

KEEPING CONNECTED 8

10th May 2020



BEING A CHRISTIAN IS NEVER A STATIC THING. THE GOSPEL PROMPTS US TO GROW IN OUR FAITH. WHATEVER OUR AGE OR SITUATION WE ARE CALLED TO BE THOSE DEVELOPING INTO BETTER FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD JESUS.

READINGS:

PSALM 1

**BLESSED IS THE
MAN**

ACTS CH28 V17-31

PAUL IN ROME



PRAYERS

Heavenly Father, You have called us to grow in grace and nurture a deeper relationship with you. Lord, this is what we desire to do, and we pray that we may come to know you more and more each day. Thank You Father for the Bible, your word of truth, and thank you for the indwelling Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide us in the way that we should go. Help us not to listen to the noise of the world, help us not to stray from your paths, forgive and bless us we pray...

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

*'But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen'
2 Peter ch3 v18*

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

Growing up in Jesus! Tell the children that's it's time to have a yummy snack, talk about all the things they like to eat- what are their favourites? After this conversation set out a bowl of baby food (if you don't have any, mash up some stuff, you could even put it into a jar labelled 'baby food'). Share the food out on plates, "this is what we are all going to eat", keep the joke going as long as possible! Eventually ask the children why they don't want to eat the baby food? Because they aren't babies anymore!

When we trust in Jesus, the Bible tells us that we are 'born again', we become like new people, like baby Christians. Just like babies we need to grow and leave baby food behind becoming people who enjoy a diet that will help develop both our bodies and our minds -

we need to eat 'spiritual food' to help us grow. **Think about it:** What do you think spiritual food is? What can we do to grow in our faith?- We can pray, read the Bible and learn to understand more of what it says. **Do it:** Write out a 'menu' on a piece of paper of what you plan to do to grow in faith- Maybe you are going to set a time each day to pray or learn how to pray more confidently? Maybe you are going to read part of the Bible each day, perhaps starting with Luke's gospel? Maybe you could write a list of a few things about the Christian faith you would like to know more about and start investigating?- On the back of your menu colourfully write out Ephesians ch4 v14&15 as a reminder to keep growing, tucking into a good spiritual feast, not getting stuck on baby food! **Pray:** 'Father help us to grow, so that we are more and more like Jesus, help us to become better followers of him so that we might honour you, forgive us when we don't put much effort into our spiritual lives. Lord God, develop within us a greater appetite for the truth of your Word, for you and for your ways we pray. Amen'



DEVOTIONAL

The Story that Continues

Coming to the final passage of the book of Acts is a strange experience, in many ways it feels like an ending. For a considerable time the reader has journeyed with Paul seeing the church grow and develop into a large network of believers spread across the entire known world. Now the apostle finds himself under house arrest, and while we have many of his letters to read, following Acts in the New Testament, in terms of his personal story the biblical account ceases. Yet Paul's ministry during that time in Rome can teach us so much about the nature of the Gospel and in turn so much about ourselves as we seek to live in its light. Paul gathers the Jews and spends substantial time speaking to them of Jesus, pointing back to the teachings of the Law and the Prophets, revealing to them the truth of who Jesus is and what the Kingdom of God really looks like. Some listened, convinced by the in-depth explanation given to them, but many didn't and much of the gathering left in disagreement and squabble. Their leaving prompted by Paul's decree that while they may not harken to him, the Gentiles would with open ears receive the salvation sent out to them.

The two closing verses of Acts, while bringing the book to its end, clearly point onward, to a story that would endure, to a church and shared faith that would continue to grow. Paul, we read, spends two years *'boldly and without hindrance'* preaching of Christ and his Kingdom, showing that in spite of the circumstances and challenges, there was movement, with the Gospel still being proclaimed, there would be growth as more people came to follow Jesus and many came to understand him in a deeper way. Here we do not see solely the ending of Paul's trail, but with a step back what we actually observe is the truly wonderful story of the Gospel that points back, that moves in the present and that will continue to realms beyond. That image of the Gospel, telling an ongoing story and prompting a church that grows, ought to inspire us as individuals who seek to follow Jesus to see a similar sense of movement in our own lives. Our faith is never a motionless entity but a dynamic desire to know God better and a concentrated commitment to pursue him and his ways. Just like the picture of the church, growing in spite of circumstances and challenges, our faith can grow in these difficult days, in fact perhaps now is an opportunity to stop and reflect afresh, to engage in a bit of spiritual MOT by asking ourselves- *how might we do better at this Christian thing?*, there is not one of us who cannot see something in our life of faith that needs attention, not one of us is the finished product.

A good place to start is looking at our habits of prayer and Bible study, two essential ingredients in all healthy Christian lives. ***How is your prayer life?*** What might you do to improve it? Perhaps now is a time to set a routine that can carry on beyond the lockdown? Maybe you need to be more honest with God by being a bit more 'real' when you pray, seeing it as an opportunity to rest and grow rather than a religious duty. ***How is your personal bible study going?*** Sparse, nonexistence, confusing? Again perhaps now is a time to set a routine? Maybe you could join us on Zoom on Monday night (or if there is interest another group/time can be organised)? When we get back to normal church maybe you might come to the Bible study, seeing it as a means to help you grow rather than a holy huddle of super Christians (believe me there is no such thing!)? Or possibly it is time to look at resources you might use to help you get started again or kick off for the first time? Whatever the situation, as always, I'm keen to help you with your prayer life and with your exploration of the Scriptures, please feel free to give me a shout. I honestly believe that in spite of the circumstances that surround us we can, and will, mature in faith and just as Paul displayed, see our own individual Christian stories as connected with all that God has done in past, is doing now and is yet to do.

***Grant me the courage from above
which You impart to all
who hear Your word and know Your love
and answer to Your call.***

***So may I daily grow in grace,
continuing Yours alone,
until I come to sing Your praise
with saints around Your throne.***

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.

REV MCCONNELL AULD

One of Cregagh's former Assistant Ministers has passed away at the age of 90. Rev McConnell Auld served our church family in 1953/54 before ministering in Australia. He later became Divinity Head Teacher at RBAI. He also built NI's smallest church at Portbradden and was Mayor of North Down Borough Council. Please remember his wider family circle in your prayers.

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. It would be great if more folk were interested in joining in.

THANK YOU!

We want to say a big thank you to children and young people for contributing beautiful pictures (two of which are attached today) - 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

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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