

Service on a Sheet – Sunday 22nd May 2022

Lectionary readings for today: Acts 16: 9-15; Revelation 22: 1-2; John 5: 1-9

Call to worship: 'and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' [Revelation 22: 2b]



Please don't ask me about how my holiday went and did I have a wonderful time ... in short, it was an unmitigated disaster from beginning to end! As I reached the outskirts of Edinburgh I remembered I'd left a washer full of washed clothes and had to ask my neighbour to go round and pop them on the radiator racks. When I reached the croft the accommodation had been double booked so I spent my first week in a beautiful place but felt constantly uneasy and felt I should not have been there. Patricia was attacked by another dog on her favourite beach. I forgot to take one of my daily tablets with me and had to approach the local GP to get a supply. When I finally got to the correct accommodation the internet was out. My ferry home was cancelled so I came home on an earlier one on stand-by leaving the croft at 5am to get to the ferry in time. When I got home the kindly neighbour who dealt with the washing had not only switched off the washer but also all of the kitchen sockets including the fridge/freezer so I had a freezer full of food that had defrosted and rotted over three weeks and a situation where my supply of insulin had also 'gone off'. Fortunately, I had a repeat prescription in but when I went to collect it one of my vital tablets is apparently unavailable and so I have had to contact the GP to get an alternative arranged ... then, to top it off, I dropped my Monday tea on the kitchen floor (Patricia was very grateful for such largesse!). Holiday? What holiday!

Prayers:

- For the glory of God seen in every aspect of the world and the communities around us.
- For the world in which we live from bird song to budding plant.
- For the kindness, hospitality, and compassion of other people.
- For the presence of God in the midst of even the unexpected and chaotic events.
- For the forgiveness God offers when we are not mindful or caring about our relationship with him.
- For the ever present and available grace and healing of God.

Lord's Prayer

'Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently, nourish the life of the world in our care: gift of great wonder, ours to surrender, trust for the children tomorrow will bear.' [Singing the Faith 729]

The pool at Bethesda was known as a place of healing. In fact, archaeology suggests that it may have been a pagan place of healing long before the Jews came along. The man had been there for a long time, unable to work, unable to fulfil commitments to family or society he waited and complained bitterly that when the waters stirred (some sources suggest this was done by an angel but earlier documents omit this idea) someone else always got in there ahead of him and so he remained uncured and waiting. Jesus takes command of the situation and, eschewing all conventions and expectations, heals the man telling him simply to pick up his bed and go home.

This activity takes place on the Sabbath so Jesus is immediately criticised by the religious leaders for his actions. But the story raises some interesting questions. How unable to fulfil his obligations was the man or had he just found a convenient way to avoid responsibility and place the fault on superstition and myth? Human opinion said that what Jesus had done was wrong but Jesus would say he was about God's work. Does God make us wait for long periods of time, wasting the life we have been given, in order to eventually allow God's grace and healing to come into our lives? There are almost more questions than answers so please consider the following:

- Have you ever had a time when your own opinions, doubt or cynicism has got in the way of what God was asking of you? When was that and what happened?
- Have you ever been in a situation where human opinion seemed to weigh more heavily than your faith in God? When was that and what happened?
- What is getting in the way of you growing and working for God right now? How can you deal with this remembering that God's presence and grace are readily and immediately available to all?

Moving on to our reading from Acts we see God at work in a rather different way. The slave girl is bringing in a handsome profit for her owners by foretelling the future for others. When she is healed, they lose this valuable income and asset. They are incensed and get the disciples arrested and jailed as well as causing a storm with their accusations – all fuelled by their lack of financial gain and, what they see, as a flouting of societal convention.

- Have you ever 'flown in the face of convention' by doing what God wanted rather than what people wanted? If you have, what happened? If not, what stopped you?
- Have you ever 'lost out' in life in some way because you chose to follow Jesus and not the expectations and values of others? When and what happened?

I have selected our final reading out of a complex mesh of verses offered for today. This verse is one of my favourites, indeed it is stitched onto one of the stoles I sometimes wear in church. If God is the gardener and we are the branches then our growth is shown by the production of leaves and fruit. This verse reminds me that the leaves of my life – the experiences, the walk with God, my relationships with others, my roles in society and community- are supposed to be a source of God's healing and grace. This is not easy as there are many who would try to block God at work and, indeed, decry the presence of God in any form at all. Yet, as followers of Jesus, however weak our faith may be at times and however inadequate we may feel, our lives are supposed to bring the grace, presence, and healing of God into the everyday.

- What does it feel like to think that you are a bearer of God's grace, presence, and healing?

'You showed us mercy when we were in darkness, you showed us freedom when we were in chains, you showed forgiveness when we were in depths of sin and now your life runs through our veins.' [Singing the faith 488]

Prayers:

- Continue to pray for the other areas of conflict around the globe, for the many refugees from war and violence many times risking their lives to find safety and shelter.
- Continue to pray for places where crops have failed, water is scarce and disease is rife.
- Continue to pray for our use of resources, our exploration and initiation of new energy sources and or stewardship of this planet we call home.
- Continue to pray for those you know who need prayers this day.
- Hold your own life before God and ask what God wants from you to his life of grace, healing and presence in the here and now.

Blessing:

May the presence of God be found in every word, action, thought and deed.

May the peace of God flow through our relationships one with another.

May the grace of God feed our thinking, dreaming, planning, and doing.

And may the healing of God, Father, Son, and Spirit be our gift to the world each and every day. Amen.

Doxford Place is in urgent need of someone to act as a Data Protection champion for the church ensuring that information is held securely, that we hold to the policies of the Methodist Church in regard of data protection and to complete an annual return (a simple check list). If anyone is willing to take on this role please speak to Rev Una or a steward. Thank you.