

Dear Friends in the Borders Mission Circuit

Ministers Weekly message

29th March 2020 5th Sunday in Lent

This week we read 1 Kings 17: 8 to 16. Please forgive me for not using the lectionary but this is a passage of Scripture which I feel speaks to us at this time.

Up until now big disasters on the scale in this Bible reading have tended to happen in 'other' places, while we tend to experience extreme weather and floods. However, the Coronavirus has changed this and we find ourselves in the middle of a pandemic which is a very scary place to be. There is little we can do apart from staying at home, being safe and sensible. We find ourselves with the brook dried up much like Elijah and the widow. How do we journey with God at times where the brook has dried up? How do we respond? This passage shows us how we can trust in God and draw strength from God.

In verse 9 God tells Elijah to go, and he is obedient, does as he is instructed and once there he asks the widow for a drink of water. The widow recognises that Elijah is a man of God and she responds to him. My biggest question about this passage has to be - what does the widow see in Elijah that makes her willing to respond in the way she does?

She goes to get him a drink, he calls 'and bring me, please, a piece of bread.' Here the widow explains her plight. I wonder if I were down to my last meal, what would I do? She has a child too, surely her instinct is to feed her child before anyone else! It really makes me think, what would I do if it were me? Would I give what little I had to a stranger?

God is inviting this woman to participate in the incredible miraculous ministry of this man of God, the prophet Elijah. But her eyes were filled with the reality of her problematic situation. At this time, it's important not to let our human fear control us. Fix our eyes on God and remember to pray in all things. Elijah calms the widow's fears: her fear of him, her hunger, and her imminent death. He gave her a promise on the authority of the word of God: she would have food until the drought ended. (Note as this passage continues from v17, the link with the widow's son and Lazarus in today's Gospel (John 11)) Her obedient response demonstrated her faith in the word of the Lord. When she let go of the little bit that she did have, she made herself an empty vessel for God and so gained in abundance that which she did not have. In giving up her last meal; the Lord supplied that which she needed continually - the jar of flour was not be used up and the jug of oil did not run dry. What does it mean to be an empty vessel that God might fill to overflowing? And who are the empty vessels in our communities that God wants us to help fill up.

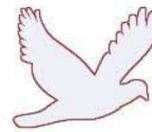
Which brings me to the work of the MHA Live at Home Scheme. When we met at the circuit meeting in September just as the work of setting up the Live at Home Scheme began, little did we know where we would find ourselves in March 2020. However the work of the Live at Home Scheme is going to be needed more than ever when we are finally allowed to come out of this isolation.

It is my hope that through the Corona virus, as hard as it is going to be, we can fix our eyes on God. I hope when we finally begin the Live at Home Scheme that like in this passage, we can transform lives in lots of ways.

And not forgetting we are in Lent and we are in a time of journeying to Easter and the Life giving news of transformation of Jesus. Currently we may feel cut off in a dry brook or a Lent wilderness that feels even more isolating. But maybe this current change of pace might in time bring flowing water and movement to us and our communities who will surely need restoration and transformation. The widow in her generosity played a vital part in Elijah's transformation and we too could play a vital part in transforming our communities.

So may we fix our eyes on God, let God take up residence within us, do not be afraid. Let us be an open vessel, let God fill us to overflowing, so that we can fill others, and let us continue to walk the way of Jesus Christ this Lent and beyond. Amen.

Deacon Sam on behalf of Rev Loraine, Rev Ann, Rev Nicola, Deacon Sam and Rev Peter



This week we are delighted to include a meditation from Margaret Lee, a steward at Swanwick. If you feel God speaking to you during this time of isolation please send your contribution to the ministerial staff team and we will try to share across the Circuit – Connecting the Circuit even when we are isolated. **Please do not hesitate to contact your minister by phone or email if you need to talk or would like to be prayed for.**

MEDITATION from Margaret Lee of Swanwick

“Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you”. Lord, it seems only a short time since we said these words, all of us, gathered together to renew our Covenant with You. Most of us were going along quite nicely, hoping it wouldn't be us who were laid aside this year. And now.....? We're all laid aside - from worship, from fellowship, from our plans, and from our hopes. Why? Why all of us? What does it mean and when will it end? After all, I thought plagues were an Old Testament thing, or in Eyam!

We were in the middle of our tasks, our ministry, our vocations. Now all has been interrupted. Our structures have gone, not least Sunday worship, the lynch pin of our week. Doesn't that only happen to persecuted Christians? It feels like we have lost so much, the sacredness of Communion, the anticipation of Easter worship and Lent courses interrupted. There are no events to act as boundaries between this week and next week, this month and the next. What are we supposed to do now? What about the moments of inspiration we've recently had which might have taken us an important step forward in our service to You? It's the back burner for those I suppose.

Then, in the midst of all the anxiety, frustration and bewilderment, I hear other words, like the “gentle whisper” to Ezekiel:

“When you pass through the waters I will be with you...for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour”. (Isaiah 43 v2-3) And “If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast”. (Psalm 139 v 9-10) And “The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life.” (Psalm 121 v 7) I hear the “gentle whisper” nudging my senses to deal with this so unexpected situation. I will learn to appreciate the little things that we miss when we rush from one activity to the next, like the detail of a flower's petals, cloud formations when I look skywards, the ripple of water flowing through a dale and the scent of herbs. I will really be able to listen to this spring's birdsong for nature won't stand still and seasons will still move in their familiar tracks. It is we who have the challenge of stepping outside our comfort zone to find new ways of relating, like the joy of phone conversations we wouldn't otherwise have had. We will find new ways of worshipping too, silent and less public ways but secure in the knowledge of those threads which still bind us together and to You. Teach us new ways to be still and experience Your peace. One day we hope to return to those familiar paths and to pick up our plans and get on, but for now....

“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” (Psalm 23 v2-3). Amen