

This Sunday is the third Sunday in Advent. Christmas is racing towards us – but that is OK – a celebration worth waiting for, although, like so much else in life this year – “It won’t be the same!” but we will make as much of a celebration as we can.

One of the readings for this week is Isaiah Ch 6 verses 1 to 11, which narrates Isaiah’s call to serve God. It includes the well know response:

“Here am I send me!”:

“Coming as it does though, so close to Christmas, we tend to hear Isaiah’s words through the lens of the coming Christ child. It is Christ who has come to set us free; to heal us and help us, to carry us and to bring us comfort and joy. Read in that way it certainly does up the feel-good factor at a time when people (we) really need to hear of the hope and of the promise Christmas carries at its heart. But this passage from Isaiah is not only about God’s amazing longing to heal the broken human condition, there is in these words, a challenge to God’s people, to be not only recipients of that reconciling love that leads to Jesus’ birth, but to be the bearers of that love in our time and place.

Isaiah is asking: What is it we are doing to work with God to bring about healing and justice? What are we saying in God’s name, that helps to raise up the downtrodden? How are we working to bring peace? To set prisoners free? Who are our hands reaching out to and our hearts opening up to?

Isaiah’s words are both wonderful.... And challenging! “

(taken from the Church of Scotland website on Worship for the 3rd Sunday of advent prepared by Rev Dr Susan Brown)

An Advent Activity – The Nativity Window Trail

We now have quite a few people creating windows, but still room for more! – and so far all in Tayvallich. So lots of opportunities for other areas. Let Louise know if you would like to be a part of this, and she can provide craft materials and paint if you need some.

THE NATIVITY WINDOW TRAIL

Would you like to decorate a window in one of the iconic nativity scenes?

If so, please let me know which of the scenes below you feel inspired to create, so we have the whole story covered.

We have plenty of craft materials to share from the Messy Church boxes so you will be welcome to come and choose some. For example we have large black card, cellophane and tissue paper for a stained glass effect, and paint to mix with washing up liquid to make it stick to window panes.

Once the windows have been created we can all walk round and follow the story.

Happy advent!

Louise

1. The angel Gabriel talks to Mary
2. The wise men set off from the east.
3. Mary and Joseph set off for Bethlehem

4. No room at the inn
5. Jesus is born in the stable
6. The angels come to the shepherds
7. The shepherds visit Jesus
8. The wise men visit Jesus
9. Mary, Joseph and Jesus escape to Egypt

Louise Logue

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North Knapdale Prayer Group

The group continues to meet weekly under the guidance of Catherine Paterson and everyone is invited to take part, either by joining in with others on Zoom or phone, or by receiving prayer topics by e-mail. It is a great privilege we all have, to be able to pray for one another, and to intercede for situations both local and afar off.

If you would like to pray with others, by phone or on Zoom, or have topics you would like prayers for, please let Catherine know:

tel: **01546 603672**

e-mail: catherine@dochasfund.org.uk

Zoom (House) Group.

The North Knapdale house group is continuing to meet weekly, no longer together in our home, but now on line using Zoom – so there is even more room now for people to attend! Anyone and everyone is welcome to join us, so please let me know and I can send you out the link for zoom. If you don't have internet, you can join I with an ordinary telephone.

If you have not used zoom, it is quite easy, and we can arrange for one to one guidance for you if you wish.

David Logue: 01546870647

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On line worship services and other meetings – borrow a tablet to try!

The church has bought a “tablet”, a small computer, **which does not need an internet connection** to watch on screen services and zoom meeting etc., and is simple to use. This tablet is available on loan to anyone in the community who would like to try it out.

Louise is looking after this and will be pleased to bring it to you and provide tuition and help to get connected. Please let her know if you would like to find out more.

e-mail – mail@northknapdale.org

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This week's Psalm: Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion

(returned the exiles home)

We were like those who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter

Our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,

“The Lord has done great things for them”

The Lord has done great things for us

And we are filled with joy.

Restore the fortunes Lord,

Like streams in the Negev

Those who sow with tears

Will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping,

Carrying seed to sow

Will return with songs of joy,

Carrying sheaves with them.

On first reading this, it seems to be a song of celebration during a time of good news. The people exiled out of Israel have been able to return and there is rejoicing. But there is a clash with that thought as in the middle of the rejoicing, there is a plea for restoration, that the Lord would bring back fortune to His people as the rain causes streams to flow in the Negev Desert, bringing good grazing and wild flowers into the wilderness.

This is a psalm written, not at a time of plenty, but at a time of scarcity and sadness, and the message is – “Remember the good times! Remember the blessings of God as He brought back our people from exile, remember God restoring our country.” The psalmist reminds us that, as we go through dark times and difficulties, let’s look back to times of blessing and joy. As life gets difficult and we feel tired and despondent, remember the times that God has brought light into our lives, and when we have sat down and despaired, remember how often God has lifted us, has encouraged us, has brought us friends by phone or letter to help us through. We often have difficult lives, and this year has brought us more anxiety and uncertainty than ever, but as we read this psalm we hear the people of God rejoicing in joy, not for the difficulties of the present, but out of the certainty and experience that God has restored us in the past and He will restore us again – and again.

Weekly letter and prayer from Rev Owain Jones, Presbytery Moderator:

Hello, everyone.

I've never made a parachute jump – though I'm not entirely averse to the idea; certainly, if the congregation needed a lot of money quickly, I'd sooner fund-raise by doing a parachute jump than a bungee jump (and I trust the Presbytery Clerk, my predecessor as Moderator and the Presbytery's Prayer Convener not to mention to my Session that I said any of this!)

I'm told by people who have done serious parachuting – from 10,000 feet or so – that there's a phenomenon called "ground rush". For eight and a half thousand feet or so, they say, nothing seems to be happening; miraculously, you appear to be flying like a bird. (Now, you see, *that* bit I find quite appealing!)

But suddenly, a sense of vertical movement cuts in. The ground does indeed seem to rush up to meet you.

I've no experience of that, and I reflect that the congregation would have to need a lot of funds very quickly for me to entertain it – and even then, I'd probably beg for the clemency of letting me raise funds a sponsored Mohican haircut, in whatever garish colours the Session might choose. (My hair's certainly getting long enough, once again...)

But there's a serious spiritual point here. I am writing this letter to *people who know all about this*, so I'm simply offering this in the spirit of a shared experience again this year. Christmas is coming, and we all, Elders, Readers, Ministers, know that, some time after Remembrance, the sensation of "ground rush" begins.

We may have begun thinking and preparing for Christmas long before then (aye, right!) but suddenly, the complexity, the sheer density of things-happening, Nativity Plays, Carol Services, the expectations of congregation and community (compounded this year by the challenge of our strange circumstances) can begin to feel overwhelming.

And then, there's the Preacher's Prayer, "Lord, I know that the limitation is mine, but I'm running out of ways to re-think the Christmas Story...." It's a prayer that's always answered, because we never reach the end of the ways of telling the story – but imagination is another resource we all find is stretched tight by the approach of Christmas.

But beyond Christmas, we know, lies another experience of "ground rush". A brief, and God willing deeply therapeutic pause in the lee of Incarnation – and the challenges of what we know will be a difficult year lie ahead of us. We really need to be grasped by the deep meaning of Christmas – and especially this year.

It's easy enough for people to exhort us "Take the time out to reflect on the meaning of Christmas." Exhortations often just add to frustration, and frazzle, and guilt. I'm in the privileged position of being able to offer you eleven minutes (on average) to reflect – if that helps - and myself to draw strength from doing that. I'm told that parachutists, when ground rush sets in, often close their eyes for a moment, to adjust. I suppose that's what I was aiming for in these prayers.

Be very blessed in your preparations for Christmas.



And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger...
Luke 2:16

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. *Luke 2:19-20*

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." *Luke 2: 34-35*

I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people;] for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2:10-11*

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of human beings... *Philippians 2:4-7*

i) Truth, Courage, Love

You are the source of our courage, Lord.
In which we can face all things –
If only we face them in you.

You are the source of the daring honesty,
in which we can survey the truth of where we are,
unblinking and unflinching,
if only we take our stand in you.
Teach us that honesty is the correlate of truth,
and that only in honesty can we embrace the truth,
and meet its challenge.

You are the source of the unending love
which binds us to each other
by binding us to you,
and binds us to you in each other,
when we love each other
as Jesus commanded.

These things are true, we know,
for each of us
for all of us,
for our lives of faith,
for our lives in community, as congregations of your church,
for our life as this Presbytery.
We reflect on them, as Christmas comes.

When we meet, let it always be in love.
When we prepare to meet,
As members of the Court,
Together as committees,
Reflecting on the business before us,
Let our minds be full of love.

You have taught your folk, over the history of our salvation,
what love means.
Point by point, along that history,
you have transformed your people's understanding of you;
and still we learn.

ii) Incarnation

And yet, in history, you have made your definitive statement
Of what love means, and who and what God is.
Your word of love is spoken:
In the vulnerability of baby-flesh
lying in a manger;
In the patient growth of childhood and adolescence,
hidden from us, inferred by us;
in the warm response, the unflinching challenge,
the public courage, the private frustration –
frustration shared with twelve friends,
frustration at the obtuseness of twelve disciples,
openness to betrayal (surely, he knew)
obedience at unimaginable cost
embrace of the world, in arms flung wide,
on the hard wood of the cross,
forgiveness in dying, reconciliation in death...

We speak the word "incarnation" so lightly.
Remind us that this is what it means,
The fullness of God in Christ,
Us, in the humanity of Jesus
There at the meeting-point of courage, truth and love.

In a sentimentalizing world, besotted with the pretty,
help us to see, and to draw others,
beyond the prettiness of the remembered story
into the gritty loving meaning

of Nativity, and all that begins with it.

iii) Confession, Forgiveness

Our calling as your Church

our calling as congregations and Presbytery,
our calling, each one, as members of the body,
is to come to Jesus, to be with Jesus, to live in Jesus Christ,
at the intersection, in the world,
of courage, honesty and love.

Forgive us when we do not live there.
Forgive us when the subtle pressures of life in the world
have edged us from that point
where courage, honesty and love come together.
Forgive us where we have not stood where Jesus stands.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

We do not take for granted
what we know is already granted in Christ.
Marvelling at the cost of forgiveness,
paid at the intersection of truth, courage and love,
we simply grasp that we are forgiven.

iv) Living Out the Implications of Christmas

As Christmas comes, as we prepare to reflect
On the meaning of God-made-flesh
God fully present in the humanity that is ours,
and as we survey the challenges that lie before us,
the truth of where we are,
with the demands it makes of us

We pray these things as your Church.
Each of us prays these things as members of the body of Christ,
loved and cherished;
and in these prayers we share,
we pray them as your Presbytery of Argyll.

Brace us, prepare us for all that lies ahead
Ground us in truth,
Endue us with the honesty to acknowledge truth,
Endow us with courage,
And flood our shared life and work
With the love that transforms all things,
that the incarnate love of Christmas, born in us
inform all we are, and all we do.

And we pray for each other, and for all whose needs we know, and for the world in which we are placed to serve you:

[SILENCE]

And as Jesus taught us, so we pray...

You can find news on our church website: www.northknapdale.org

And our Face Book page – North Knapdale Church.

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