



Weekly Newsletter No 33 - Sunday 1 November 2020

Sunday Worship

The reopening of the churches last Sunday can only be regarded as a roaring success. Bellie Church was almost at capacity and Speymouth had a few, well OK, quite a few places available. Although we sat behind our facemasks it was great to be together as a congregation enjoying worshipping together in that special 'thin' place. It was especially exciting to see families with us. We even had a (digital) visit from Hamish the heilan' coo as he and his pal Sully found a quiet place to pray. At Bellie Church, 29 people booked for the next week and at Speymouth Church 6 people booked. The digitally streamed service from Bellie Church worked well and is still available on the church's Facebook pages.



From Seoras

THIN PLACES

There is a phrase which you may have heard used before. A "thin place". A thin place is a way of describing a place where it seems that the veil between heaven and earth is thin. Almost as if it is easier to feel God's presence, to be aware of the spiritual realities of our world. It's an idea that forms part of our heritage here in Scotland. Early Celtic Christians used this language to describe places dedicated to praise and worship. Where there was a deliberate effort to place aside all else to wait on God.

But more importantly, it is a Biblical idea. Throughout scripture, we find that God chooses to reveal Himself in specific places at specific times. Right at the very beginning of Genesis, God walks in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are used to His presence being in a certain place that they believe they can hide from Him. In Exodus, Moses is led to a burning bush, where a supernatural fire does not consume the branches, but instead He encounters the presence of the living God, and speaks with Him. We then find God revealed as a pillar of fire and cloud as He leads the Israelites through the wilderness. His presence rests in the temple with such intensity that any High Priest who entered would sometimes have to be pulled out by a rope. We then ultimately have God revealed in Jesus Christ. God as a person. A fragile individual who was only one place at a time.



What we also know from scripture, and also hopefully from experience, is that God's presence lives in us. Pentecost is the birth of the church, the moment where the Holy Spirit came to rest upon and work through God's people. And He has done ever since.

That means that we are walking "thin places". We are the people who wear down the barriers between heaven and earth.

The ones who diligently pray for God's kingdom to come.

The ones who obediently obey His commands and live God-pleasing lives.

The ones who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly each day.

The ones who welcome God's presence wherever we are, who call upon His peace, and minister in His power.

We may have just prayed for our church buildings at this important time, but remember that we are the church. As wonderful as it is for us to be able to be back in church, we do not need to be in certain buildings to meet with the Lord. We can form our own thin places wherever we go.

An amazing example of this in the Bible is Daniel. In chapter 6, Daniel is an official working in a foreign empire. The king has just given the command that no one can pray to anyone but him, and this is Daniel's response.

"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."

The passage goes on to tell the famous story of Daniel and the lion's den. What we see there is Daniel wearing down the barrier between heaven and earth. God breaks through and intervenes, closing the mouths of the lions. God moves to save Daniel, not because he was in the temple giving sacrifices, but because he prayed.

Just like in the Hamish video for this week, Daniel had found his own cosy, prayer spot. A quiet place in his room where he regularly went to pray to the Lord. He made his own thin place. A place where he felt closest to God. But he also became a walking thin place. Someone who saw supernatural events happen around him, where the barrier between heaven and earth was thin and God's presence moved.



This is our invitation. We each need a 'cosy prayer spot' where we feel close to the Lord. For it is when we soak our lives in prayer, that we see heaven breaking through in the world around us.

God bless,
Seòras

'96 not out'.



Many congratulations to our friend Jim MacArthur who celebrated his 96th birthday this week. Prior to the lockdown in March, Jim was the oldest church goer at Bellie Church and once this pandemic is over, is keen to get back to joining the 'young ones' at church again (maybe wearing his kilt?).

Jim, we wish you every blessing and pray you will have many more birthdays.

And to those who have a birthday or other special day in the coming week, from your church family and friends,



Christmas is NOT cancelled

The apoplectic and somewhat hysterical media response to Professor Jason Leitch's advice last week about Christmas may have some people wondering just what is going on. What he actually said was, *"I'm hopeful that if we can get numbers down to a certain level, we may be able to get some form of normality. But people should get their digital Christmas ready."*

A more reasonable and thoughtful response was given by Rev Susan Brown, when she said, *"This coming Christmas could be seen as an opportunity to give everyone the perfect 'excuse' to reassess how we mark the celebrations whether as a faith festival or simply as a 'holiday'."* (Very Rev Dr Susan Brown)

We perhaps should have drawn your attention last week to Susan Brown's message about the celebration of Christmas this year especially in view of the press uproar following Jason Leitch's comments. You can read the full article on the Church of Scotland website – it really is worth taking the few moments to have a look at it.



As far as Bellie and Speymouth are concerned, we will be working to make Christmas 2020 as meaningful and as exciting as we can, so watch this space. And while we are about it -

53 sleeps
to go!



Moray Community Christmas.

For the last several years a group of volunteers have organised a Christmas lunch for people in Moray who may otherwise be on their own over Christmas. As well as the lunch, those present received a small gift to add to the fun and the food.

This year, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, the lunch cannot take place. So the volunteers have organised a lunch which will be delivered by a group of volunteer drivers throughout the area including Fochabers, Mosstodloch, Garmouth, Kingston and Spey Bay. However, to achieve this Santa needs some help!



- Firstly, if you are going to be on your own and would like a lunch delivered to your door on Christmas Day, please let me know and I will pass your details to the organisers.
- Secondly, could you volunteer to help? Drivers are needed and the more there are, the quicker the meals and gifts can be delivered. It's best to have local drivers who know the area – also best if there are two of you in the car. Since you are not entering peoples' homes, there is no need to go through the 'Disclosure' system.
- Thirdly, could you donate something, perhaps money, which will be used to buy and supply a gift?



If you can help then please get in touch with me and your details will be passed to the organisers. As Susan Brown says in her article, it will be a different kind of Christmas so let's make it a special Christmas of giving rather than receiving.

CROSSREACH

Care you can put your faith in

CrossReach is the Social Care arm of the Church of Scotland and delivers a range of services across Scotland to people of all faiths or none at all.

Earlier this year, CrossReach launched an urgent appeal for funding to enable them to continue providing enhanced care services to some of the most vulnerable individuals across Scotland during this healthcare emergency. The response was amazing and raised over £275,000 for essential, lifesaving, PPE and other equipment to keep their services open and safe. This allowed CrossReach staff to help and support many people, even during the difficult early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Bellie and Speymouth contributed £1,000 to this appeal)

However, the pandemic continues to affect us all and we face uncertain and difficult times in the near and medium future.

This winter, the demand for the services supplied by CrossReach will increase beyond anything they have seen before. Already they see the needs growing; the need for care, counselling, special education and practical measures to support some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Are you able to help CrossReach at this most crucial time with a 'one-off' donation or a regular monthly donation, please?

Your donations can help provide:

- Essential PPE supplies to keep people safe
- Telephone counselling for people who find their mental health is suffering especially from the ongoing COVID-19 situation
- Additional technology to help more residents in Care Homes and other Residential Services to keep in touch with their friends and families
- Ongoing care across all CrossReach services including learning disabilities, homelessness, addiction recovery and children's services.

You can find how to donate to CrossReach by clicking on to their website – they have made it easy to donate.

While your generous donations will be hugely appreciated, please pray for CrossReach staff team, supporters and those with whom they work.

Gardeners Beware

Some of you may have seen in the media this week that police in Aberdeen had been called to a report of a masked man carrying a machete. 'Scotland's finest' attended and found the alleged weapon was, in fact - a leek. CCTV footage recorded a man in a local shop wearing a COVID-19 mask and buying leeks. So, be careful how you carry leeks and just in case you are confused:



LEEKS



MACHETE



You couldn't make it up, could you!

As we go through the next week, spare some thought and prayers for two special groups; those who are on their own just now and those involved in education; pupils, students, teachers, lecturers and all the rest.

We may be familiar with the issues for those living on their own but please keep in touch with them, especially with the long nights just now. We still can't visit them in their (or our) homes and it is a bit chilly or wet to meet outdoors so please be innovative in keeping in touch.

And for those at school: some youngsters were badly affected by the lockdown earlier this year and may still not have recovered. The older ones in school, S 4,5 & 5 may not have formal exams in the spring next year but to build a bank of evidence as to their performance, are subject to constant 'tests' in all subjects. This may cause additional stress to both those sitting the 'tests' and those who must devise, mark and record the 'test' results. It's all extra work with little respite. This year there are no Christmas concerts, discos or other fun times at school this year all of which can lift our Christmas spirits.



So let's have some heavy praying for all of those involved and while we are about it, don't forget the older students who are missing many of the enjoyable bits of college or university.

or the rest of us, stay safe, stay cheerful, stay busy and try to have some fun.

Watch out for leek carrying criminals!

Bye for now
John

