

Pastoral letter from Sue Stanworth, Local Preacher  
for Remembrance Sunday  
8th November 2020

Dear sisters and brothers,

This has been a difficult letter to write. Once again we are in a changing situation here in Sheffield. There are more restrictions on where we can go and who we can meet with. Our church buildings are closed. If we have the technology we can meet virtually, but not everyone is comfortable with mobile phones and computers. Nobody likes wearing a mask, but we wear them (if we are able) to protect others, not ourselves. Once again, small businesses will be hit hard by this latest lockdown and low income families will find it hard to put food on their table.

Our daily news has been dominated by the elections in the USA, conflict over our future as we exit the European Union, earthquakes in Greece and Turkey this week and terrorist attacks in France.

On Sunday, we shall be remembering those who fought in past wars, those who lived through them and those who died in them.

We have so much to pray for!! I have been reminded this week of a story told by a local preacher, a farmer, whose mother was frail and elderly. He was in the habit of calling at her bungalow in the evening and making her a cup of tea just before she went to bed and he would always make sure she was safely tucked up before he left. Once, as he passed her window, he glimpsed his mother kneeling on the floor beside the bed. It was her "Holy Habit" to pray every night before she slept, as she had done since childhood, kneeling beside the bed. He told the story with tears in his eyes.

So let's pray for free and fair elections across the world. Let's pray for our NHS workers, home care workers and residential care staff as they continue to care for the sick and the elderly. Let's remember in our prayers our school teachers and college lecturers as they support children and young people in their education. Let's also pray for our ministers and lay workers and those who have helped us and maybe challenged us on our Christian journey over the years.

Our Gospel reading this week comes from late in Matthew's account of Jesus' life. We are jumping from the Beatitudes in chapter 5, to chapter 25, verses 1 to 13, as Jesus prepares his disciples for his impending death. Jesus tells the story of the 10 bridesmaids who were waiting for the bridegroom so that they could escort him to the bride's house. In those days, it was ok for the bridegroom to be "fashionably late" so it was important to have your oil lamp ready to light the procession's way to the party. (No street lamps in those days!). In Jesus' story, the bridegroom was very late and the girls fell asleep as they waited. Suddenly, he appeared and they needed to refill their lamps with oil. Five of the girls hadn't brought extra oil, just in case! They ended up being locked out of the wedding celebrations. To our ears this seems harsh, doesn't it? But they hadn't taken their commitment seriously enough. As we start to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus as a baby into our world, let's think about how we might continue to live for Jesus while we wait for him to come back. Like the bridesmaids, we don't know when he will return.

"Jesus says: Be on your guard! You don't know when your Lord will come.  
Always be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come."  
Matthew 25: 42 (Contemporary English Version.)

Just to balance this out and encourage us all, I've been drawn to the golden thread of encouragement in the Bible about how God has loved and visited his people throughout history. He walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. He spoke with Abraham and Jonah. Just like the disciples, just like ourselves, none of us are perfect. Still He walks and talks with us as we wait for his coming in glory.

You will remember how David wasn't perfect by any means but he knew his Lord very well.

You may want to read Psalm 23 in your own Bible. We know it so well that I tend to forget that David **really** knew the presence of God with him, providing for him, loving, forgiving and protecting him.

We are blessed to have two hymns based on Psalm 23. If you've still got Hymns and Psalms, it's at no 70. You probably know it off by heart!

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green, he leadeth me  
The quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again,  
And me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness,  
E'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
Yet will I fear no ill;  
For thou art with me and thy rod  
And staff me comfort still.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
Shall surely follow me.  
And in God's house, for evermore  
My dwelling place shall be."

Stuart Townsend's version of the same Psalm is at no 481 in "Singing the Faith":  
say it, sing it, pray it!

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me lie in pastures green,  
He leads me by the still, still waters,  
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,  
And I will trust in you alone,  
For your endless mercy follows me,  
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,  
and he anoints my head with oil,  
And my cup - it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path -  
I will not fear the evil one,  
For you are with me, and your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know.

Amen to this and to all the prayers we make in Jesus' name.

I would be happy to hear from anyone who reads this and would like to talk something through.  
I can usually be contacted on my mobile phone number which is 07989 533075.

With every blessing,  
Sue Stanworth