

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 7 January 2022

Minister on Holiday

Jeff is on holiday until 12 January. If you have a need, Jean Martin jeansmartin1968@gmail.com and Liz Nelson liznelson48@aol.com can direct you to the appropriate person.

From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

Please pray for families in Cupar particularly for those who are feeling the financial strain of Christmas and are struggling to feed their families.

Please pray for our young people that they remain as they return to school.

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

9 January: Worship

Our regular diet of worship will resume on 9 January, with worship at 11:00am and 4:00pm. Both services will take place in the Old Parish Centre and be led by members of the congregation. Sunday Club will meet during the afternoon service.

Church Guild

Eileen: eileen.spurr@btinternet.com

The Guild (hopefully) returns on January 19th at 2.30pm in the lounge of the Parish Centre. It's a musical afternoon with Ann Baird on vocals and her husband on the piano. She will sing a medley of Scottish songs, songs from the musicals and some favourites. It promises to be a great afternoon. Do come and join us.

I don't have speakers for February 2nd and 16th yet. Still waiting to hear.

March 2nd is Helen Eckford, National Vice Convener, coming to speak on the World Mission Council Project, Empowering teenage mothers Zambia. Helen visited the project in 2020 so will have first hand knowledge.

March 16th we have a Speaker from BEAT project - eating disorders - Blether with BEAT. This project will help to develop a network of ambassadors, those who have lived through the illness, to help others recognise the signs and understand how to support those struggling to get the treatment they deserve. This work brings the message of hope that people can and do recover from eating disorders.

March 30th will be the Guild AGM

Reflection from Peter Meager

Peter: meager52@btinternet.com

This weekend we should have been heading for a family skiing trip in Austria. While there, I would have spent a few minutes sitting quietly in the little village church where we stay. The photograph below was taken during our last visit in 2020.



You'll notice that the Christmas decorations are still in place and wouldn't come down till Candlemas, - on the day when Mary went to the Temple for the rite of purification after childbirth and also to present her firstborn son, Jesus.

Maybe we should reinstate this festival as a way of getting through the darkest and most depressing days of the year. A recent article in the Scotsman tells us that, 'History is on our side in all this. Traditionally, Candlemas Day on February 2 marked the official end of Christmas. No less a personage than Her Majesty the Queen used to keep the Christmas decorations up for an extra month at Sandringham. In Scotland, it was traditionally when agricultural rents were paid, heralding the end of winter and the start of spring.'

Returning to Mary's visit to the Temple - last week we thought about Simeon but stopped before verses 34 and 35 of Luke chapter 2. There, his mood changes and he moves from joyfully celebrating the arrival of the Messiah to warning that his life will be divisive. '*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,*'

When we come face to face with Jesus, he demands a verdict from us. In Matthew 12:30 he said, '*Whoever is not with me is against me.*' As someone has put it, 'The sun that softens the wax, hardens the clay.' When confronted with the claims of Jesus, it's impossible to sit on the fence. The disciples would respond to Jesus with love, devotion and a desire to share their experience. The authorities would respond with hatred, hostility and a desire to eliminate him.

Simeon then addressed Mary and said, '*And a sword will pierce your own soul too?*' Those words must have sent a chill down her spine. She would have to live with that sombre prophecy until that day her heart was broken as she wept at the foot of the cross. We are not told how often her thoughts would return to that prediction as Jesus grew and developed.

The nineteenth century artist, Holman Hunt, had this theme in mind when he painted 'The Shadow of Death' in 1873. It depicts Jesus as a young man. He has been sawing wood in the carpenter's shop and stretches his weary arms. The setting sun throws a shadow onto a wooden spar on the wall behind him creating the image of a crucifixion. Mary is depicted from behind, gazing up at the shadow, having been looking down into a box holding the Wise Men's gifts. We are left to imagine her face and her feelings.

In the news last week, we were reminded that the voice of prophecy is still very much alive as we saw images of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's funeral. He had insisted that there should be no pomp and circumstance in the ceremony. His coffin was made of white pine with simple rope handles. A new word was added to my vocabulary when we were told that he would be 'Aquamated,' - claimed to be a greener alternative to cremation using water and chemicals.

Speaking on Radio 4 on Sunday morning, Archbishop Justin Welby said, 'A prophet is one who speaks true words which change things. They are words that call to account, that bring into the light what is hidden in darkness, they are words which come at a great price and are spoken to cause a response. They are words which are usually ignored, opposed, and protested against. But these words must be spoken by the prophet because they are the words of God.'

He went on, 'However hard people may try, it is impossible to speak of Archbishop Desmond Tutu without speaking of Jesus Christ. His life and witness only make sense when seen in the light of the love of God in Jesus Christ and the faith he had in the purposes and sure coming of the Kingdom. He lived politics because he knew that the authority over all human life is that of God. He knew that a nation that forgets that authority forgets its soul, forgets to value one another, forgets to champion the oppressed. He knew his call and that the sovereignty of God over every aspect of human existence, from the greatest to the smallest, is lived out in the expression of liberty, of freedom and inclusion.'

'His spiritual director once said that you could tell he was a prophet because he shed so many tears, but his tears were not for himself – rather he shed tears because of the state of the world and the reality of what God intended the world to be. He acted from his personal experience of oppression, and that qualified him to speak in a particular way that the rest of us cannot imitate, but we can emulate.'

He famously said, "there is no neutrality between oppressor and oppressed." That if an elephant has its foot on a mouse's tail, the mouse will not appreciate the objectivity of your neutrality.'

Archbishop Welby concluded, 'It was because he was entirely convinced of the power of God's love for the whole world in Christ that he insisted on forgiveness, on hope, on friendship, on dignity, on the importance of facing the truth and on the possibility of reconciliation. And he did it all with such profound joy.'

He believed that change was possible. Not because of anything he was able to achieve, or that it wasn't difficult, but because of the promise of Jesus: *'I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!'* (John 15: 35). He then urged us, 'Let us respond to this life, and be passionate on the side of the oppressed, never neutral, for Christ has overcome the world.'

Bible Reading: Luke 2:34-35

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Prayer

Lord Jesus, light of the world, illumine our hearts and our homes that we may be beacons of hope in a world that is living in shadow. May we radiate peace and joy on our faces, in our words and through our actions. May we drive out the darkness of fear, loneliness and evil. May we never be indifferent to the plight of others. May the gifts of mirth and laughter cheer us and others along the way.

Father, we thank you for all parents as they rejoice in the gift of children. May they take seriously their responsibility to provide secure homes where faith is natural, joyful and spontaneous. Bless all whose children have to cope with disabilities and carry a ceaseless burden of care. Comfort all who have lost a child and whose hearts have been broken.

Lord God, we thank you for all who champion the rights of the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the oppressed. May they speak boldly without fear or favour and have courage and perseverance when the struggle is long and progress is slow.

Father God, let us always remember that success does not depend on our cleverness, strength or skill but on the victory you have already won through your death and resurrection.

Hear our prayers, Lord and answer in accordance with your will, for Jesus sake. Amen.

Song: Look ye saints

Here is a link to the hymn *Look ye saints, the sight is glorious*:

https://youtu.be/7kf2li1Z_Dc

Look, you saints, the sight is glorious!
see the man of sorrows now
from the fight returned victorious
every knee to him shall bow:
Crown him, crown him,
crown him, crown him
crowns befit the victor's brow.

Crown the saviour, angels, crown him!
rich the trophies Jesus brings;
in the seat of power enthrone him
while the vault of heaven rings:
Crown him, crown him,
crown him, crown him,
crown the saviour King of kings.

Sinners in derision crowned him,
mocked the dying saviour's claim;
saints and angels crowd around him,
sing his triumph, praise his name:
Crown him, crown him,
crown him, crown him;
spread abroad the victor's fame.

Hear the shout as he is greeted,
hear those loud triumphant chords!
Jesus Christ in glory seated
O what joy the sight affords!
Crown him, crown him,
crown him, crown him;
King of kings, and Lord of lords!