

Pastoral letter from Sue Stanworth
For week beginning November 15th, 2020

Dear sisters and brothers,

I had a bit of an unwelcome surprise last week! The NHS Test and Trace App messaged me on Friday 6th to say I needed to self isolate for the next 10 days. Fortunately for our family, so far I have no symptoms and John can do the walk to school and back with the grandchildren on his own and do the shopping as well. Needless to say, I'm not resting on my laurels but getting on with lots of cleaning jobs that haven't been done for a while. I'm glad to have time to write an encouraging pastoral letter for us all as well!

We're living in tumultuous times at present and it's hard to keep going isn't it? Our Bible reading for this Sunday comes from the end of Paul's first letter to the new church he had founded in Thessalonica. The new Christians were struggling without Paul's leadership and Paul writes to encourage them:

*"Now, brothers and sisters, we do not need to write to you about times and dates.
You know very well that the day the Lord comes again will be a surprise,
like a thief that comes in the night.*

*While people are saying: "We have peace and we are safe." they will be destroyed quickly.
It is like pains that come quickly to a woman having a baby. Those people will not escape.
But you, brothers and sisters, are not living in darkness, and so that day will not surprise you like a thief. You are all people who belong to the light and to the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness. So we should not be like other people who are sleeping, but we should be awake and have self-control. Those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But we belong to the day, so we should control ourselves. We should wear faith and love to protect us, and the hope of salvation should be our helmet.
God did not choose us to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Jesus died for us so that we can live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes. So encourage each other and give each other strength, just as you are doing now.

1 Thessalonians 5: 1 -11 (The Holy Bible, New Century Version, 2006).

These are all big issues for our faith and if anyone wants to ask something straightforward, (I might need notice for tricky issues!!), I'd love to hear from you in confidence.

Inspiration for our quiet times:

How great is God's faithfulness!

Let's take this opportunity to wait for God in prayer:

There may be things we dare not ask of God.

There may be things we are anxious about.

There may be things we don't like to let out into thought or word.

Listen to these verses from Lamentations 3: 24-26

*"I say to myself: "The Lord is mine, so I hope in him.
The Lord is good to those who seek him.
It is good to wait quietly for the Lord to save."*

Now sit quietly with your hands comfortably folded,
or cupped, open and ready to receive, or holding an empty bowl.
Ask God, who already knows what you need,

to fill your empty hands with a portion of Himself.

Ask: "What is it you are wanting to give me today? Here I am, ready and willing, waiting for you."

Spend a few moments enjoying sitting with God, quietly waiting and listening with your inner self. Then give thanks that God, in his faithfulness, has honoured this time, whether you have felt anything or not.

(From "Quiet Spaces", pp76/7, Jean Sims. November 2014.)

Prayer: Faithful God, we thank you that you know what we need. Thank you that you hear our unspoken prayers. Your love never ends, Your mercy never fails. Great is your faithfulness. In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let's sing together virtually! One of my favourite hymns, inspired by Psalm 139, which is one of my most loved psalms: "Our God is a great big God" from "Singing the Faith" no 61

*"Our God is a great big God,
Our God is a great big God,
Our God is a great big God
And he holds us in his hands. (Sing twice through)*

He's higher than a skyscraper, and he's deeper than a submarine.
He's wider than the universe, and beyond my wildest dreams.
And he's known me and he's loved me
Since before the world began.
How wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan!

*Our God is a great big God, (x3)
And he holds us in his hands. (Sing twice through)."*

As always, please feel free to give me a ring if you'd like to talk. My mobile number is 07989 533075.

Also, if anybody would like to draw me a picture of this hymn, send me a photo of it and I'll send you a very small Christmassy prize! It will soon be Advent!

Let's keep praying for each other and for our crazy mixed up world,

With every blessing,

Sue Stanworth, local preacher.