

Reflection for Saturday 16th May 2020 Revd Kyla Sorensen

Philippians 4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul's conversion was dramatic, from persecutor of the church to apostle, mission evangelist and church planter in the Early Church. His deep love for Jesus and His church was in direct response to Jesus' words "why do you persecute me?" it was a complete turnaround, Paul listened to Christ and responded in the only way he knew how – with loving action. But it was not action for the sake of it, not doing without being, as today's passage shows us. Paul was prayerful, he moved and acted in alignment with God's will, and he could do this because in every situation he came to God in prayer. He tells the people of Philippi to copy his actions, and put into practice what they have learned from him. This message is still just as relevant to us today. Especially at this time of global crisis.

As we have been hearing last week, when we looked at the Psalms and this week as we reflected on the stories of David and of Jonah, so we are also assured by Paul that if we pray to God he will hear us.

Our diocesan Pioneer Missioner, Rev Tim Yau posted on Facebook only this morning an excerpt from an article from churchandculture.org:

1. Churches have been forced to move from a weekend-centric, crowd approach to a seven day a week, incarnational approach
2. Churches have been forced to embrace social media
3. Churches have been forced online
4. Churches have been forced to innovate and change
5. Churches have been brought back into mission

You may or may not be happy with these statements but whether you are or are not, the fact is the church has had to move. The incarnational approach has had to happen, while people are at home in one place, we have had to take the church to the people.

Now at St. Mary's we were already very much an incarnational presence in the community – we were very much already out there, in the places where the people are, getting alongside them, listening to them, praying with them, working with them, hearing and responding in our community. But the fact is this lockdown has given us the opportunity to be innovative, it has meant we can throw open the church doors (even though they are effectively shut to the public) and take our threshold out from the church grounds and into the community, house by house by house.

We have only been able to do that with God's help. Holy Spirit has seen the opportunity to innovate and breathe new life into what we do and has done so with a great whoooosh! But everything starts with prayer – how can we do this, who can do this with, Lord lead us! Show us!

So I don't think the word "forced" is perhaps all that helpful, as true as it may be. We have been given an opportunity to reach more people than we ever imagined. Like Paul in those early days of the growing church, we are finding ways to reach people in their houses, to offer prayer and encouragement, to signpost people to resources, to be a loving and caring presence in this community, both within the church when Revd Gerry prays with us and for us each day and without as we are all seeking to remain connected and one in Christ in our own places.

I remember as a teenager, someone saying to me, when I was asking about praying for courage, that when we pray for courage God doesn't just give us "courage" but rather opportunities to "be" courageous. It is up to us to recognise them. It is up to us to recognise the opportunities to "be" something different. It is up to us to recognise the opportunities to "be".

As we are tentatively looking forward to the future and starting to make plans, we will need to "be" courageous, all of us, as it most likely will not look like it did before. And it's ok to grieve for that, we are all human and we like what we like, but don't grieve for long – instead, rejoice in the opportunities we have to be more courageous – more innovative – more passionate – more open – more inclusive – more excited about finding ways to share the good news with the people around us – ALL of them. This lockdown has given us the chance to share in new and imaginative ventures such as Wild Church on a Wednesday, shared reflections, bringing prayer and praise directly into our homes every day! And the people are thirsty, they have been responding...

The Lord is near, Paul tells us. He is indeed close, possibly closer than ever before. It is up to us to respond to his call and to let our imaginations feed into our prayers and our prayers feed into our imaginations!

God has plans for us. So turn your hearts and minds to that which is good, as Paul advised the Philippians and so in turn advises us. Fix our hearts on what good can come out of this, pray into it with passion, imagination, with hope and a firm belief that when we bring all of our prayers and petitions before God, whatever they are, he hears us and we will find peace.

We are encouraged to be thankful, not act thankful. Be thankful.

When faced with a crisis, we can be anxious about many things, we are only human after all, but we tend not to bring it God in prayer (although he knows our hearts).

Like in Matthew 11 v28: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” So Paul is also echoing those words from Jesus, reminding us to put all of our anxieties into Jesus’ hands. To trust that they will be transformed, and so we will know peace. We are reminded that no matter how difficult or different the road ahead may be, we are not walking it alone, we are being led by Christ and we can support and encourage each other in prayer and action as we reach out just that little bit further and wider in God’s love.