

Family Worship – Sunday 17th May 2020

Good morning everyone! I hope you're keeping well and thank you for joining us this week as we spend some time together as families and individuals in worship. Things are starting to change around the country with some people going back to work but, overall, the message is still the same: "Stay at home" except for a limited number of 'essential' purposes – and meeting with others for worship isn't one of them! However, we hope you'll find the contents of our "Family Worship" outlines meaningful and helpful as we continue to meet 'together' in our various home settings. We're continuing to look for lessons we can learn from the life experiences of the apostle Peter.

If you've got internet access, here's a song to enjoy together – it's a great song of praise that declares "you are the peace in my troubled sea!" It's called "My Lighthouse" and you can watch/listen/join in by clicking this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFBZJGSgyVQ>
If you don't have internet access, please play a suitable track from one of your CDs.

Please pray together, thanking God for shining in the darkness, leading us through the storms and carrying us safe to shore. Ask him to help us trust him more and more each day and to be with us as we read and think about what he says to us through the Bible passage we're looking at this morning.

Bible Reading: Acts 4:1-22

If there's more than one of you, maybe you could take it in turn to read a verse or two each?

If you have internet access, please click on the link which will take you to our Facebook page where you will find a video from Peter that includes the Devotion and a prayer. The video can be found here: www.facebook.com/muckamorepc

If you don't have internet access, here's Peter's Devotion for you to read:

Stand up and be counted – Acts 4:1-22

I'm glad to say I'm not terribly familiar with all that takes place in a court of law. I imagine the real thing is very different from what we're used to seeing on TV – in fact, I know it is because on a couple of occasions I've gone along with some friends by way of support for them as proceedings were taking place. The first time I went, I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, I'm glad *I'm* not facing that magistrate" because if he'd said to me what he said to my friend, I'd have been wanting the ground to open up and swallow me! Courts can be very intimidating places – just ask the apostle Peter. Like me, the first time Peter was there, he was with a friend who was facing trial – Jesus. And that night, Peter was so uptight and anxious about being there that he didn't want anybody to know that he even *knew* Jesus never mind be one of his disciples. It didn't end well – either for Jesus or Peter. But just a couple of months later, Peter was a changed man. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, had come into his life and transformed him, just as Jesus had said would happen. This Galilean fisherman who was prone to knee-jerk reactions and outbursts that often resulted from not putting his brain in gear before he opened his mouth, became one of the most powerful public speakers the world has ever seen! It wasn't uncommon for several thousand people at a time to respond in a deeply personal way to his preaching. But, perhaps, the best evidence of the change that had taken place within him was the way he handled being hauled before the very same body of people who'd been involved in the proceedings of that fateful night when he'd let Jesus down so badly. *That* night, the very

idea of being associated with the name 'Jesus' had scared him so silly that he used language he'd never have dreamt of using in front of his mother! But now – now look at him! Bold and strong as he stood before the 72 members of the Jewish ruling Council, the Sanhedrin, and what does he say? *"It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed"*. It's probably not the cleverest of ideas to accuse your accusers of murder especially while you're standing in *their* courtroom! Could he possibly have been any less tactful? The denier has become the defy-er! Where did the guts suddenly come from? v.8 tells us: *"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..."* Jesus was right: *"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem..."* – Peter was the proof of it! And on *this* occasion, it wasn't Peter and John who were intimidated but the authorities! *"What are we going to do with these men? Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it"*. So they did the only thing they felt they could do in the circumstances – they *"commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"*. But they'd overlooked one thing: something that was part of the very psyche of the society of their day – the relationship between rabbi and disciple. The funny thing is, they'd already acknowledged that this was part of what they were dealing with – *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus"*. Not living in the sort of culture the people back then did, a lot of that verse just glides over our heads, so let me unpack it a bit for us.

Like most children at that time, Peter probably left the synagogue school in Capernaum where he'd been brought up at 12 or 13 when formal education ended for all but the brightest of students. A few of the most outstanding students eventually left home to study with a famous Rabbi, being encouraged and sometimes supported by their families. Peter wasn't one of them – nor John either – which is why they were described as *"unschooled, ordinary men"* – they were fishermen not theologians trained in the niceties of the OT, so you wouldn't expect people like them to be able to argue and reason from the Scriptures in the way they did before the Sanhedrin. So how were they able to do it? The clue lies in the last phrase – *"these men had been with Jesus"*. Come back with me for a minute to the night when Peter was in the courtyard at Caiaphas' house watching what was happening to Jesus. A servant girl said to him *"You also were with Jesus of Galilee"*. Another girl saw him and said, *"This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth"*. And a little while later several people said, *"Surely you are one of them..."* – one of whom? His disciples. You see, to be *with* Jesus, or Shammai, or Hillel or Gamaliel or any other Rabbi of the day was to be their disciple; to have been taught by them; to have walked with them; lived and breathed the same air as them with a view to becoming Rabbis themselves, following in their Master's footsteps and perpetuating his teaching. That's what was so astonishing to the members of the Sanhedrin, many of whom were Rabbis in their own right. Peter and John had been with Jesus; they were disciples of Jesus – and from what the Sanhedrin were seeing and hearing that day, Jesus had done an amazing job to take these unschooled, ordinary men and turn them into the articulate, persuasive, powerful orators that stood fearless before them. Of course, we also know there was more to it than met the eye - being disciples of Jesus meant they were now also *"filled with the Holy Spirit"* too!

You can imagine how the religious leaders must've felt. They thought they'd seen the last of Jesus when they'd badgered Pilate into crucifying him – now his name kept coming back to haunt them. Would they ever be free of Jesus? But what to do – that was the question. v.18 tells us - *"they commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"*. In many ways, disciples of Jesus experience the same kind of reaction in every age and generation, including our own. Christian values are being constantly eroded and

undermined in just about every aspect of national life! Christians are dinosaurs, trying to keep people in the dark ages – this is 2020, we're told; a time when so-called 'equality' trumps everything else; a time to liberalise our laws in keeping with public opinion; a time to accommodate the whims and fancies of individuals no matter what the impact is on others. And so what does society try to do? Silence his followers; deny people the opportunity to hear about Jesus; make life difficult for anyone who identifies themselves with Jesus or his teaching. Bury the truth; silence the truth; discredit the truth; ignore the truth; deny the truth; reinterpret the truth; be economic with the truth – that's the kind of opposition rained against God and followers of Jesus Christ today.

How should we respond to that? What should our reaction be?

Sadly, there doesn't seem to be as big a desire or a willingness for Christian people to live distinctively as followers of Jesus Christ as there should be. Unlike Peter and John, we try to blend in with our surroundings; we adopt the same attitude to our studying and our work as people who aren't Christians; we take the same shortcuts, abuse our teacher's or employer's trust, we treat others with contempt and a hard-nosed arrogance and superiority, we chase after success and financial reward as if they were the most important things in life – not so Peter and John? As disciples of Jesus, they had clearly learned so much from him. He had transformed these men from simple fishermen to people who had a presence about them, an integrity, an ability to speak with conviction and power in a way that the religious leaders weren't able to do. Is that how other people see us? Or have we failed to give them sufficient reason for even thinking that we might be a disciple of Jesus? As a young person growing up in Londonderry, I remember hearing a speaker at a youth outreach asking all of us present this question: "If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?" It takes courage to be a Christian; it always has and it always will. It takes courage to stand up and be counted as a follower of Jesus Christ in the face of opposition and a world that dismisses God and anything to do with God as irrelevant or a thing of the past. Where can we find the courage we need to stand up and stand out for the Lord? Within ourselves? No! The Lord himself supplies the courage we need – as Paul says in 2 Tim 1:7 *"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline"*. In other words, the Holy Spirit enables us to be courageous witnesses for Jesus. So when we find ourselves up against it at school or at work; when we find ourselves in a position where our relationship with God is in danger of being compromised perhaps because of a relationship with someone else or behaviour that's not in keeping with being a follower of Jesus; when we feel under pressure to turn a blind eye to something we know to be wrong; when we find ourselves side-lined because we've taken a stand for what is right; what should we do? Trust in God and do what's right. As Ps 37:5 says: *"Commit everything you do to the Lord; trust him, and he will help you"*.

Now watch/listen/sing along with this song in which we say: "We will glorify, we will lift him high, we will give him honour and praise" – it's called "Jesus is the name we honour" and here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUqxpRlxdh8>

If you don't have internet access, please play a suitable track from one of your CDs.

Please pray for others as you finish, continuing to remember everyone working in the Health Service, Nursing/Residential homes and Social Care sector. Perhaps you could also remember everyone connected with PCI's 15 residential homes/units, giving thanks for God's continued protection on our residents and staff. And please pray for the families involved in the two tragedies last week in Ballycastle and Co Donegal, especially for a good recovery for Hannah Smyth (5).

Thanks for following this outline for Family Worship – may you know God's presence and sustaining grace with you in the week ahead.

Activity for Children: (thanks, Hayley!)

Bible passage this week:

Acts 4:1-22

This morning we are going to play a game of hide and seek. I know that all of our children are experts at this game so they will be able to find the best hiding places. However, after a few rounds of playing hide and seek normally, instruct your children that you swap roles and you will go and hide this time and they will have to find you, but you are to ensure that you are to hide somewhere very obvious or dress in a certain way that makes you 'stand out' and can be spotted very easily.

After playing hide and seek ask your children:

- 1) What makes a good hiding place?
- 2) How did you spot me so easily?

Discuss with your children that when we want to be the best 'hider' that ever existed in the history of hide and seek, we think about things we can hide behind, maybe objects or items that we can blend in with, or maybe we go and hide in places that people would never think of going to.

We can be really good at hiding and blending in, but a lot of the time this isn't just when we are playing the game, sometimes this is in our lives as Christians even when we really should be standing out.

As we read the bible last week and watched a video we heard about Peter and John being used by God to heal a lame man, even though they were just walking to the temple and feeling like they were just having a pretty 'normal' and 'ordinary' day. We learnt the God used them in their 'normal' and that he wants to use us in our 'normal' to show and tell others who he is and what he has done for them.

Well as you can imagine, this got people talking, they couldn't believe what they had just witnessed, and they couldn't figure out how Peter and John had healed him. They had so many questions!! Peter and John had stood out from the others around them and they got the opportunity to tell people that it wasn't them or their own strength that healed the man, but it was the power of God that worked through them. That brought on even more questions, so they got to tell them even more amazing news, that God had sent his son Jesus to die on the cross but that he wasn't dead anymore because he rose again, and he wants people to know him.

This all sounds amazing, doesn't it? But there were some religious rulers and leaders in the crowd who also heard everything that Peter and John were saying, and they didn't like it. Actually, they really didn't like it, so much so that they threw the men in prison!

We know that like Peter and John we still have this incredible news to tell people, but it can sometimes seem really scary to do, can't it? Maybe we are really scared about what our friends will think about us if they knew that we love God. Maybe, we are afraid about the questions that people will ask us about why we go to church or why we pray, or we want to show kindness and help others who need it. Maybe we are afraid about being different to others, maybe we want to be the same as everybody else, we want to 'blend in', we want to hide.

There are also children and their families in other places in the world that are scared about some people in their country knowing that they love God, because the rules of their countries don't want them to worship God but this doesn't stop them following God and continuing to ensure that people can hear about God's amazing love for them. We are going to watch a video on YouTube that has been put together by 'Open Doors UK & Ireland' called 'Fast food fifth course: Central Asia- Do you pray every day?' to help our children to think about what it is like for some people to love God when others around them really don't like it. You'll find the video here: <https://youtu.be/MI9Eq848fVE>

After you have watched the video, ask your children:

- 1) Why do you think Brother Viktor still wanted to tell others about God even when people were very mean towards him?
- 2) We know that God is always with us, even in the times that we feel sad, lonely or scared. What does this show us about who God is and what he thinks about us?

At the end of the video, Open Doors raise two questions:

- 1) Do you ever call on God for help?
- 2) How has he helped you?

Discuss these with your children and answer them for yourself as well with them.

God is always with us! He's with us when we feel scared about telling our friends why we go to church, he was with Brother Viktor and he was with Peter and John when they were thrown into prison. Remember, everything that they were telling the people around them about God and what he had done for them, nearly 5000 decided that they wanted their lives to change and they started following Jesus too! Even after being thrown in prison, Peter and John were not going to stop telling people about God because the news was just too amazing to keep to themselves.

God's power is amazing, he has the power to change lives and make them full and he wants to use us to do that. It might be scary at times; it might mean that we have to 'stand out' from everyone else and not 'blend in' and hide, but God has made us different, he has transformed our lives and he has rescued us. Remember that we can talk to God anytime in prayer and we can tell him when we're feeling a bit scared about it and pray that his power will work through us and he will give us the strength and courage to stand out for him.

Please send through any pictures or videos that you might take of today's children's activity to Hayley (07598329604) and they will be uploaded to the church Facebook page.