story doesn't end there - it is only the beginning - we are challenged through what we say and do - through how we live and through who we are - to witness to this presence of the risen Christ with us on our journey through life and beyond so that others may also experience eyes opened to his presence and hearts inflamed by the Holy Spirit. Pray then, that we will meet and respond to that challenge with

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the same excitement and joy as these two disciples as they rushed back to Jerusalem, always remembering that our “Jerusalems” are wherever we live and work and travel. Amen

A Prayer : Dealing with isolation

Three months, Lord,
three months of isolation,
of keeping my distance,
not just from colleagues or friends,
but from those closest to me,
even my nearest and dearest!

Separate rooms,
separate beds,
separate towels,
separate everything.

Just my own company,
hour upon hour,
day upon day.
Can I cope?
Will it drive me mad?
I honestly wonder,

faced by that daunting prospect.
Yet, of course, that's nonsense –
for it's a small price to pay to protect
not just myself
but others.

It seems hard,
but it's not really –
not compared to what so many are
going through at this time.

Remind me of that, Lord,
should I start to feel sorry for myself,
and teach me to do my bit,
gladly,
willingly
and conscientiously.
Amen.

A blessing

May the presence of the risen Christ be with you
the love and mercy of God be within you
the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you today and always. AMEN