**The Parishes of Crail and St Ayle**

**Reflections for the Locked out - Locked Down Church from Peter Neilson**

**Sunday 21 June 2020**

Good morning and *shalom* to all my friends in Crail and St Ayle.

**Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Last Sunday I went for a walk over the fields towards Wormiston in the grey haar which blanketed the countryside in misty stillness. I started off walking through the Denburn Wood, enveloped in the sweet and sour smells of the dripping wetness. Up past the cemetery and through the fields of maturing barley and oil-seed rape, with only the sound of my own footsteps and a solo runner. I listened to the birds with their unique chatter and passed a hedge where the buzzing of bees echoed the aero-engines of another era. There was little to see as my glasses gently dimmed with the droplets of water. Only the soft outlines of the edge of Crail, and the long straight walk home in the company of an occasional car swishing past.

As I walked, I savoured a blessing of John O’Donohue: “May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven round a heart of wonder.” However grey your day may be, I pray that blessing for you.

I have found inspiration in the poetic prayers of this Irish priest, steeped in Celtic spirituality. His phrases fasten themselves to the heart and pulse with life. Our opening prayer is taken from his book of blessings called “Benedictus “. I suggest that you read it slowly a couple of times and then settle on a phrase that touches your heart. For myself, I often reflect at the beginning of the day on the words: “I lay on the altar of dawn/The quiet loyalty of breath...” You will find your own.

So be still in the presence of God, and in the company of all God’s people worshipping in a myriad ways, near and far, on earth and in heaven. We are “alone together”.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here...

**Gathering into the Presence of God**

**A Morning Offering**

I bless the night that nourished my heart

To set the ghosts of longing free

Into the flow and figure of a dream

That went to harvest from the dark

Bread for the hunger no one sees.

All that is eternal in me

Welcomes the wonder of this day,

The field of brightness it creates

Offering time for each thing

To arise and illuminate.

I place on the altar of dawn

The quiet loyalty of breath,

The tent of thought where I shelter

And all beauty drawn to the eye.

May my mind come alive today

To the invisible geography

That invites me to new frontiers,

To break the dead shell of yesterdays,

To risk being disturbed and changed.

May I have the courage today

To live the life that I would love,

To postpone my dream no longer,

But do at last what I came here for

And waste my heart on fear no more.

*[Benedictus,* John O’Donohue, Bantam Press, 2007)

**Listening for the Word of God**

**Please read: Romans 5:1-5**

**Reflecting on God’s Word for Us**

*We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God..... (Romans 5:3,4)*

Three “men of colour” have stood out for me in the past few days – Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, responding to the removal and drowning of Edward Colston’s statue, Trevor Hutchinson, pictured rescuing a drunk man from danger in a London protest, and Marcus Rashford, with his powerful appeal on behalf of children in poverty to have school meals over the summer.

Marvin Rees stood out as a man of dignity speaking in measured tones about the emotional pain felt by those who, like him, are direct descendants of plantation slaves. When asked if he was optimistic about changes in racial equality, he said that he was not optimistic, but he was hopeful because suffering produces perseverance and character, and that is the basis of hope. His words are almost a direct quote of Paul’s words to the church in Rome. He went on say that events such as those in Bristol can be moments of redemption. That is a deeply Christian perspective on troubled times.

Trevor Hutchinson stands out as a giant of a man at 6’6”, carrying the intoxicated protestor to safety with apparent ease – an image that resonates with so many pictures of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, retrieving the lost sheep. Here was a man who had gone with friends into the melee, at great risk to himself, with the intention of safeguarding the young black protestors. His words resonate again. “This is not about black versus white. It’s about us all against racism.” Once again, the interviews have been marked by a quiet dignity and determination addressing the root issues for the sake of his children. Trevor Huthinson is another instance of suffering producing perseverance, perseverance producing character and character producing hope - hope expressed in loving action to the “enemy”.

Marcus Rashford has made the headlines this week because he brought about a change in government policy. For me, it is the way in which he has made his case that has impressed me. His letter is quietly insistent, well researched and firmly argued, but its power lies in his testimony to his mother’s struggle to bring up her family through poverty, and give him the chance to fulfil his dream. He wants to ensure that children in similar situations have enough food to eat and equal opportunities to thrive and flourish in 21st century Britain. He summed up his case: “This is not about politics. It is about humanity.” I see in this 22 year old footballer the same progression of suffering, perseverance, character and hope.

In these three men we see leadership that is rooted in character, not personality or celebrity. They give us true hope for our future, rather than the pseudo-optimism of much political rhetoric.

People who have been through difficult times in life can either become bitter, resentful and cynical about the future; or the dark times create in them a steely determination that forms a depth of character that does not give up even when the odds are against them. Their soul does not shrink in fear or hatred; it expands in compassion and courage.

That comes as no surprise to the Christian who knows that godly character is modelled by the One who set his face like flint towards Jerusalem, and made Gethsemane choices of courage, enduring the Cross to save a broken and sinful world, sustained by hope of glory in an empty tomb.

I pray that these young men may be carried forward by the Spirit of Jesus beyond the false dawns of the past with “hope that does not disappoint, because God has poured out his love into our hearts.”

*Our Father....may Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven.*

**Responding to God’s Word and God’s Spirit**

**Intercession using our Imagination**

*In the Gospel of Mark 2:1-12 we read of four friends who carried a paralysed man on a stretcher to meet Jesus. The house was crowded, so they climbed on to the roof, removed part of it and lowered the man into the room. Jesus speaks a word of forgiveness and healing to the man – inner and outer healing.*

*Let that story shape our prayers for others today – bringing individuals we know and people in the news; bringing the church and a world in need of healing. And remember our prayers over this month for our new minister, John Murray. Let’s carry him together into the presence of Jesus for His blessing.*

Imagine the person/situation you are praying for on the stretcher.

Imagine yourself and other friends taking a corner each.

Together you carry your friend and lay him/her at the feet of Jesus.

*Hold that image.*

How does Jesus look at your friend/situation?

What does Jesus say?

What other voices do you hear?

What does Jesus do?

How does your friend/situation respond?

Imagine your friend/situation rising and walking away -

healed inwardly and outwardly,

blessed by Jesus.

*Hold that image.*

Now return to the beginning and bring

another person or situation into the presence of Jesus.

Hold them there and let Jesus bless them.

**A Meditation before we Go**

**My Name is I AM**

I was regretting the past

And fearing the future.

Suddenly my Lord was speaking,

“My name is I AM”

He paused.

I waited.

He continued.

“When you live in the past

With its mistakes and regrets

It is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not I WAS.

When you live in the future

With its problems and fears

It is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not I WILL BE.

When you live in this moment

It is not hard.

I am here.

My name is I AM.”

[Helen Mallicoat]

**A Blessing**

*Imagine saying this blessing with and for our friends in church and community.*

And now may the peace of God that passes all understanding

keep our hearts and our minds

in the knowledge and in the love of God

and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us all

now and always.

AMEN