

# KEEPING CONNECTED 6

26<sup>th</sup> April 2020



IN A WORLD THAT IS  
UNCERTAIN,  
UNPREDICTABLE AND  
FULL OF  
MISUNDERSTANDING,  
LET'S REST IN THE  
KNOWLEDGE OF WHO  
JESUS IS

READINGS:

PSALM 100

SHOUT FOR JOY TO  
THE LORD

ACTS CH28 V1-10

ASHORE ON MALTA

## PRAYERS

*Dear Lord, help us - every single day - to find faith in the midst of the circumstances that surround us. Give us the desire and ability to know you and give thanks to you. Sorry for when we forget you, sorry for all that is sinful within us. We pray that we will draw nearer and nearer to you, and that our faith will grow exponentially as we understand in new, deeper ways that you are everything we ever hoped you would be. And so much more. By the power of the Holy Spirit we pray, in the name of our friend, Lord and Saviour, Jesus*  
Take a moment to pray for NHS staff, key workers, those affected by coronavirus, vulnerable children, the elderly or lonely, our Prime Minister and government officials, our families and friends, the world and church near and far- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

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*“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Matthew ch16 v15-16*

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## CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

### ***The right idea about Jesus!***

Think about how some people get the wrong idea about Jesus. Some people say that Jesus isn't real or that he was nothing more than a very clever teacher. Others say he was only some kind of magician and some people even say he was bad guy!

The Bible tells us who Jesus really was, and still is! He is God's only Son, God in human flesh, the Messiah, the living Saviour, the Lord of our lives and one day he will rule the new kingdom that God the Father is making through us, by the power and work of the Holy Spirit. To help us understand who he is, Jesus, when he was teaching, used the 'I am' sayings- seven sayings to help us see his true nature. He said : 'I am the..'

***bread of life- light of the world- gate- good shepherd- resurrection and the life- way, the truth and the life- true vine.*** You can read this teaching of Jesus' in John's gospel ch6-15

- Get seven pieces of paper, on each one spend time drawing a picture for each 'I am' saying, when you are done lay the pictures out in the shape of a cross- think about how each 'I am' saying points us to the bigger picture of who Jesus is. Which is your favourite 'I am' saying and why? Is there any you don't really understand and would like to read and think more about?

**Pray:** *'Father, thank you for Jesus, thank you that he gives us what we need to live and thrive, thank you that he guides us, thank you that he leads us to a relationship with you, thank you that he cares for us, thank you that he gives us hope, thank you that he teaches us the truth, thank you that he holds us all together as your people. Help us to always remember who Jesus really is so that we might love him with all our hearts. Amen'*



## DEVOTIONAL

### ***A strange world full of strange ideas***

The story of Martin Luther is not an unfamiliar tale, yet perhaps reflecting upon it again, in light of the circumstances that surround us, would be a useful endeavour. Luther's story is not a grand account of an atheist coming to faith or even a 'Christian in denial' coming to a point of acknowledging the faith within them. With Luther we see someone trapped by the wrong ideas about God.

Luther lived in a world of superstition, a world where God either rewarded or punished you depending on how good you had been. Life was a constant tight rope, each sin needing admitted and atoned for, without confession and hard work God would catch you out, and then you would be done for. This image of God tortured the friar who lost sleep and lived in terror of a holy God who he was unworthy to stand before. His life was transformed however when he saw with fresh eyes the God of the Bible. Upon reading the Scriptures he was struck to the core by the picture of God, who by grace gave his Son Jesus as a sacrifice for sin- that it was by faith in Jesus- not in the unending pursuit of enough good works or adherence to superstition, that salvation and the right to belong to God would come. Luther thereafter sought to live well, and encouraged all Christians to do likewise, not to try and earn God's love and favour, but out of thanksgiving for the love and favour that was theirs already through the person and work of Christ.

Paul, along with the souls of the shipwrecked vessel, finds himself on the island of Malta. It is a strange place to him, somewhere he had not been before. The people of the island show to their new company unusual kindness, looking after them, providing food for their bellies and fire to warm them. However while this gracious behaviour is not to be undervalued, the way the inhabitants of the island thought about how the world works soon becomes apparent. As Paul places wood on the fire he is bitten by a viper, the islanders make an automatic assumption- Paul must be guilty of a terrible crime, that's the only explanation, only a murderer would survive a shipwreck, only to be bitten by a snake, the godlike force of Justice has caught him out! Yet Paul does not die nor does he suffer illness, so another assumption is made- Paul must be a god himself! Of course both these ideas were wrong. God is not a force seeking to catch out the wrong doer, not is Paul divine. Paul was who he was not because he was good at keeping ahead of a 'checklist ticking' God or because he was of godlike nature himself but because his faith was squarely planted in the grace of God. In an uncertain place Jesus was still the same Jesus that has saved him and commissioned him to serve, the same Jesus who is with his people and promises to guide and shepherd them whatever the circumstances. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to heal a number of people on the island and we can be sure that Paul used this, as was his way, to point to Christ, to show the islanders the true nature of God. God, revealed to us in Jesus will never turn away those who come to him in repentance and faith, he doesn't sit waiting on his people to fail nor is good works the way to earn his favour- it is simple faith, trust in Jesus and his work upon Calvary's tree that means we can belong to God now and forever. What a motivation to live well, living in thanks, a truly greater motivation that simply trying to make God like us- he already does- enough to send Jesus to the cross in our stead.

In the strange, unpredictable land we live in just now, full of misunderstanding about God and his ways, we can rest in the knowledge of who Jesus is, not the mixed up secular Jesus, but the one of Scripture, he whose name is above every other name, he who alone has the authority to say with utter truth and confidence *'come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest'*.

***Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.***

***Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is he;  
Lord Sabaoth is his name,  
From age to age the same, And He must win the battle!***

## MALAWI UPDATE

Dear All

I hope that everyone is coping well with the social isolation while finding opportunities to count our blessings. Unfortunately the virus has also reached Malawi and it is unthinkable to consider what might happen.

Our good friend John Munthali has been tasked with tracing contacts of those who have tested positive for the virus. John studied Public Health at QUB and seems to be the only one I know who has insight to take the threat seriously. Some of my other contacts do not understand why they cannot meet for worship or why the schools have been closed. There was a meeting recently and they had only 75 people present even though they were allowed up to 100 so they thought they were doing well! At least weddings have been postponed as they attract everyone from the community. Invitations are not necessary!

Although the schools are no longer open our sponsored students still have needs. They need soap to encourage good hygiene and food will be an issue. Those who have been in boarding school will be missing their daily bread and for those living at home life will be tough. Many of the parents are unable to provide rations as street trading has been banned. Many of the people in Blantyre sell what they can on the streets, living hand to mouth.

John tells me there are 17 ventilators in both public and private hospitals in Malawi. In the UK there are more than 12,000 and we still need more! The population in Malawi is 18.5 million and in Blantyre alone there is almost 1 million people. Last time we were there a friend went to the main hospital with a back issue and was delighted to receive some aspirin.

I am sending this communication in the hope that those who subscribe to the school sponsorship programme will continue to do so while we are at a distance. I have to say thank you to everyone who signed up and those who already use standing order.

£30 each term provides for each of our students but any amount at anytime helps us to provide for them and the wee ones at Chifundo3. Standing Order forms can be sent to you and be returned to myself or [heathersharpe99@gmail.com](mailto:heathersharpe99@gmail.com). Please continue to save your pence for porridge too.

The situation in Malawi is quite fluid as Saturday was to be the start of a three week lockdown. Appeals from many people who live hand to mouth have been made to the courts and so it has been lifted for the moment.

We were able to send £1000 to Chifundo3 to buy some basics for 80 families and 10 sponsored students. It worked out about £10 per family to support them for three weeks. Only maize flour, soya pellets, sugar and soap could be supplied. The money was sent, spent and everything distributed within three days.

To anyone not involved in the sponsorship programme, one off donations and are very welcome to build up our depleted funds again and ensure we can respond with help when it is needed. Thank you for your ongoing support, interest and prayers for Malawi.

Sheena

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CREGAGH KEEPING CONNECTED

Each Friday morning I will email out an update like this one, which will include a devotional, children's activity, prayer points and readings. These can be hand delivered or posted if necessary, if you hear of anyone who is not receiving a copy, or if you know of someone outside of our congregation who might benefit from receiving one please let us know.

### BEREAVEMENTS

It is with sincere regret that I record the deaths of Mr Gary Anderson, formerly of 2 Strathearn Park, and Mrs Edna Swain, formerly of 21 Loopland Fold. Please remember in prayer Gary's mum Beverley and family circle as well as Edna's wider family at this time.

### PRAYER

The fortnightly Prayer Link will be sent out next week, if you have any prayer requests please pass them on, if you do not receive the Prayer Link but would like to via email or printed copy please let me know.

### BIBLE STUDY

If you would be interested in joining our Zoom Bible study group please email me. We meet on Mon evenings at 7pm, however another time can be arranged, or another group formed if required.

### THANK YOU!

We want to say a big thank you to children and young people for contributing beautiful pictures, prayers and poems (two of which are attached today) that we soon hope to distribute around members of the congregation- if there are any more please send them in, the more the merrier!

### CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

If you have taken any photos of your children enjoying the Keeping Connected children's activities and would be happy for folk in our church family to see them, please send them on to me.

### PCI MATERIAL

PCI are gathering useful material to help during these challenging days, for a number of blogs, podcasts and links to other materials visit- [www.presbyterianireland.org/thesehreeremain](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/thesehreeremain)

You may also wish to take this opportunity to follow PCI on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) to keep up to date with resources and news.

### GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be of any help whatsoever, if you need messages or even if you would just like a chat.

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