

GATHERING REGAINED

5th July 2020



TWO WEEKS AGO WE TOUCHED ON THE IDEA OF REPENTANCE, A WORD AND IDEA THAT IS OFTEN SEEN IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT. LET'S EXPLORE THIS CENTRAL BIBLICAL THEME AND IN THE PROCESS FIND AFRESH THE TRUE BEAUTY OF REPENTANCE

READINGS:

PSALM 51

**HAVE MERCY ON ME, O
GOD**

MATTHEW CH11 V20-24

UNREPENTANT CITIES



PRAYERS

'My God...Let me not think, or say, or do a single thing which tends not to your service and submission to your will, that thus all my actions may aim at your glory and the salvation of my brethren, while they are taught by my example to serve you.

And as you are giving light to this world for the purposes of external life by the rays of the sun, so enlighten my mind by the effulgence of your Spirit, that he may guide me in the way of your righteousness.

To whatever purpose I apply my mind, may the end which I ever propose to myself be your honour and service.'

John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

Take a moment to pray for all those affected by coronavirus in whatever way, the world and church near and far- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."

Jeremiah ch24 v7

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

Getting back to church!

It's really exciting that we can start thinking about getting back to church each Sunday. Worshipping together is a very important part of the Christian life as we remember that following Jesus is something we do 'together'. Coming to church is a reminder of that and also that people of different ages and backgrounds can find that they have something in common, that by faith they are God's children, sharing in the kingdom as co-heirs with Christ.

Church will be a little bit different for a while though. To make sure everyone is safe you might have to sit somewhere different from where you normally sit, also you need to keep your distance from other people, there will be no singing for some weeks, you can't come to the front to see me and the worst of it all- there will be no biscuits after the service! There's no need to worry however, it'll not be forever, just until things get a little better. ♦ While you can't come down to see me as part of the service I still want to make sure that I do a talk for you, so I was thinking- that I could take any questions you have and answer them for that part of the service. So if you have any questions about the Bible or what it means to follow Jesus please get one of your grownups to email them to me and I'll do my best to answer them on an upcoming Sunday! Everybody has questions, so have a good think!

Pray: *'Thank you Father that things continue to improve and that we can start coming to church again. Help us to remember that we still need to be safe and look after each other. Bless our church family, forgive us and pour your love upon us by the power of the Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen'*



DEVOTIONAL

Repent!

Repentance, like the passage we read from Matthew's gospel, is not a subject that is often top of the list for discussion when it comes to the things of God. 'God is a God of love' is a phrase oft used to disarm any talk of sin, judgement and the need for repentance, yet when we look at the Scriptures we see a deeper idea being presented. Jesus warned about judgement more than he talked about salvation and why would God's grace, or 'undeserved favour', be so amazing if judgement was not what we truly deserved?

Repentance, instead of being a legalistic negative idea is a wondrous gift of God's grace, it is a path that unites us as we limp after Jesus together. Repentance is an acknowledgement of our sinful state before a holy God and an ongoing leaning upon the Holy Spirit to help us turn away from our sin, to see our mind-sets changed as we walk in the footsteps of Christ. To see that God and his ways are the path to fulfilment and joy, to salvation and life.

When a person becomes aware of their sin and turns from it, they casts themselves on the mercy of God. The first fruit of authentic repentance is the recognition of our profound need for mercy. David does not ask God for justice. He knows that if God were to deal with him according to justice, he would be immediately destroyed. As a result, David begins his confession with a plea for mercy, therefore Psalm 51 is not simply a casual acknowledgement of guilt. David is a haunted man; he doesn't try to minimise his guilt, there's no attempt at self-justification. David is brought to the point where he is honest before God. He admits his guilt, realising that his sin is ever present. He can't get rid of it, and this haunts him. Repentance is a painful thing, as we confess our sinfulness and acknowledgement our guilt we can find that guilt is the most powerful destroyer of joy there is. David asks God to restore his soul and make him feel joy and gladness again. We, like him must be honest with ourselves and stand before God broken and in doing so see that only he is the path to the return of joy and gladness, or the way to discover it for the first time, to find a new and clean heart and a renewed mind. The only way to have a clean heart is by a work of divine re-creation. We are incapable of creating that in ourselves. Only God can create a clean heart, and he does create clean hearts by blotting out our sin.

Repentance is our refuge. It is a response, cried out in faith, of one who knows that they are in sin. Our faith therefore ought not to make us smug and self-righteous, Christians are not those who are called to right wrongs because they are better than everyone else, they are called to speak of Jesus because they have been forgiven and want others to know about that forgiveness too. As D.T. Niles said "*Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.*"

The Bible tells us explicitly and shows us implicitly that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. David knows this to be true. As broken as he is, he knows God and how God relates to repentant people. He understands that God never hates or despises a broken and contrite heart. This is what God desires from us and Jesus also assures us that when we grieve over our sin, God by his Holy Spirit will comfort us. John Calvin's prayer, chosen for today, echoes so powerfully the words of Psalm 51 and the beauty of repentance, perhaps we too can be inspired by David's words so that we would come before God and say "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, Blot out my transgressions. Purge me with hyssop. Wash me and make me clean. O Lord, restore to me the joy of your salvation.*"

***Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,
where Jesus answers prayer;
and humbly fall before His feet
for none can perish there.***

***Your promise is my only plea;
to You alone I cry,
for burdened souls in You are free
and such, O Lord, am I.***

INFORMATION FOR COMING BACK TO CHURCH

It is wonderful that we as a congregation can gather together again in corporate worship. As we do so please be assured that all the decisions that have been made about which procedures are to be put in place are in line with the PCI guidelines, which are in turn set out with the authority of the Chief Scientific Advisor to the NI Assembly.

At Cregagh we want to create an environment that is both welcoming and safe. While I would actively encourage you to come back to worship, believing it safe to do so with the measures we have taken, I also want to say that no one should feel under any pressure to attend church if they do not feel ready to do so, nor should anyone come to services if they have any symptoms or if they are shielding.

The guidelines state that there are no restrictions on numbers as long as 2m social distance is maintained, this would therefore allow us to have **two services each Sunday one at 10am, the other at 12noon, accommodating around 60 people on each occasion. This pattern would continue for three services at least- 12th, 19th and 26th July. The church doors will be opened at 9:30am and 11:30am** so that folk can be guided and seated by an usher. We would ask you to be conscious of social distancing should you have to queue outside for a moment while waiting to enter. We must also strongly recommend that you do not offer lifts to church to anyone 'outside your bubble.'

The service itself will be shorter than normal, around 35-40mins, consisting of prayers, readings, children's talk and sermon, for these initial three Sundays there will be no congregational singing. There will be no offering plates passed around at the service, instead there will be two stations where offerings can be placed upon leaving the building. Due to 'contact tracing' we have been instructed to keep a record of those attending services for the time being. Therefore **we would ask you to register if you wish to attend by contacting Michael Graham email: michaelgraham112@gmail.com or phone: 07548635075, if possible for three weeks, indicating how many are 'in your bubble' and attending with you.** If you have registered and for whatever reason you or someone in your group cannot attend please contact Michael so that the register will be as accurate as possible.

Children are very welcome and encouraged to attend. Upon registering with children you may initially, for these three Sundays, be asked to sit in the gallery, please check with an usher when you arrive at church. **KidZone will not take place on 12th July but we are keen to trial run its return on 19th and 26th. If you do register with children please also let Karen McCurry know email: j.k.mccurry@tinyonline.co.uk or phone: 07552606550, indicating which service and which children are attending, so that information can be sent out to you.** Unfortunately Crèche will not be available over the course of the three Sundays.

Over the course of the three Sundays an update, in a different format, will be sent out to members, with printed copies being made available for those who do not have internet access or who cannot attend. The services will also be recorded, being placed on our website and social media. **On Monday 27th July all these procedures will be reviewed, following which, a further update will be sent out to keep you up to date with whatever changes we hope to make.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPEN CHURCH

The church building will be open on Fridays 10am-12noon for private prayer. A one-way system, social distancing and hygiene procedures will be in effect. The facility to drop off church envelopes is also available during these times.

PRAYER

A Prayer Link will be sent out during the month of July, 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

The Bible Study continues on Zoom, Monday evening 7pm.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

Over the past 12 weeks we have been showing you the artwork that many of the children in the church have sent in, but now it's time for a bit of a change. We have a new feature called 'Look Who's Talking!' which is an attempt to get to know the children in our church just that bit better and see how they've been coping with these unprecedented times. We hope you enjoy this brief insight into their lives.

Karen McCurry

(Look Who's Talking will be included in the upcoming Sunday updates)

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch

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