

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 29 April 2022

Dear Friends:

I solicit your prayers for our cluster representatives in the coming days, especially next Wednesday, when we meet with the presbytery planning team to advocate for an increase in our staffing allocation in the new presbytery plan.

Our success, however, would mean that another part of the presbytery would suffer a decrease, so we pray for the best possible outcome, the way forward that doesn't simply suit our needs, but fulfils God's purposes for the whole of Fife.

Warm regards,

Jeff

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From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

April 25 was World Malaria Day. Although malaria is preventable and treatable, it continues to kill more than 500,000 people every year. In Africa, more than two-thirds of victims are children. Please pray for God's blessing on the work being done to eliminate this disease. Please also pray in particular for health messaging, treatments and resources such as mosquito nets to reach difficult-to-access communities.

Please pray over the next few weeks for our young people who will be sitting national exams in schools and colleges.

The Prayer Group continues to meet weekly through Zoom. If you would like to join us, have a prayer request or would simply like a member of the group to pray with you then please contact either Jeff Martin or Janice Geddes.

1 May: Worship

Please join us for gathered worship at 11:00am in the sanctuary or at 4:00pm in the Old Parish Centre. Sunday Club takes place in the afternoon, following a time of shared worship. The focus for this week is the conversion of Saul in Acts 9: 1-19. The 11:00 service will be uploaded to our YouTube channel in the afternoon, for viewing at your convenience:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdOxFrZ_kg94DYogyIFAVEQ

1 May: Communion in Monimail

The Monimail Church will have celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion at their worship at 9:30am this Sunday. All are welcome.

4 May: Coffee and Chat

Jill: 07929 444 246

It's always a good time with friends at our weekly Coffee and Chat gathering, from 10:00 to 11:15am on Wednesdays. All ages are welcome.

28 May: Save the Date for a Guild and Sunday Club Tea Party

Eileen: eileenjspurr@icloud.com

The Cupar Old Parish Church Guild and Sunday Club will cohost a Platinum Jubilee Afternoon Tea Party on Saturday 28 May, from 2:00 to 4:00pm, in the Old Parish Centre. Tickets are £5 each, available from Guild members; children are free. Proceeds will go to the Guild projects.

Reflection from Angus Allan: Good and Evil

We were warned in advance that some of the scenes following on tv might prove to be distressing. Then the camera focussed on the bodies of three Russian soldiers left lying in the snow in one of Ukraine's cities. They could have been fathers, brothers, or sons; no one knew and no one seemed to care.

Paul is writing to the church in Rome (12:21) when he says: "*Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good,*" So with the help of the Holy Spirit, we have always to aim for the goodness of God. The prophet Isaiah (64:66) reminds us that '*all our righteous acts are like filthy rags*'.

We arrived in the market place in Whitehaven on Christmas Eve, with one of a family Angus John (Then a baby, now retired and known to some of you. He and his wife Sandra and the family lived in Cupar some time ago and were members of the church.) That night, in a thick smog, we made our way to our flat in the college grounds. It was dark and damp. A few years previously, in 1957, a reactor at Calder Hall had overheated and spewed radioactive dust over a wide area. The incident was hushed up at the time, but has since been branded 'the UK's Chernobyl'. Students came to college, mainly from Sellafield, to study chemistry and physics to National Certificate and degree level. I had the privilege of being invited along to Sellafield and saw some of the work going on in this vast nuclear power plant feeding electricity into the grid and processing spent fuel (which is still very radioactive).

Here we have a power at our disposal that can be used for generating electricity or making warheads. Putin claims to have 4000 of the latter, enough to destroy much of humanity and for a time at least, he ordered them to be on standby. It is to be hoped he is not tempted to go any way down that road.

How do our politicians in the west react to these threats? So far, they have been careful and restrained, knowing that involvement would lead to a third World War. But what about the church? Jesus advises his disciples not to be too anxious about the future: *'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'* Mathew 6:34.

The song by Linda Randle, **One Day at a Time**, was recorded by Lena Martell in 1979, and reached number one in the charts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDK6rO2jgao>

One day at a time, sweet Jesus,
that's all I'm asking of you.
Just give me the strength
to do every day
what I have to do.

Yesterday's gone, sweet Jesus,
and tomorrow may never be mine.
Lord, help me today,
show me the way
one day at a time.

After the resurrection and ascension the disciples gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem, taking one day at a time, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And so today we are in the midst of a 'waiting time.' Waiting for problems of churches to be solved, waiting for war to cease and peace to prevail, waiting for evil to be overcome with good through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The psalmist encourages us to wait patiently through prayer and song to discover good at work:

I waited patiently for God,

for God to hear my prayer,
and God bent down to where I sank
and listened to me there.

[Psalm 40; paraphrase by John L. Bell]

+ Help us, Lord, not to be too anxious about the future but to take one day at a time.

Reflection from Peter Meager

Peter: meager52@btinternet.com

The story is told of a father who was helping his daughter with her homework when she received a text from her mother. It said, 'What do you want from life?' It wasn't the usual kind of message she got from her mum, but she didn't question it and she started exploring with her dad what she wanted from life. However, after only a couple of minutes, her phone 'pinged' again. It was her mum who had realised that predictive text had changed the message she had meant to send, 'What do you want from Lidl?'

The lead character in the Bible passage we're looking at this week, from the Book of Acts, certainly knew what he wanted from life. He is Saul from the town of Tarsus. He is an ardent Jew, committed to preserving the purity of his ancient faith and vehemently opposed to this new break away group that has sprung up following the execution of a Galilean teacher called Jesus. Saul had literally 'held the jaiquets' while the mob was stoning the first Christian martyr, Stephen. (Acts 7:54-60) He now obtains international arrest warrants to pursue a group of believers who have settled in the Syrian capital, Damascus. He has a life's vital work ahead of him. What can stop him? God can – stop him dead in his tracks.

Luke is the narrator of the story in chapter 9:1-16. This is a pivotal moment for Saul and, indeed, for the fledgling church. We use the word, 'conversion,' to describe such a radical change in someone's life. This has the idea of going at full speed and momentum in one direction then, in an instant, doing an about turn and going in completely the opposite direction with the same drive and commitment. What accounts for such a fundamental change of direction? Luke will tell us and deems the story to be so important that he includes it three times in the book we know as the Acts of the Apostles, but which might be more accurately described as, 'The Acts of Apostolic Men.' Luke is the narrator when the story is retold later on in chapter 22:6-21 and a few chapters later, in chapter 26:12-18, he lets Saul himself, who has by this time changed his name to Paul, describe what happened; So let's delve into the first of these passages.

Saul and his band of religious zealots are nearing the city of Damascus when he is physically blinded as he is enveloped by a light which is more intense than the glaring midday sun. He falls to the ground and hears Jesus' voice, asking him, *'Why do you persecute me?'*

In New Testament Greek there is no punctuation. Scholars who have translated the original texts have worked out the sense of the words and put in the punctuation marks accordingly. In verse five they have Saul asking, *'Who are you, Lord?'* because he does not recognise the voice he is hearing. But, if we change the punctuation slightly, another interpretation of this verse is possible. If we put the question mark after 'you', then Saul asks, 'Who are you?' There is then a pause while his mind is in turmoil over what's happening to him. Then the penny drops and he makes the astounding declaration, *'Lord!'* it is the very voice of God he is hearing. Jesus confirms what Saul has just realised. *'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'*

It has been pointed out that there are similarities between Saul's experience and that of Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:3 and 19:16-22). There Moses has his own life-changing encounter with God. In both stories there is the appearance of fire or light; a divine voice calling out the human name twice; the humans seeking to know God's name; and lastly, both embarking on a life-changing journey. Paul soon becomes a leader who will take thousands through the waters of baptism on a journey to new life in the promised land of God's kingdom.

Speaking about Saul's dramatic turn around at Keswick in 2018, Jonathan Lamb points out that it is God who takes the initiative with Saul; God has the power to change him by shining a light into his life; spotlighting the fallacies in his thinking which have led to failures in his actions and showing him that Jesus can make him a new creation.

Conversion is not initially our activity; it is God in his grace, seeking us out and giving us a chance to respond to his amazing love for us. In verse sixteen when Jesus is speaking to Ananias he says of Saul, *'This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.'* Indeed, when Paul himself looks back on his life he realises that God had in fact been working on him since he was in his mother's womb. (Galatians 1:15)

As with Saul (verse six), the Lord takes us as we are and moulds us into the people he wants us to be. Jonathan Lamb remarks, 'God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called!' God has an overreaching plan for the whole of our lives and he often sends his people to help us along. Ananias is one of the unsung heroes of the faith. Talk about being asked to put your head in the lion's mouth. (verses 11-16) The Lord asks him to present himself at the digs of one whom everyone knows is openly out to get Christians. Ananias was the first in a long line of anxious, frightened people who have carried out God's work and whose endeavours are probably all the more effective because of that. Ananias reaches out to Saul in compassion, 'Brother Saul,' he greets him and begins the process we need to learn too; how to turn Outsiders into Insiders.

God has the power to change. No one is beyond his reach. God has the power to help and that help often comes through God's faithful people.

Song: And Can It Be?

This hymn was penned by Charles Wesley and it is believed it was written the day after he came to faith. It has Paul describing the wonder of his coming to faith using, in part, imagery from the time when he had been miraculously freed from prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25-40)

<https://youtu.be/Tu2uA6U4Fvg>

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love Divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Reading, Acts 9:1-16

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.'

'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'

But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

Prayer

Gracious God who has made us in your own likeness; who has known us from the moment of conception; who has loved us from the foundation of the world, we marvel at the confidence you have in our potential and wonder that you should want to have anything to do with us.

We praise you for the moment when we became aware of the light of your presence shining all around us; when we heard you calling our names; realised our need of you due to our unworthiness and when we had the grace to turn to you, accept your forgiveness and start walking with you and

experiencing your patient reshaping of our lives. We pray that we may continue to be faithful as you use our gifts to witness to your ability to save and transform all who turn to you in humility and faith.

May we all know with certainty that, “Easter is the feast of the victory of love over hatred, of joy over sorrow, of peace over war, of patience over panic, of kindness over anger, of faithfulness over betrayal, of gentleness over unrest, of self-control over voracity; that Easter is the victory of the spirit over flesh, of truth over mendacity, of life over death.” Amen

(From an **Easter Letter** from His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, who interprets the famous text of Saint Paul on the Fruit of the Spirit – quoted on Radio 4’s service on 24th April)