

Life at St. Paul's Milngavie

June 2020



Dear Friends,

I hope that this letter finds you all well and staying safe. These are indeed strange times, yet times that enable us to reflect a great deal on life, and on our relationship with God.

One of the things with which I have struggled in the recent weeks is opening my diary and discovering a blank space on a Sunday morning, where normally it would remind me (not that I ever need reminding) that we should be gathering for worship. I really miss not being able to be there just now. I miss the fellowship, the sense of community, and not least the way that we are able to encourage each other, as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ by worshipping together and singing the praises of God. Like many, I have been following the news intently, and as I write, it occurs to me that it has been quite easy to lock down our economy. What I believe will be difficult will be opening it up again, whenever that might happen.

I believe that the same will be true of the church across the world. We have had to face a very steep learning curve as far as technology is concerned, yet I rejoice that as a family of God, we have been able to stream two services every Sunday; one from St Luke's, and the other from St. Paul's.

However, I believe that the most difficult task has yet to face us, and that will be opening up the church for worship again. I have no doubt that attending church in the future will be very different, and there will be various challenges that face us. We have not been able to access our building for over 10 weeks now, and like many, I have a deep longing for us to be together once again.

We still await guidance from our own Covid-19 Task Group in the Church of Scotland, there have been very helpful papers published by the Lutheran Church in Germany, and the United Reformed Church here in the UK which have given some thought to the form that the services might take and how the services might be facilitated. While we have no idea when that might be, it has been a great encouragement to me that thought is being given to this, and in relaying this to you, I hope that it will encourage you too.

The only thing that we know for certain just now is that God is sovereign, and that in the context of the Kingdom, we can take great comfort from that. I often find myself asking what He is teaching us in this situation, and I keep coming back to the belief that if these days of Covid-19 do not make us realise afresh that we are frail and fallen creatures, dependent on a powerful God, then I have no idea what might. The truth is that we face an enemy that we did not choose; an enemy that we do not yet fully understand, yet an enemy that presents itself to us as something that is smaller than a drop of water, and yet has had the capacity to claim lives.

We must still be prudent in these days, follow the advice given to us by the government, and stay safe. Yet still we can give thanks that modern technology has enabled us to be close to the Word of God and enjoy fellowship with each other. The feedback on the services has been encouraging, and I am grateful to those in the congregation who are maintaining pastoral contact with some of our members.

I have been reflecting a lot in these days on the passage that we find at the end of the book of Habakkuk, chapter 3 verses 17&18:- "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will be joyful in God my Saviour."

During these trying days of coronavirus, though we may be limited in where we can go and what we can do, though isolation is painful, and essential duties, like shopping, a challenge, yet we too, like Habakkuk, can be joyful in God our Saviour.

I wish you every blessing at this time,

Yours in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Ramsay B. Shields

Answers to the Hymn Titles Quiz from May

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|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Away in a manger | 13. Just as I am |
| 2. Be Thou my vision | 14. Joy to the world |
| 3. Blessed be the name | 15. O worship the King |
| 4. Faith of our fathers | 16. Silent night Holy night |
| 5. For all the saints | 17. See what a morning |
| 6. From heaven you came | 18. The church's one foundation |
| 7. Go forth and tell | 19. The old rugged cross |
| 8. Great is Thy faithfulness | 20. Thine be the glory |
| 9. How great thou art | 21. Will your anchor hold |
| 10. How firm a foundation | 22. We sing the praise |
| 11. In the bleak midwinter | 23. What child is this |
| 12. Infant holy Infant lowly | 24. Whom shall I send |

Letter From Fergus

Dear Friends,

I am certain that I am not the only one among you who has been informed by the Scottish Government that they have to regard themselves as 'under shielding'. In practise this means not wandering very far from your own doorstep and being careful of all social contacts. In a sense I was way ahead of you. I was in a kind of shielding after January's stem cell transplant but with a bit more room for manoeuvre than now. It's frustrating at a number of levels but I am persuaded that conforming to the official guidelines is the one contribution we can all make to a positive outcome to this crisis.

It is impossible for anyone to know how this will all work out. A wise man in the Bible says: 'Of making many books there is no end . . .' (Ecclesiastes 12: 12) Similarly there is no end to the speculation of what the 'new normal' will be like. And in many ways that is contributing to the strain that many people are feeling. There is always something unsettling about the unknown.

No doubt you have found your own coping strategies, the things that keep you strong. Just recently I found myself greatly encouraged by the thought that God has enabled me to feel 'shielded' in a way that goes deeper than personal discipline. In Psalm 28: 7 David says:

'The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him and I am helped.'

This is a man who is convinced that in every circumstance he is enveloped in God's good and loving purpose. Jesus taught this but in a different way:

'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.' (John 10: 27-28)

The believer is in the hands of the Good Shepherd and no one or nothing will ever prise us away. We are shielded against the spiritual darkness of sin, death and the devil.

In the end, no matter what the future holds our greatest resource is God's Word and the promises therein. I hope and pray that in them you are finding the strength and peace we need for these challenging times.

Wishing you every blessing in Christ,

Fergus.

Lockdown thoughts from the Bible Class

Lockdown – Andrew Whitelaw

This whole thing has been a very new experience for us all, but while you might hear all the other children complain about not having anything to do, I'm surviving just fine. I haven't had the most exciting time, but I've been occupying the time by playing music or Face Timing with my friends. It's been a very productive time for me, from starting to do recordings with my band to catching up on all the episodes of TV I've missed due to school. I've even started to develop my creative side and began to make new things. The first thing I made was a new birdhouse which is still up today. Success! Although, one of the big cons of this whole quarantine malarkey is that my hair doesn't stop growing. Therefore, I resorted to cutting it myself which went surprisingly well (that meant I didn't have to shave my hair off). School has not been that bad either, only 3 subjects a day which I can do anytime. Only I have been told off for dying my hair in attempt to keep spirits up with my friends! My hair has been through a lot this week, from a dark, dark brown, to bleach blonde to its final resting colour... bright red!

I hope everyone's staying fit and well during these tough times.

Lockdown – Abigail Bates

Before lockdown began and we were still at school, the music school residence closed suddenly, meaning that my best friend found it hard to keep coming to school. Luckily, she made it for the last day where all we did was watch films and colour in. It feels so long ago now.

The first couple of weeks of lockdown were quite fun as we were all able to have lunch and dinner together. Normally my Dad works away a lot, but he's been working from home! We ran out of things to say at dinnertimes, so we have started to watch TV which we've never been allowed to do. We've watched all of Mallory Towers and we are now on series 3 of the Worst Witch.

On a normal day at home I get up at 6.30am to practice violin, then we all eat breakfast before doing Joe Wicks PE online at 9am. Then I go to my room to start schoolwork. My school send out 2-4 subjects a day (about an hour a subject) and music school gives out work too. I usually work in my room, but my brothers work downstairs. I feel sorry for my Mum because my youngest brother doesn't really like writing and schoolwork so he can be a bit of a handful. After dinner I do my piano practice while Mum brushes our very hairy dog (the groomers are all shut!) and I go to bed around 9pm. On Sunday mornings we go to a different online church each week, although our favourite is Dundonald Church as we miss Lynsey Bremner.

We have had lots of celebrations during lockdown though. Gregor and my Mum had birthdays and my parents had their anniversary, so we've had a couple of dominoes deliveries and a Chinese too! We did no schoolwork those days and for Gregor's birthday Mum had managed to get loads of crafty stuff for us to paint. Video calls with family has been a bit stressful though as everyone talks over everyone else!

I am really missing my friends and my grandparents. My Granny is really sad at the moment, but she lives an hour away and we're not allowed to visit her. I do spend a lot of the day on my own doing music or schoolwork, so I like doing dog walks to get some downtime, especially the Bluebell woods. I hope everyone is safe and well and I'm looking forward to getting back to St Paul's soon.

Paul Word Search

N A M O R W A L B A S K E T G
E E Y L U A S A R R E S T A A
S L H I S R E T T E L O V E M
C T T P P N E S S A I N A N A
A N O S E E L U F H T I A F L
P E M M I T R C G I N R L L I
E G I Y S P S S R O E E A E E
S E T E J R E A E J G K E G L
S C S N E E N M N C A A Z A P
U H I R W T O A O K U M N C I
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A C C J H R Y T R A M E D R I
T H C A E R P A P O S T L E D
L I G H T I R I P S A I N T Y

Ananias, Antioch, Apostle, Arrest, Basket, Blindness, Christ, Church, Damascus, Disciple, Enemies, Epistle, Escape, Faithful, Gamaliel, Gentiles, Gentle, James, Jewish, Journey, Kind, Law, Legacy, Letters, Light, Love, Martyr, Persecute, Peter, Preach, Prisoner, Roman, Saint, Saul, Spirit, Stephen, Synagogue, Tarsus, Tentmaker, Timothy, Zeal

GUILD NEWS



First of all I want to bring greetings from the committee to all Guild members in these strange times in which we are living. We are pleased to be keeping in touch by regular phone calls, and we are delighted - but not surprised – to be able to report that members are coping admirably with the enforced restrictions. Many people live alone and are adjusting to the lack of contact in a variety of ways. Houses have had an extra-thorough spring clean, and most gardens are looking better than ever before! Most importantly, we can also report that members are staying well.

We are, however, all missing the fellowship we so much enjoy at church. Those of us who can go on line are really appreciating the services from St. Paul's and St. Luke's; we have a real sense of being inside the building, thanks to Chris's clever filming, and I know that some people enjoy spotting their pew! It is also lovely to hear the organ and to be able to join in the singing. Some of us also 'visit' other churches such as Dundonald, where Lynsey is minister, and it is wonderful to be able to share in the worship there. Television is also playing its part: 'Reflections from the Quay' has had some very uplifting and helpful programmes, and 'Songs of Praise' continues to encourage us too. We have been cheered to hear news of many people who are not regular church-goers but who are tuning in to services at present. God is still at work!

Our session ended very abruptly in March, just after our very successful Coffee Morning – which was well attended by the congregation who were aware that this would be the last such occasion for some months! It meant that we missed the last three meetings including our AGM. The business of the AGM was carried out at long distance and members received all necessary information by letter. Unfortunately our outing to St. Andrews, scheduled for May, had to be cancelled; initially we had hoped to have it in September but that now looks unlikely too. We will be in touch in July when Kate, our treasurer, will give up-to-date information about that and other matters.

Of course we have no idea when our meetings will resume, and at present it seems unlikely to be in October, our normal time. Nevertheless we decided to go ahead with planning the syllabus as from the beginning of October, just in case! The speakers who have accepted our invitation are only too happy to come at a later date, if necessary. Ann has been busy contacting a myriad of people and a very interesting programme awaits us in due course. The topics include trips to Antarctica and Israel, a visit to the Glasgow Botanic Gardens, and talks about the Leprosy Mission, the Lodging House Mission and the Glasgow Boys. We plan to have a few afternoon meetings in the New Year for a little variety.

Members of the congregation who are not in the Guild but who attended our very successful fund-raising concert will, like our members, be interested and pleased to hear that the work of MALAWI FRUITS is continuing apace despite the arrival of Covid-19 in Malawi. In the most recent newsletter we read how hygiene training is going on, along with provision of equipment and other support to hundreds of farmers in the north of the country. Many of these farmers are young, and many are women who are struggling to provide for their families after being abandoned by their abusive husbands. We read of a young woman who, as well as running her farm, has gone back to secondary school to continue her education which was interrupted; there was news of a young man who runs a grocery shop supplying his area, as well as managing a small farm. All of this would be impossible without the support of Malawi Fruits, and it is wonderful to see how our money is being used!

When the Guild resumes we look forward to welcoming back all our members but hope that other folk in the congregation will join us too. You will all be very welcome. In the meantime, stay safe!

Eleanor Easton

Men's Association

Unfortunately, as a result of Covid-19, the final meeting of the Association on 24th March which was the AGM and film night, had to be cancelled. The members of Committee have all agreed to remain in post with the exception of Angus Kennedy and we publicly thank Angus for his devotion to the Association Committee and look forward to seeing him at meetings in the future.

Also cancelled was the outing to Mount Stuart on the Island of Bute which had been provisionally rearranged for a date in September. As the lockdown continued, the Committee felt that it would be prudent to cancel that date as well, leaving the outing to be rearranged for April 2021, when hopefully things will be operating in the "new normal." God willing.

As for the next season of meetings, the Committee felt it was premature to be asking speakers to commit to coming to St Paul's in October, November and December at this point in time but that a review of the position could take place when matters were clearer. Obviously, we are aware of strong local talent within our Congregation who would be able to address the Association when it is possible to do so. Your names and numbers are in the Secretary's Black Book!

On behalf of the Association, we would like to wish all members of the congregation to stay safe and to look after yourself and most of all, keep the faith, in the Lord's name.

With Christ's Blessings,
Brian Adair, Secretary.



Dear Friends,

Hello from Japan where Alistair and I returned in the middle of March, just before the lockdown started. Japan then declared a State of Emergency, so as a result we have not been able to see people since we returned, other than by video calls.

That State of Emergency has now been lifted and we are slowly adjusting to what is being called a “new lifestyle”. This includes measures to help prevent infection such as physical distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands. People are also asked to avoid gathering in crowded places, close-contact settings, and closed spaces, known as the “three Cs”.

My church here moved to online services and I play the piano for them. The minister also decided to email a daily devotion to all the members, and I write one each Wednesday. Even after 22 years in Japan, it is still a challenge to write well in Japanese!. The church plans to meet from next Sunday, splitting into two services and using two rooms, so that everyone can be far enough apart.

Although we all long to meet again in person, it has been encouraging to see different ministry opportunities open up online. People have been doing online Bible studies and prayer meetings, as well as services. Many Japanese people have had more time to attend since they are not commuting to work or University. Some churches made masks and delivered them to people in their community. Missionaries in Sapporo made cookies to take to a local hospital to encourage the health care workers there.

It was so great to see so many of you while I was back. Thank you for your warm welcome and fellowship. Please continue to pray for the people of Japan and that God will use this time to open hearts. We are also remembering you in Scotland as lockdown gradually eases. Here is the verse I shared in the devotion I wrote last week:

“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” (Deuteronomy 31:8).

May we all know the presence of the Lord with us and have confidence that He is going before us.

With love and prayers

Lorna, Daniel, Matthew, Calum and Alistair

St. Paul's Prayer Meeting

For as long as any of us can remember, St. Paul's folk have gathered for prayer on Thursday evenings from 8.00 till 9.00/9.15 pm (usually in the Jubilee Hall).

The meeting is normally led by Fergus, but over the past year members of the Prayer Group have taken turns in leading the meeting. We start with the singing of a hymn followed by a Bible reading and a short meditation on the passage of scripture. After this, people can share prayer requests for people and issues which they are concerned about or for situations in the community, country or world. We then have a time of prayer when anyone who wishes may say a prayer; some people prefer to listen to the prayers of others rather than to pray out loud themselves and they are an equally important part of the meeting. After the prayer time the evening concludes with the singing of another hymn and the saying together of the Grace.

Sadly, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the prayer meeting in the church had to be suspended, but we agreed that it was important, **perhaps even more important**, that we should continue to 'meet' to pray as part of the church family. To help us to do so, a prayer sheet is emailed to members of the Prayer Group each Thursday, comprising some thoughts from scripture and a list of prayer suggestions. This sheet is also put on the St. Paul's Website at the same time so that it is accessible to anybody who wishes to 'join' us in prayer. Members of the Prayer Group are also invited to submit personal requests for prayer each week and these are circulated on a confidential basis (but are **not** uploaded on to the Church Website).

The apostle Paul was in no doubt about the crucial importance of prayer in the life of the individual Christian and of the church. To quote just two examples of his thinking on prayer:

'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18)

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4: 6-7).

We would be pleased if you could join us in prayer each Thursday. For further information please contact st.pauls@btconnect.com or phone 0141 956 4405.

The new Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has reminded the Church that its call to serve is unchanging, even in the extraordinary circumstances of the Coronavirus Covid-19 epidemic.

The Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair the minister of St. Andrew's Parish Church in Arbroath, added that, like the first disciples of Jesus, the Church finds itself in uncharted territory, but that Jesus 'calls us to Him and sends us out for Him – asking only that we trust Him'.

This is the first time in over 300 years that a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has not been held. Instead, Dr Fair was installed as Moderator at a socially-distanced ceremony in the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on Saturday 16th May, 2020.

Dr Fair said: "Regarding my own situation, many folks have said to me, 'We're so sorry it's worked out like this, in your year.' I appreciate the kindness - and yes there are disappointments. Then again, it's 'life' It comes at you. Not all of it you'd choose. Sometimes, life sucks.

But let me say this today: it sucks a whole lot more for those at the bottom of the pile - those who need to bear the humiliation of food banks and soup kitchens and those around the world for whom food banks and soup kitchens are but the stuff of dreams. And those who struggle with poor mental health. And those who live in fear of the fist because of the pressure of confinement.

For some, this is much more than inconvenience and disrupted plans.

Yes, much has changed, much is horribly uncertain.

And yet much remains. Primarily, our Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. The apostle James assures us, 'He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.'

For my own part, I signed up to serve this 'same as always God' so nothing has changed. The circumstances have. What my year as Moderator is going to involve has, yes, but the call to serve is as it was.

And I hear it today, in this place, loudly and clearly."

The Very Rev Colin Sinclair, in his speech as outgoing Moderator, said it had been 'a rich experience' for himself and his wife, both in the parts of the year that went as planned and the Covid-19-disrupted last two months.

"It wasn't the ending we expected and for which we had planned. However we are grateful to God that when one door closed another one opened."

He said to Dr Fair, "The whole Church welcomes you and blesses you, and believes you will be a blessing. We commit to pray for you in this unique and extraordinary time we are living through, and for the forthcoming year. God bless you in the year ahead.

There is no map to guide you but Jesus will be your guide. So you are in safe hands."

CrossReach Emergency Appeal

As highlighted last month, there are additional pressures on charities at this time. One such charity is The Church of Scotland Care Council who manage *CrossReach* which marked 150 years of service in 2019. Income has suffered as fundraising activities and major events are cancelled due to the epidemic. At the same time, its services to some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland have come under increasing pressure during the crisis. In April, the then Moderator of the General Assembly, The Rt. Rev. Colin Sinclair, urged people to take part in the 2.6 Challenge for *CrossReach*. The challenge, launched the week the London Marathon should have taken place, encouraged people to complete any activity suiting their skills and abilities, featuring the numbers two and six in any way. Suggested activities include baking 26 cakes for neighbours, jumping 26 times on a trampoline, donating 26 items to a foodbank, drawing 26 rainbows in appreciation for NHS and care staff and running 2.6 miles in the house or garden. It is a fun challenge which is open to anyone and you can be as creative as you like.

Donations can be sent direct to *CrossReach* or via the Treasurer who is willing to assist with any financial donations to *CrossReach* and other local charities.

Please contact Chris Scott for more information.

Due to the continuing Coronavirus situation, there will be a July edition!

The copy date for the July issue is Wednesday 24th June via email.

Please send any articles to st.paulslifemagazine@gmail.com

The Prisoners, the Earthquake and the Midnight song

Listen. Do you hear it? A sound like sawing logs. A sound coming from a prison. A prison in Philippi. The jailer is snoring! He's fast asleep. And his prisoners are all safely locked up for the night. But there's another sound. Do you hear it?

It's coming from the very middle of the prison. The place from which no one escapes. And it's coming from two of the prisoners.

Listen closely. Are they moaning and groaning? They could be. Their backs are bruised with the beating they were given. Their feet are locked up in stocks. But that's not it. Listen again. Are they complaining?

They could be. They really shouldn't be there, you see. They were only helping a slave girl they met while walking through Philippi. Helping her through the power of Jesus, who died so we can be forgiven, who came back from the dead so we can live for ever, and who sent his Holy Spirit so we can follow him as our king. But her masters got angry and had them thrown in jail

Listen once more. Listen closely. Do you hear it? A simple tune...a set of words. They're singing!

That's what they're doing. Singing songs of praise to God. And every other prisoner in the jail is listening to them.

Their names are Paul and Silas, and they have come to Philippi to tell everyone there about Jesus, who died so we can be forgiven, who came back from the dead so we can live for ever, and who sent his Holy Spirit so we can follow him as our king.

And even though they don't deserve to be in jail, they trust God and take this chance to tell the other prisoners about him.

Hang on! Do you hear it? There's another sound. It's a rumbling sound. A grumbling sound. A sound from deep beneath the prison. A sound rising up from the ground. A sound like a shouting chorus to their songs. It's an earthquake! That's what it is. It shakes the walls and the floors. It knocks the doors off their hinges and the locks from off the stocks. And now every prisoner is free!

This is the first part of Bob Hartman's brand new book, *The Prisoners, the Earthquake and the Midnight Song* (The Good Book Company). Get hold of the book to read the rest of this story. BOB HARTMAN is an author and performance storyteller, who has spent many years writing and telling stories.