

Suggested outline for family worship – Sunday 22nd March at 11.00am

Prayer

Song suggestion: “The Lord’s my Shepherd” by Stuart Townend – watch and sing along at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MGO>

Reading: 1st Peter 2:4-10 – perhaps from The Message translation:

Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honour. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a temple vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The Scriptures provide precedent: “Look! I'm setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honour. Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it” (Isaiah 28:16). To you who trust him, he's a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him, “The stone the workmen threw out is now the chief foundation stone” (Ps 118:22). For the untrusting it's . . . “a stone to trip over, a boulder blocking the way” (Isaiah 8:14). They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted. But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you— from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

Devotion:

Out... but not down!

Well, this is different, isn't it? Just like that, church is gone; closed up; deserted... It reminds me of so many farmers back in 2001 during the “Foot and Mouth” epizootic (animal equivalent of an epidemic in humans). Something like 2000 farms were left without a ‘moo’ or a ‘baa’ as herds and flocks were destroyed. Farmers found themselves looking out from a farmhouse on a farm they couldn't farm. Like many of my colleagues, I now find myself looking out from a Manse on a church I can't ‘church’. There are no cars in the car park; no parents dropping off children to organisations; no people coming to worship on Sundays. It's deserted. It's silent. It's painful. Ah, but, thankfully we're not just church when we meet in our building on the Dunadry Road. We're church wherever we are; wherever we go; whatever we're doing! Home, school, work, sport, hospital – and yes, self-isolation, quarantine and lockdown, too!

And God isn't confined to the building, either: “*the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands*” says Acts 7:48. How could he? Look at what God, himself, tells us in Isaiah 66:1-2 (NLT) – “*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that? Could you build me such a resting place? My hands have made both heaven and earth; they and everything in them are mine!*” No building could ever contain all there is of God – and yet, we discover a couple of amazing things in the books of Ezekiel, Acts, Romans and 1st Corinthians. God doesn't live in buildings but he *does* live in his people! As promised by God in Ezekiel 36, when we turn our lives around from living our own way to living God's way, God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes to live in us, moulding us and shaping us so that we reflect God's nature and character in our everyday

lives. Peter tells the people listening to him on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) that this promise can come true for them if they turn from their sins and turn to God – they will receive *“the gift of the Holy Spirit”*. Paul confirms this in Romans 8, speaking about how God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit, lives in those who have welcomed Jesus into their lives as Saviour and Lord. So each of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ – whatever age we might be – have God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit, living within us. And in 1 Cor 3 Paul tells us that as a group of people who trust in Jesus, we are a ‘temple’ in which God himself is present. The temple in the Bible is the place where God ‘lived’ among his people; and priests were people who represented God to people and people to God. But now the temple isn’t a building made of ‘Jerusalem stone’ but one that’s made of ‘living stones’, as Peter says in 1 Pet 2 – people who love God and live their lives his way. It’s a building that stretches right across the world, to every nation on earth as men, women and children put their trust in God.

So, the church is alive and well – it’s just that the buildings in which we meet together are closed up for a while. But we are still the church and God is still present in us and with us – and he’s looking for something: people who are *“humble and repentant, who fear me and obey me”* (Isaiah 66:2, GNB). Fearing God isn’t like fearing the coronavirus. The virus makes many, many people afraid; scared of what it can do to them and their loved ones. But fearing God isn’t about being scared of God but respectful of him; humbly seeing him for who he is: the maker of heaven and earth; the one who gives life to everything there is; the one who loves us and gave his Son, Jesus, to be our Saviour; the one who never lets us go when we put our trust in him; the one who gives us peace of heart and mind as his Spirit lives in us – even when we’re facing the most challenging and scary situation we’ve ever experienced.

In Old Testament days, David frequently faced challenging and dangerous situations and yet as he put his trust in the Lord, he knew he had everything he needed – in the times when things were going well for him as well as the times when things threatened to overwhelm him. His trust in God enabled him to say *“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever”*. Can you say that, too?

Prayers – you might want to ask each member of the family to pray or you might want to lead everyone in prayer, yourself, based on some of the thoughts shared in the devotion.

Song suggestion: **“Jesus, strong and kind”** by CityAlight – watch and sing along at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Y8s-Sz_ac

Activity for children

If you would like the excuse to go outside and get some fresh air, you could try and collect some pebbles/stones/rocks with your children. Using paint, felt tips or anything you can find to decorate them, or your children could also use a collection of smaller stones to create a 'pebble picture' (there's lots of space for creative freedom).

Throughout this activity discuss with your children how stones are strong and often used together for building different and greater things. God refers to those who love and follow him as living stones and it is those people that God uses to tell and show more people about how much he loves them and how much they need him and his son Jesus in their lives- God

uses us to build his kingdom. The people that your children are used to seeing every Sunday morning are the church, the people who love and follow God and the people that he refers to as 'Living Stones'. Though we are not seeing each other face to face this morning we are still being used by God to build his kingdom.

When your children have finished their creations (and adults please feel free to join in too) please take pictures and send through to Hayley (07598329604). She will then upload these pictures to the new facebook page so that your children can see that though we are physically apart we are still very much together as the church, and God is still very much with each of us.

(Alternative: If you are unable to get outside for any stones you could use other objects for building such as lego etc to create something and discuss the same application)'