



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a new Sunday Reflection as we remember 80 years since the end of the war think about mission and service in today's world

.

INTIMATION:

TBC “Money Talk”

14 May Newton Park Ct

8 June Pentecostal lunch

Call to worship

The apostle Paul says

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹ Rather, as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”[[] (Romans 15,20-21)

HYMN:

Childrens' Talk

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Gracious God

Your son has risen from the dead and sits at your right hand. As we follow him in mission and service, in worship and praise we come before you with our prayers and entrust ourselves to you knowing that you are our fortress and our strength in challenging times.

Loving God,

You are our shepherd and our guide, you lead us through the darkest valley to green pastures and we know that you are with us in darkness and in light, in joy and in sorrow, in good times and in our challenges. We thank you for your faithfulness.

You have sent your son to heal, to teach and to preach, so we know you better, so we are closer to you in this life and the next and we know that he is still with us through your gospel and through your spirit, one with you as part of one holy trinity. We thank you for your son.

You have given us the Holy Spirit, so we find the strength and the courage to do your work here on earth, so we tell your good news to all around us, so we live a life in you as your son's disciples. We thank you for your Spirit of courage and strength

Forgiving Father,

There are times when we find it hard to trust in your Spirit, to trust in what we know in our hearts is right. Ridicule and indifference from outside, fighting and animosity inside your church keep us from following your son. Forgive us where we do not let you into our lives.

There are times when we find it difficult to follow your son in mission and service, when we are discouraged and dispirited, when we do not see a way forward for your church and your people. Forgive us where we do not put our trust in you.

Gracious Lord

We know that we have failed you and each other in many ways, but we also know that you have saved us by sending your son and in this assurance we pray as he himself has taught us to pray.

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name, thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

Hymn:

READINGS

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.

² He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.

³ He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths, as he has promised.

⁴ Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.

⁵ You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honoured guest and fill my cup to the brim.

⁶ I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live.

Acts 9, 32-43

² Peter travelled everywhere, and on one occasion he went to visit God's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he met a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up and make your bed." At once Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All the people living in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. ³⁶ In Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha, who was a believer. (Her name in Greek is Dorcas, meaning "a deer.") She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ At that time she got sick and died. Her body was washed and laid in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Joppa was not very far from Lydda, and when the believers in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him with the message, "Please hurry and come to us." ³⁹ So Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, he was taken to the room upstairs, where all the widows crowded around him, crying and showing him all the shirts and coats that Dorcas had made while she was alive. ⁴⁰ Peter put them all out of the room, and knelt down and prayed; then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ Peter reached over and helped her get up. Then he called all the believers, including the widows, and presented her alive to them. ⁴² The news about this spread all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed on in Joppa for many days with a tanner of leather named Simon.

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

We can rely on your presence in the darkest valley and in the sunniest meadows, you walk with us through life's joys and challenges, through sadness and through moments of happiness and delight. You have sent your son to live with us and to die for us, who walked with us through the painful and bitter end on the cross and gave us new hope and new life through his resurrection on Easter Day. For all this we offer our praise and thanks and in giving thanks for your faithful presence, we now ask for your Holy Spirit in this hour, through which you live in our hearts.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

It is 80 years since the second world war ended – at least in Europe – and we do not forget that elsewhere, specifically in Japan, the fighting continued and the dropping of the first nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was still to come. But here in Europe, as of last Thursday, the 8th of May 80 years ago the guns fell silent and were replaced with street parties – with what rationed food you could get – and dancing. And I get it: The exuberant joy that the war was finally over, that families could be reunited without the fear of bombs falling in the cities, the gratitude for each soldier who came back unscathed or at least alive. Demob happy is a term I learned here in Scotland. But for the young widows, who were left to fend for themselves, whose husbands and fiancés did not come back, for the mothers and fathers who grieved for their sons for the rest of their lives, for the families whose houses lay in ruin in London and Coventry, in Hamburg and Dresden, whose sons and daughters lay buried beneath the rubble, the victory may have been more bitter than sweet. And as there is war again in Europe and elsewhere in the

world, not least in the Holy Land on the paths that Jesus walked, when radical right wing organisations rear their ugly head again all over Europe, including the UK, it is the church's job to remember the pain that war causes and to look to Jesus as the Prince of Peace. And so, VE day might be more suited to quiet reflection than to exuberant celebrations.

Our Old Testament reading, Psalm 23, arguably the most famous Bible text in the world, deals with both: the peaceful serenity of green fields and pools of fresh water and the scary path through the dark valley of death. I am not surprised that it was popular with soldiers on the front, marked in the Bibles they took with them, praying it aloud or murmuring it under their breath, no doubt. Like few other passages Psalm 23 represents the hopes and the fears of life and the unwavering trust in God the writer has. The first two verses in a slightly more modern translation than you might be used to: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.² He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water", its peaceful serenity contrasts sharply with verse four: ⁴"Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me" and describe the hopes and fears of the psalmist and of us all. I imagine that the latter verse in particular appealed to the soldiers on the battlefield, while the first verse was gratefully recited after the fighting had stopped. And while the mood of the psalm changes, because our situations in life change and our emotions change with them, one theme continues throughout the whole psalm: The psalmist's unwavering trust, that whatever happens, whether he conjures up the image of green meadows and fresh water or whether he figuratively walks through the valley of death, God is by his side.

And that is what I take from this psalm for our times and our life today: In good times and in challenging times God is by our side, God

walks with us. And when we ask where God is in our personal challenges in the challenges of this world, even when we ask where God was on the battlefields of 80 years ago, the answer is always: right there, right by our side. Our faith, our trust in God will not prevent suffering and pain, or even war, but it will assure us, that we are not alone in it. And when times are changing, then God is the one constant in our lives.

For Peter in our New Testament reading times have changed drastically and radically. Jesus is no longer walking this world, is no longer preaching, teaching and healing and Peter has well and truly taken up the baton. That will have its own joys and its own challenges. Today's reading gives us two stories where Peter takes over from Jesus, does what Jesus used to do, while he was with them on this earth: He heals a crippled man called Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and he raises a god-fearing woman called Tabitha or Dorcas from the dead. It is remarkable, that Tabitha's story is much longer, much more detailed than that of Aeneas. At some length we hear about her charitable work and her good character. We learn in some detail, how the people around her mourn for her, cry about her, do everything they can for her, to the point of fetching Peter from another town. Tabitha is clearly a deserving woman. We do not know as much about Aeneas. But maybe that is one of the extraordinary things about this story: that this woman is valued, loved cherished, that those around her go to some length to help her, that Peter takes so much trouble to raise her from the dead – a woman. And a woman of some standing at that: This story drives home what the apostle Paul says: that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither man nor woman in God's eyes – just followers of Christ and they are all equally deserving of Peter's care, of Jesus' love and care. In the society Tabitha grew up in that will not have been taken for granted. And today that is important, too: God's

message of healing, of love, of peace is for everyone, man and woman, the stranger and the neighbour.

But the most important message is maybe in the last verse of our reading today: “The news about this spread all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord”, they believe as Peter believes. Because Peter does not heal in his own name or for his own sake, he does it for Jesus and in Jesus’ name. He says so explicitly to Aeneas: Jesus made you well and at Tabitha’s deathbed he stops and prays. He has been given power and authority by Jesus himself, he is the rock on which Christ’s church is built, but he cannot do it on his own. When the need is greatest, he turns to God, he turns to the risen Christ. And God will not let him down, Christ will not let him down. This is what psalm 23 and our story from the acts of the apostles have in common, different though they might appear at first sight: The unwavering belief that God will be with us when we need him most, that he will be there, right by our side.

There are times when this may be hard to believe, not just in times and places of war and destruction, be that today in Ukraine and in Gaza, be that 80 years ago all over Europe and beyond, but also in our day and age, when the world becomes ever scarier and our lifestyle, not least our church begin to crumble. And the question, where is God in all this, or in the words, Jesus cried on the cross: “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me”, is a legitimate one. But for Peter and for the anonymous writer of Psalm 23 this is trumped by the firm belief that God is there in darkness and in light. And this belief makes the challenges and even the catastrophes of our lives and our history easier – for all of us.

AMEN.

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God

You are our fortress and our strength, a sure help in all our troubles. Whatever may befall us, whatever lies ahead, you are with us, you will hold and guide us. For this we praise and thank you. And in offering our praise we lift up to you those who suffer around us and those who suffer in the world, who cannot see or feel your presence.

As we remember 80 years since World War II has ended in Europe, we pray for countries and people ravaged by war and terror today in Ukraine, in Gaza and Israel and in all parts of the world, where peace is a distant dream. We pray for the injured and the bereaved, we pray for all whose houses lie in ruins, who no longer have a place they can call home. We pray for all who have lost hope. May they find new hope in you.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who have no choice but to flee their country, their home as many have fled the Holocaust so long ago, for those who are threatened with war, persecution and oppression in the country they call home. May they find compassion in the places they flee to and may they find comfort in you.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

Today we pray for the young who shape our future, here in this country and in this town, and in the world. We pray that they will enjoy the peace and the prosperity we have known for 80 years and we pray that those who have lost their way will find a way back to you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will never forget to pray for everyone in our congregation and community, for old and young, for strong and frail. We pray for the children and their parents and for the generation above them. We

pray especially for those who are ill in hospital or at home. May they all know you love and your faithfulness

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

We prepare for the dedication of the offering

Dedication

Loving God,

You give us your love and your protection, you guide us through our lives and provide us with all we need. You are our good shepherd, who watches over us and cares for us. For this we offer our praise and thanks and together with our thanksgiving we bring to you our offering and we ask that you may bless these gifts, so that they are used for your kingdom.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God whose son we follow guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN

