

17<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Friends,

I am sitting in the lounge diner area of the Manse as I write this, listening to the sounds of bird song, children playing in a garden, and of my neighbours lawn mower, the sun is shining, there is a gentle breeze, a beautiful summers day. How strange it seems for all this beauty to exist during a pandemic, but that is life isn't it, beauty and horror somehow rub along side by side, and we are called to find God in both the joy and the hurts of life, and surely God has entered fully into both as we so clearly see in the life of Jesus.

So, I wonder, as I always do, how you are this week? What joys have you seen, heard of or shared, and what is challenging, hurting, or troubling you? Maybe you too are experiencing a mix of emotions and have good and bad days side by side. I think the truth is we all do.

This week I have had the joy of seeing my grandson for the first time in 4 months, he was 4 months old in March when I saw him, and now he is 8 months old, he has grown and changed so much, and there was a bitter-sweet recognition that I have missed out on some of his development, and the joy of seeing him and being able to have a cuddle. I know for others that birthdays, anniversaries and even graduations have been celebrated differently, weddings put on hold, funerals done very differently, while there is a sense of waiting to properly say good bye when we can finally do that.

Conversations are carrying on about how and when we might open our buildings, great care is being taken over risk assessments and thought being put in to make things safe. We will of course have mixed feelings about how and when we go about that, but we are, and must stick to both the national church and government guidelines as we do so.

So how do we deal with this mix of emotion, practicality, trepidation, uncertainty, and hopefulness. Perhaps Jesus parable set for the lectionary reading this week will help us:

*24-26 He told another story. "God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. That night, while his hired men were asleep, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up, too.*

*27 "The farmhands came to the farmer and said, 'Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn't it? Where did these thistles come from?'*

*28 "He answered, 'Some enemy did this.'*

*"The farmhands asked, 'Should we weed out the thistles?'*

*29-30 "He said, 'No, if you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I'll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.'"*

*36 Jesus dismissed the congregation and went into the house. His disciples came in and said, "Explain to us that story of the thistles in the field."*

*37-39 So he explained. "The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history. The harvest hands are angels.*

*40-43 "The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of their Father"*

Read in these days we see that there is a mix of good and bad happening, thistles have appeared among the wheat, and while they weren't part of the original plan they are allowed to grow, for weeding them out at the wrong time will damage the wheat which won't then reach its potential. The good and the bad rub along together, and sometimes as I am sure we all know, God uses the hard, prickly challenging times to help us to grow and to mature into the kind of disciples he calls us to be.

So, what are we learning and how are we growing during this Covid-19 pandemic, what are the lessons we want to take forward, just as I posed some questions last week, so this week I pose some more questions? As we move forward as a church:

- During the time we have not been in our buildings, what have we lost that must remain 'lost'?
- During the time we have not been in our buildings, what has been lost that we need to regain?
- During the time we have not been in our buildings, what has been gained that must be retained or developed?
- During the time we have not been in our buildings, what has been 'ok' for a season, but must be laid down in the days and weeks ahead?
- As we look to the coming weeks, what opportunities do we have to do something new?
- Where might God be inviting us to step out in faith, and hope, and love?

Once again, I ask you to begin prayerfully and carefully considering those questions, talk to one another about them, and talk to me if you want to. We will have to begin to make some decisions, and Church Councils will need to take responsibility, we do need to do this together, and we will have the support of the Circuit who are putting practical measures in place to support us, as well as holding us in prayer.

So, hold to the faith, keep worshipping God, and remember that you are called, chosen, and loved. This week instead of a song I offer you a poem, you can read it for yourself personally, or as a member of the church, or perhaps better both, replace person with people of church as you choose...

*I cannot unbecome  
who I am,  
the product of my family,  
my days,  
inhabiting my story...  
I cannot undo  
what I have done,  
retrace my footsteps  
and erase them...  
+  
I can only begin from here,  
where, accepting all  
that went before*

*as a gift, I can grasp  
grace  
with both hands,  
and offer myself  
into your presence  
+  
Here, life  
and light  
dispel  
the darkness,  
and transformation  
becomes  
truly  
possible,  
and I am not rejected,  
for I have always been at heart  
the person I was made  
to be!*

We are called to maturity in Christ, to flourish and to grow and to encourage one another to do so. As always do not hesitate to call me if you want/ need to talk. Many blessings

Peace and blessings

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Thistles can be beautiful! Something to ponder.