

St. John's and St. Columba's Strathpray

Let us pray for one another and for the world ...

Sunday September 1st Pentecost 15.

“And now, O Israel, listen carefully to these laws I teach you, and obey them if you want to live and enter into and possess the land given you by the Lord God of your ancestors. Do not add other laws or subtract from these; just obey them, for they are from the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 4:1-2.

‘When we come to the Bible, we come to be changed, not to amass information.’ (Richard Foster)

Loving God, we pray that as Christians we may take to heart the need to walk the talk, and live out what we profess. May nothing get so important to us that it pushes Your values aside. Amen.

We pray for the congregation of St. Mary-in-the-Fields, Culloden: overseen by the Inverness City Team.



Monday September 2nd

*This week we are looking at **Philippians 2:14 – 3:11** (with reflections from Nicky Gumbel – A Life Worth Living).*

I make no excuse for the length of this reading – after all, this is how Paul originally intended his letters to be read.

May I encourage you again to reflect on this modern paraphrase of these verses in the coming week – and read it as you would read a letter to yourself, knowing that God speaks to us through Scripture:

‘Do everything readily and cheerfully - no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I’ll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns. You’ll be living proof that I didn’t go to all this work for nothing.

Even if I am executed here and now, I’ll rejoice in being an element in the offering of your faith that you make on Christ’s altar, a part of your rejoicing. But turnabout’s fair play - you must join me in my rejoicing. Whatever you do, don’t feel sorry for me.



I plan (according to Jesus’ plan) to send Timothy to you very soon so he can bring back all the news of you he can gather. Oh, how that will do my heart good! I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves, with little concern for the things of Jesus. But you know yourselves that Timothy’s the real thing. He’s been a devoted son to me as together we’ve delivered the Message. As soon as I see how things are going to fall out for me here, I plan to send him off. And then I’m hoping and praying to be right on his heels.

But for right now, I'm dispatching Epaphroditus, my good friend and companion in my work. You sent him to help me out; now I'm sending him to help you out. He has been wanting in the worst way to get back with you. Especially since recovering from the illness you heard about, he's been wanting to get back and reassure you that he is just fine. He nearly died, as you know, but God had mercy on him. And not only on him - he had mercy on me, too. His death would have been one huge grief piled on top of all the others. So you can see why I'm so delighted to send him on to you. When you see him again, strong and strapping, how you'll rejoice and how relieved I'll be. Give him a grand welcome, a joyful embrace! People like him deserve the best you can give. Remember the ministry to me that you started but weren't able to complete? Well, in the process of finishing up that work, he put his life on the line and nearly died doing it. And that's about it, friends. Be glad in God!



I don't mind repeating what I have written in earlier letters, and I hope you don't mind hearing it again. Better safe than sorry - so here goes.

Steer clear of the barking dogs, those religious busybodies, all bark and no bite. All they're interested in is appearances - knife-happy circumcisers, I call them. The real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ's praise as we do it. We couldn't carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it - even though we can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book.

The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash - along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant - dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ - God's righteousness.

I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.'



Monday.

'Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life ..' Philippians 2:14-16.

'The New Testament speaks not so much of society's responsibility for us, but of our responsibility for those around us. We live in a "crooked and depraved generation". The word for "crooked" suggests that it is warped in its activities, and the word for "depraved" suggests that it is distorted in its values. This is true not just of Paul's generation, but of ours, and of every other generation. In the midst of a society which is warped and distorted due to its rebellion against God, Christians are called to live lives that are noticeably different from those around them. Praise of God and of others, rather than complaining or arguing, should characterise our lives.'

And now to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright mountain of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy; to him be power and authority, for ever and ever. Amen. (Martin Luther King)

We pray for Bishop Mark and all the Bishops of the SEC.

Tuesday September 3rd

'I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves, with little concern for the things of Jesus. But you know yourselves that Timothy's the real thing.' **Philippians 2:20.**

'Friendship is at the heart of Christianity, and it should be at the heart of church life. Men and women were created to live in a relationship of friendship with God – and also friendship with one another. Restored friendship is part of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. He also set us an example of friendship. He demonstrated that marriage is not the only solution to 'aloneness'. Close friendship is another solution.



This God-given provision is often undervalued. Paul discovered that in his friendship with Timothy and Epaphroditus. There is a totally different dimension to the friendship between Christians – an unparalleled closeness which the New Testament calls "fellowship" – about which the world knows nothing. It results from the trust, security and openness arising out of our common focus on Jesus Christ.'

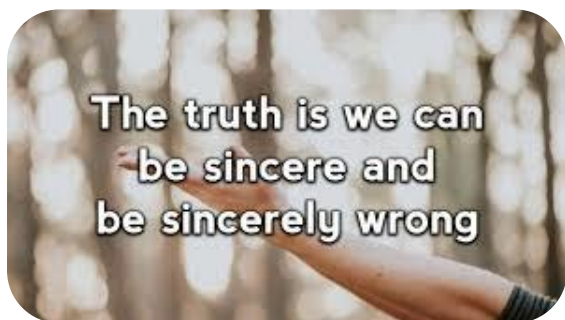
Help me, O God, to be a good and true friend: to be always loyal and never to let my friends down; to be true to them as I would wish them to be true to me. Let my friendship be a pledge of my faith in you. Amen.

We pray for King Charles and members of the Royal Family.

Wednesday September 4th

'If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.' **Philippians 3:4-6.**

'Before he met Christ, Paul had been religious. He belonged to the strictest sect of Judaism and was scrupulous in keeping every law and every rule. He believed in God, he prayed and he gave money. There are some today who say, "I have never done anyone any harm;" "I have never been in trouble with the law;" "I have always been very religious." But none of these things can give us confidence before God. Sincerity of belief is not enough. Some say,



“It doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you are sincere.” Paul had been sincerely wrong in persecuting the Christian church. Here Paul adds up all the things which gave him confidence before. Now he rejects all those things with disgust. Now he has a totally new confidence – in Christ.’

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us. Deliver the oppressed, pity the insignificant, raise the fallen, show yourself to the needy, heal the sick, bring back those of your people who have gone astray, feed the hungry, lift up the weak, take off the prisoners’ chains. May every nation come to know that you are God alone, that Jesus is your Son, that we are your people, the sheep of your pasture. Amen. (St. Clement of Rome)

We pray for the teachers and pupils in our local schools.

Thursday September 5th

‘But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.’ Philippians 3:7-9.

‘Paul’s new confidence comes from the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.” One day he encountered Jesus. From that day onwards he lived in a vital, lively, continuing relationship with Jesus Christ. It is possible to know Jesus, the man whom we read about in the pages of the New Testament. We do not see him physically but we can talk to him and listen to him speaking to us. We can spend time in his presence, we can experience his love, we can know him as Paul knew him. Often we hear people name-dropping. They are so proud that they know someone rich or famous or titled; it bolsters their confidence. But that is nothing compared to knowing the King of kings and Lord of lords, and speaking to him in an intimate way each day. Now wonder Paul had a completely new confidence.’



Jesus, I need your presence. I need your Spirit. I need the joy of my salvation once again. Grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Help me to release all I need to let go of. And lay hold of all you have for me. Amen.

We pray for those living in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities across Britain.

Friday September 6th

‘I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.’ Philippians 3:10-11.



‘Paul is single-minded – he wants simply to know Christ. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits wrote: “Human persons are created to praise, reverence and serve God ... the other things on the face of the earth are created for us, to help us in attaining the purpose for which we are created. Therefore, we are to make use of them insofar as they help us to attain our purpose, and we should rid ourselves of them insofar as they hinder us from attaining it.” It is not

wrong to have ambitions – but all ambitions must be subordinated to our ambition to know Christ. He is our first priority in life.’

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. Amen.

We pray our link Diocese of Tuam.

Saturday September 7th

“.. if God be for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31.

‘If God is “Abba”, the loving Father who Jesus showed him to be, then we can have no doubt about his fairness and trustworthiness. He is utterly on our side, whoever we are. And “if God be for us, who can be against us?” We can pray to him with confidence, knowing that he will use our prayer in ways which are good, just and kind. We may not know precisely what will happen, but if God is unequivocally with us, then in some significant respect the situation we pray for will be changed.’ (John Pritchard – Intercessions Handbook)

God of wholeness, speak into the despair and loneliness of all who struggle with life and its troubles; reassure, affirm and encourage them, and alert us to ways we can help. Amen.

We pray for professional and unpaid carers.



Footprints.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand. One belonged to him and the other to the Lord.



When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that at many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it.

“Lord, You set that once I decided to follow You, You would walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life, there is only one set of footprints. I do not understand why, when I needed You most, You would leave me.” The Lord replied, “My precious child! I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”