

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Well, all good things come to an end – except a black pudding – it comes to two!

That aside, we are now at a stage in our congregational life, as we return to one Sunday morning service, and groups and organisations are able to meet again, that this Weekly Thought has served its purpose in keeping in touch with many of our folk who did not feel comfortable about coming to Church during very uncertain times in the Covid Pandemic. I have so enjoyed writing it, and I am grateful that it has been appreciated by several of our members. It has been a useful bridge of communication during these awful months of Lockdown and restrictions, and hopefully, it has served its purpose, and that you all know your Locum a bit better, that the guy in your pulpit each returning Sunday is no longer a stranger!

I am now looking forward to seeing faces return to Church after a long period of absence, and I know that will be a great encouragement to the Office bearers too after all this time. As ever, the highest standards in ensuring that the Sanctuary and the Halls are sanitised, and that the wellbeing of our congregation is of supreme import, will continue to be maintained.

In that regard, we must put on record our indebtedness to our Session Clerk and our Assistant Session Clerk, Margaret and Craig, for the quite magnificent job they have done in executing the changing rules from the Scottish Government and from the Church of Scotland. Nothing has been left to chance, and they are due our deepest thanks and appreciation. That is why we have felt so safe and secure – before every service, members use hand sanitiser on arriving, and at the close of worship, those on duty clean and wipe every surface and pew. Not once have I felt uncomfortable or my health compromised, but very much at ease – in spite of these ghastly masks!

So, we have now reached a point as the Vaccination and booster programme continues that we can “ease” certain areas of Church life.

We can say now, with a certain degree of confidence, “normal service has been resumed.” Well, as near normal!

These past seventeen months have been such a devastating time in the life of every congregation and that has been exacerbated by the mammoth changes that are taking place in the life of the four Church of Scotland parishes in Prestwick. We are not alone here – cataclysmic changes are having to take place up and down the land because of a lack of ministers, ageing congregations, and financial constraints.

St Nicholas has now been vacant for two years and every Vacancy brings its own concerns, its uncertainties and its fears. I have been so energised by the enthusiasm of the Kirk Session who have done a great job in keeping in touch with members and ensuring that they are kept up to date with Church News.

As the Mission Committee of the Presbytery of Ayr has set out plans for each town and village, we are all being encouraged to build bridges in our own particular area, looking at the possibilities of how we can work together in the years to come. It will be a difficult process of readjustment, but we are up for it here!

In the meantime we will continue to support St Nicholas with our presence, our prayers, and our giving, all the while seeking God's will for His Church in our town, and seeking ever to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Be assured that your Kirk Session is working unremittingly for the good of St Nicholas in the long term.

In all my forty odd years of Ministry, I don't think I have seen so many worried and downhearted people as I do at the present time. I have been aware these past months of an absence of hope and an almost suffocating presence of fear. Folk have been so frightened about the Covid virus; an economy teetering on the brink of recession brings untold anxiety; soaring gas bills and the possibility of empty shelves in our supermarkets; the threat posed by global warming have all taken their toll. Every time we turn on the News, there is a barrage of awful headlines – no wonder people are scared.

And, on top of all that, there are personal things that weigh us down – health worries, family issues, silver hair, no hair!

So what does a Christian do when we are confronted by all that?

Well, obviously, we must make sure that we make good decisions and take responsible actions to care for how all these things impact our own lives. That is not all, however.

Faith is not a personal possession. We are called to live in community where we become responsible for the wellbeing of others, as well as ourselves.

So what do Christians do in times like these?

We find folk who need to be loved, and we love them.

We find folk needing care, and we care for them.

We find people who are lonely, and we befriend them.

We find those struggling in the turbulent seas of life and we become a bridge over troubled water.

And, most importantly, we turn to the Lord who has promised to be our bridge over troubled waters. And what troubled waters with which we are coping at the present time!

You don't have to go through what you are going through all by yourself.

There is a God who finds people to love, and loves them.

There is a God who finds people who need cared for, and He cares for them.

There is a God who finds folk struggling in life's very turbulent seas and He lays down His life for them to be a bridge over troubled waters.

I want to put the lyrics of Simon and Garfunkel's song on the lips of our Lord Himself. Please read them as if He was singing to you –

“When you’re weary, feeling small,  
When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all.  
I’m on your side, when times get rough,  
And friends just can’t be found.  
Like a bridge over troubled water,  
I will lay me down.  
When you’re down and out, when you’re on the street,  
When evening falls so hard I will comfort you.  
I’ll take your part. When darkness comes  
And pain is all around.  
Like a bridge over troubled water,  
I will lay me down.  
Listen to God singing to us in these very challenging times.  
Then let’s go and sing that song to others!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister