

WELCOME

God welcomes us to worship Him today as we welcome one another both in person and online.

Over the coming weeks we, as congregations and Kirk Sessions of Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk, are being invited to think through how we reach out to our communities with God's love, how we share the Good News of God's love for all through our words and our actions. Each Sunday's reflection contains questions that are available both in the PDF for those of you who have internet access but also on paper for those who don't. Please ask me for a copy as you leave. There will be two opportunities in Selkirk to discuss the questions together one on the 22nd January the other on the 19th February. These will be by zoom which I know excludes some folk so please let David, Fiona or myself have your thoughts if you are not able to be present at those meetings. The first one will look at the questions raised in the first two reflections, the second the ones raised in Marks 3-5. Other arrangements are being made for Ashkirk and Ettrick & Yarrow congregations. Today we think about the 2nd Mark of Mission – teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers. Let me read you what *Deuteronomy* has to say about this (6:4-9) ***Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.***

HYMN 424 Blest be the everlasting God.

1. Blest be the everlasting God,
the Father of our Lord!
Be his abounding mercy praised,
his majesty adored!

2. When from the dead he raised his Son,
and called him to the sky,
he gave our souls a lively hope
that they should never die

3. To an inheritance divine
he taught our hearts to rise:
'tis uncorrupted, undefiled,
unfading in the skies.

4. Saints by the power of God are kept,
till the salvation come:
we walk by faith as strangers here;
but Christ shall call us home.

Scottish Paraphrases, 1781, 1 Peter 1:3-5

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

We praise You, our heavenly Father because, by Your divine power, You have given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of these by coming to know You, our Lord Jesus, the One who called us to Himself, inviting us to become part of Your family.

Your great and precious promises which You have given us enable us to share in Your divine nature, changing and transforming us into Your holy people. You promise to continue to abide with us empowering us through Your Spirit.

Thank You for the fellowship of believers, for brothers and sisters who are extensions of Your love to us, both here in our communities and across the world wide church.

Thank You for the various gifts and abilities You give to enable us to fulfil Your mandate to us in the world. “Go into all the world,” You say Lord Jesus, “Make people my disciples, baptise them and teach them to obey all I have commanded you all the while knowing I am with you to the end of the age.”

What a promise that is Lord Jesus – never to be without You and Your Spirit working in us and through us. We praise You for Your infinite care and thoughtfulness.

We confess though, that we have neglected Your Spirit and the gifts you’ve given us. We have depended wholly on our own strength, concluding that we can successfully stand against the evil one by relying on our human strength, on our knowledge and skills. But we have continually failed You. We have failed to listen to You, instead, we have listened to the world and followed its dictates and directions. We have failed to live as light and salt of the earth. We have failed to preserve it and dispel its darkness.

Because of our sinful lifestyle, we no longer reflect Your light to the world in the way You ask. We have lost our saltiness. Have mercy on us, dear Lord. Forgive our neglect and confusion of heart. Cleanse us with the blood which You shed for us at Calvary. Forgive us O Lord. Restore and renew us.

In our acceptance of this desire to be cleansed, renewed and re-commissioned we offer You our money, our time and our talents. Please use them to bring Your kingdom here on earth. In Jesus’ name we pray saying together the prayer He taught. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who

sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

READING *Luke 24:13-27*

Read by Ruth Scott (Ashkirk)

The Walk to Emmaus

13 On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; 16 they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. 17 Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"

They stood still, with sad faces. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

19 "What things?" he asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. 20 Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. 21 And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. 22 Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, 23 but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. 24 Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! 26 Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" 27 And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

REFLECTION

How best do you learn? For me I find it easier to remember things if someone has sat with me and talked me through whatever it is I'm doing, allowing me time to get used to doing it for myself. I'll be forever grateful to a very busy person in my last congregation taking the time to instruct me how to create a PowerPoint. He didn't do it with me watching – I'd never have remembered that. Instead he took me through each step slowly telling me what to do, but letting me do the work so finding out how to do it for myself. That meant it was much easier for me to remember how to do it the next time.

Different people though learn in different ways and it is good to recognise that diversity.

The second mark of Mission that we are exploring is to teach, baptise and nurture new believers. Having captured folks' attention with the Good News of God's love and forgiveness, having invited them to come and be with us or indeed accepted their invitation for us to come and be with them, the Christian family needs to have a way in which faith can be taught and nurtured.

The Jewish tradition does it in two ways – story telling and instruction. Both good methods. Each year at Passover the family gets together for the Passover meal with the children asking the question “Why?” We all know how good children are at asking that question! But it is a very relevant one – that is how they learn.

Instruction is also how folk learn. Right down through the ages teaching people about faith in God has been paramount. Jesus Himself instructed His disciples and that would include ourselves to ***Go and make disciples – teaching them to observe all that I have commanded (Matthew 28:20)***. Paul on his journeys made sure that he taught new Christians, new churches the basics of the faith. Teaching is deeply rooted in the Bible – an essential part of

the way God called, shaped, and educated His people Israel in the Old Testament so says Professor Andrew Walls. Where better to look than our Old Testament passage today. Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy is calling all Jewish families to first put God first in their lives – loving Him with all their heart, soul and strength and then he goes on to say now show that love in how you teach in how you act and in how you nurture your family.

Teach, repeat, tie, wear, write; all active verbs, all activities for **all** people of faith to do.

For faith to have a future it needs to be shared – with family, with friends and in the wider community. Here in this passage we have Moses telling the folk to teach the commands to their children and to tie them on their arms wear them on their foreheads so that others will know the reason for the way the Israelites live their lives.

It seems to me that foreheads are at the front of our brains so we are being encouraged to think about the commands God's given us, to think about the promises of help and comfort, to think of the challenges that God has given us and then we are to use our arms to act out the love of God in all that we do. It's a challenge isn't it because so often our actions are instinctive, reactive, rather than planned.

A challenge then for us to think through how we live our lives showing our love for God and His love for us in **all** that we do.

God goes on to challenge us to **talk** about these things when you stand up and sit down and walk by the way and through the day. Of course that doesn't mean that we preach a sermon about everything that happens. It means, rather, that the truth of God relates to everything in life. One of the sins of Christians and perhaps

especially churches has been what is called the sacred/secular divide. Faith, personal and for Sundays, the rest of life for other things. That was and is never God's intention. His love should permeate **all** our life.

Life itself is a living visual aid for teaching. Jesus Himself wonderfully exemplifies this. He always uses illustrations from life around Him -- the birds, the trees, the flowers, the process of sowing and reaping, the animals around sheep, pigs wolves to name but three. He also used men women and children drawing different points, truths from each. The **whole of life** was the resource from which He drew his lessons.

The first questions for today then are; *how do we learn best and what do we do to encourage that learning process in ourselves?*

How do we share our learning with others in our own families and in our church family through our thinking and in our actions?

Over the years we have run courses for folk to think through how faith in God can impact their lives in a positive way and in a way which encourages them to join us in our church family. The Start course, Christianity Explored and more recently The King and I are all examples of this.

There are Study Groups running which have allowed people to question, to share doubts, to share faith, to share their understanding of what God is saying. All of these have proved helpful in deepening peoples' faith and understanding of the God who loves them and everyone completely and always. Group members are taught by one another's experiences. Nurturing one another – caring, understanding, allowing each to be themselves happens there.

There are other groups or individuals within each of the churches who actively seek to work out their faith in action for doorposts and gates figure too in this passage – God's way of living and loving reaching ever wider out into our community and world. Teaching by example.

How might you deepen your faith in these ways? How might you encourage others to join you?

What is God saying to you about how we the church should encourage the teaching of God's ways in ways which allow individuals the opportunity to meet with the living Lord Jesus in order to experience His loving forgiveness?

How can we encourage families in our congregations to be teaching God's love in and through family life.

I think our New Testament reading is very instructive not least because the teacher is Jesus Himself.

Here were two people immersed in utter sadness, despondency, hurt, confusion and disbelief. I don't think we can truly imagine what it was like for them. Their whole lives had been turned upside down. Their hopes and dreams of the future had come crashing down round them. The one on whom they had pinned their hopes was dead, buried and gone forever. At that point they were not looking for answers from the Bible, they were trying to puzzle things out for themselves. Each needs the other, as companion in sorrow

and doubt. Discussing the realities of the weekend past, probably going round in circles trying to make sense out of what seemed senseless.

It's good, actually it's vital, that we have folk who are able to come close to us in our grief, to help us make sense out of the seemingly senseless – Paul tells it this way – we need to comfort others with the comfort we receive from God. But sometimes the grief that we experience can feed off each other and so we get nowhere fast. Often we need someone apart from the situation to give us some clear thinking.

Jesus could have come up to them and said, “Don't worry guys here I am, everything will be alright.” But he didn't. He got them to explore their thoughts and feelings for themselves. In a gentle and respectful manner He then helped them explore what their Bible said about the Messiah, the Saviour who would come. He allowed them time to think things through and of course we read that it was only when He broke the bread then left that they understood they'd been in the presence of the risen Jesus. What joy that brought them. – their eyes opened to the possibility of a new relationship with Jesus. Isn't that what we crave for ourselves and others we know?

Jesus does three things for them a) He meets them where they are, b) He provides them with the opportunity to tell their story. Allowing folk the space to tell it like it is for them, is a very precious gift and often takes longer than the evening walk for these two, c) Jesus met them and revealed himself to them in the ORDINARY event of eating supper.

How then do we meet others where they are? How do we allow them to tell their story and how can we show Christ's love and life in the ordinary things of life and living?

Many big questions to think and pray through this week but all very relevant to the Mission of God's church here in Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk. Invite God to show you answers so that together we can discern His way forward, reminding ourselves that He is with us always even to the end of the age. Amen

HYMN You're the Word of God the Father

You're the Word of God the Father

From before the world began.

Ev'ry star and ev'ry planet

Has been Fashioned by Your hand.

All creation holds together

By the power of Your voice

Let the skies declare Your glory;

Let the land and seas rejoice!

You're the Author of creation;

You're the Lord of ev'ry man;

And Your cry of love rings out across the lands.

Yet You left the gaze of angels,
Came to seek and save the lost,
And exchanged the joy of heaven
For the anguish of a cross.
With a prayer You fed the hungry;
With a word You calmed the sea;
Yet how silently You suffered
That the guilty may go free!

*You're the Author of creation;
You're the Lord of ev'ry man;
And Your cry of love rings out across the lands.*

With a shout You rose victorious,
Wresting vict'ry from the grave,
And ascended into heaven,
Leading captives in Your way.
Now You stand before the Father,
Interceding for Your own;
From each tribe and tongue and nation,
You are leading sinners home!

*You're the Author of creation;
You're the Lord of ev'ry man;
And Your cry of love rings out across the lands.*

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PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Susan White (Ettrick &

Yarrow)

Lord God we are glad that you call us to come to You with our prayers for the world, the church, our communities and ourselves.

Father God, we pray for the Church, Your body and ambassadors, to which You have committed the ministry of reconciling people to You. Grant us grace to live as light and salt in Your world, that we may be effective witnesses for You in Our Jerusalem: our family and close friends, in our Judea: our community, in our nation and the world at large. Help us to commit ourselves to pray earnestly that Your kingdom may come in each of these spheres.

We pray that Your church will stand firmly in Your word enabling people to learn of the Good News of Jesus' love and forgiveness, so enabling each person to experience Your life changing love for themselves. Encourage churches to find imaginative ways of nurturing and discipling folk new to the faith.

We pray for our political leaders in our communities, in Scotland and in the United Kingdom, that they may be endowed with wisdom and a longing to serve You faithfully. We pray for Your protection upon our leaders.

The winter period is particularly challenging for the poor in our nation. Thank You for our social support system that is in operation, for the NHS and our care system. May they and we continue to be extensions of Your love to those who are in dire need.

Comfort those whose loved ones have died. Grant healing to the sick, Your comforting Presence to the lonely. We name those we know in the silence bringing them into Your Presence in order that You might minister Your love into their lives today. You alone know their deepest needs. SILENCE

World wide there are so many troubled areas: where abject poverty exists, where people struggle daily with finding food for themselves and their families, where the rich minority have power and influence over the poor majority. Grant Your discernment to those who govern world wide. Challenge those who govern selfishly, encourage those who govern wisely.

As we comfort and help one another please give us the ability to allow others to help us too. It's not easy making ourselves vulnerable but You ask us to follow in Your way and that is what You did when You came as a baby, when You died on the cross. Thank You that in faith we can have the assurance of Your ever abiding presence in our lives.

We bring You our prayers in the name of Jesus amen.

HYMN 286 Tell out my soul

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;

in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy Name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn will are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)

based on the Magnificat from The New English Bible.

BENEDICTION

The God of love who calls you guide you today and always

His might uphold you, His love enfold you, His peace empower you.

The blessing of Almighty God; Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you today and always. Amen