

## Family Worship – Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Hello everyone and thanks for joining us for another week of Family Worship in our homes.

If you have access to Facebook, please go to our Facebook page where you'll find today's Family Worship on video: [www.facebook.com/muckamorepc](http://www.facebook.com/muckamorepc)

If you don't have access to Facebook, here's some of the contents for you to read.

Next Sunday, God willing, will see us back in here for worship. The Kirk Session has sent a letter to all the homes registered on our database giving important information about the arrangements that have been put in place in keeping with government regulations and PCI guidelines. Apologies if we've missed anyone out but we've done our best to make sure we covered as many as possible. You can find a copy of the letter on our website – [www.muckamore.com](http://www.muckamore.com) One of the things we're asking you to do is to let us know by email or telephone if you intend coming next Sunday so we can arrange the seating. Under the two metre social distancing rules, our capacity is greatly reduced – to a maximum of 80 people – so it would be really helpful if you could let us know on Wednesday, please.

You'll find a lot of other information in the letter so please do read it carefully – and prayerfully. We will be continuing to provide Family Worship online at 11.00am each Sunday for those who aren't able to be with us in person for whatever reason. Please continue to pray for God's help as we put everything in place.

As we turn to worship, please pray together, giving thanks to God for who he is and what he has done for us in Jesus. Ask him to forgive us for not trusting him as we should and to help us to honour him in our daily living.

Then read the Bible passage we'll be looking at together for yourselves – it's 1st Kings 19:1-9a – as usual, if there's more than one of you, perhaps you could take it in turn to read...

Sermon: "Elijah: under the broom"

I can just imagine him standing there; leaning against the wall outside the royal palace, chest heaving as he breathed deeply trying to recover from the almost marathon-distance run he'd just completed around edge of the Great Plain that lay between Mt Carmel and the city of Jezreel where Ahab had his royal palace. Straight across the plain would've been the shortest route to take but that had become a real quagmire within a very short time with the heavy rain after two and a bit years of drought – as Ahab discovered as his chariot struggled to keep going through the mud. Elijah waited patiently, expecting to hear from Ahab when he'd got washed and changed. Surely, after all that he'd just witnessed on Mt Carmel, Ahab would come to his senses and take a different course from now on in his reign over Israel? Elijah had dispelled the myth of Baal; he'd shown Baal to be no god at all – "the Lord is God" the people had declared after the contest. Surely, now, Israel as a nation could put behind it the tragic events of the past and begin to build a new future based on truth and faith in the Lord. The prophets of Baal were dead and gone; now surely Ahab would bring about religious reform? Surely he'd sweep away the shrines and images of Baal and restore worship of the Lord, the one, true God? And now that the false prophets were gone, surely Ahab would consult Elijah, the true prophet? But politicians the world over don't like doing u-turns; political opponents, commentators and journalists seem to equate a u-turn with a weak-turn which makes it even more difficult for a public figure to admit that things need to change from the way they were going because there's a better way of doing them. Elijah waited. More and more people began to gather round him as they returned from Carmel, waiting to see what was going to happen. It was still teeming and as he recovered from the exertion of his cross-country run, he began to feel cold and very wet! Water dripped off his chin and ran down the back of his neck. He tried to take shelter behind the wall but it didn't do much good; the rain was too heavy. His young disciple arrived and stood beside him. He waited; and waited. Eventually a soldier appeared at the gate. *"A message from the Queen", he announced. "May the gods strike me dead if by this time tomorrow I don't do the same thing to you that you*

*did to their prophets*". What happened next has been a matter of great debate among Bible translators and commentators, alike. If you're using the NIV you'll see that the main text says "Elijah was afraid" but an alternative reading is shown in the footnote: "Elijah saw". The AV has it the other way round and I agree. For many years, I went along with the idea that 1 Kings 19 describes a man who was frightened out of his wits and fled into the desert because he preferred to die in obscurity through starvation and heat exhaustion than be executed publicly by Jezebel. But hang on a minute: this was the man who'd just called down fire from heaven in the face of at least 1000 people who could easily have wiped him out in the blink of an eye! So why would a death-threat from a woman like Jezebel suddenly make him descend into a quivering, fearful wreck? No! Most of the original Hebrew texts use the word 'see' in v.3; not the word 'fear'. Others have put that interpretation on it, but the text says: "Elijah saw". Saw what? That nothing was going to change in Israel. Despite everything Ahab had witnessed & recounted to Jezebel, there was no u-turn. The message was clear: the Baal prophets might be dead, but as Margaret Thatcher once declared "the lady's not for turning". Who could blame Elijah if he thought to himself, *"I've risked my life for nothing. So that's it. I'm done"*. Broken, perhaps, but not afraid to die. As the Msg puts it, *"he ran for dear life to Beersheba, far in the south of Judah"*. I think that's a great way of putting it – "to run for dear life" can mean a couple of things: that we run as hard as we can or we get out of the way as quickly as possible. Either way, it describes the *way* we run not *why* we run. He'd just run for dear life from Carmel to Jezreel to get there before Ahab. Now he ran for dear life to get out of Jezebel's clutches. That doesn't mean he was afraid. He was just getting offside, as we would say, and quickly. He and his young disciple headed south – to Beersheba - right on the southern-most border of Judah where Jehoshaphat was King; safe territory, roughly 120 miles from Jezreel. It would've taken them 5 or 6 days on foot. From there, Elijah headed on down into the Negev desert alone another day's journey - about 20-25 miles or so. I don't get much sense of panic, here, do you? This was all cool, calm and collected. This was the desert his forefathers had lived in for forty years before entering the Promised Land. What better a place for Elijah to go to die than where so many of them had died because they'd had enough of living in conditions that felt worse than they'd been in Egypt? Is that how Elijah felt? Tired of living under a regime that showed no signs of turning away from Baalism despite the incredible events of Carmel where the people wanted to turn back to the Lord but Ahab and Jezebel wouldn't let them? Sounds like it from v.4: sitting under the shade of a broom tree – not so much of a tree as a large bush – he says, *"I've had enough, Lord. Let me die; I'm no better than my ancestors"*. Broken, but not afraid to die, he fell asleep. If he'd thought about where he was, for a moment, maybe he'd have done things differently. Why do I say that? Broom bushes are common in the desert. Where other plants shrivel and die, broom bushes thrive. Their seeds remain viable in the soil for several years until the seed coat wears down through the heat of the sun and soil or even because of a fire that scorches the bush and destroys seed coats, allowing them to germinate into new life – which is why brooms are regarded as symbols of renewal. If only Elijah had opened his eyes and looked at what he was sitting under, he might've seen things in a different light. That's easy for me to say: but remember, when Elijah arrived at the broom bush, he was exhausted – mentally, physically, spiritually. What should've been a great victory for God and Elijah over Baal and his prophets turned into Elijah seeing that nothing was going to change; he'd risked everything for nothing. If anyone needed to be renewed, it was Elijah. And here he was, asleep under a bush that symbolised that very thing – renewal. If the bush was in bloom, Elijah would've seen thousands of tiny white flowers & smelt their soothing, honey-like fragrance that aided sleep. And while he slept, the Lord was at work – again; providing food just as he'd done at Kerith and Zarephath – this time, freshly baked bread and a jar of water. Exhaustion soon had him sleeping again only for the Lord to waken him some time later for more food and a message – *"eat up, you've a long journey ahead"*. What journey? The journey to another mountain. Mt Horeb – the mountain of God as it was known - also known as Mt Sinai – the covenant mountain where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. This was a place where people met God in person; where God came down to meet people. So it would be for

Elijah. Strengthened and renewed by the food provided in the desert for him by the Lord, he made the 200+ mile journey to Mt Horeb and went into a cave where he lay down for a good night's sleep.

You know, far from being a negative experience for Elijah; and far from being evidence of failure and fear, this episode is one that should bring real encouragement to every single one of us who has committed our lives to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elijah left Israel not because he was afraid of Jezebel; he left because he saw that nothing was going to change so far as Israel's disregard and contempt for the Lord was concerned. He was tired and fed up; tired to the point of giving up – just like his ancestors - so the Lord might as well dish out the same fate to him as he did to them and let him die in the desert because he was really no better than they were. But the Lord knew different. He knew that what Elijah needed most at that point was renewal and refreshment; not punishment. That's why we're told that Elijah "came to a broom tree" – not just any old tree or bush but a broom; the symbol of renewal. The Lord's diagnosis wasn't failure or fear but fatigue. How many times do we as Christian men, women and young people feel like giving up because we're fed up with the way things are around us with so many people who have little or no time or thought for God? Fatigued from trying to persuade people that there's a better way to live – God's way – yet they refuse to listen to the Bible's message about turning back to God. It's so easy to feel like saying "*I've had enough, Lord. I feel like I'm knocking my head against a brick wall. Just forget about me; count me out*". But he won't let us go. For example, Isaiah 40:31 tells us: "*those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength*". When we hope in the Lord, our confidence is in *him*, not the world around us – and certainly not ourselves! And confidence in God renews us; gives us strength beyond our own resources so we can walk, run and *even soar* without collapsing under the weight of the world's challenges. But there's more: God, personally, renews us. His Spirit brings his grace into our lives in a real and personal way – we are being renewed by the Lord inwardly day by day. Isn't that what Paul prays for his fellow believers in Eph 3:16? "*...that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*". Our faith in Jesus enables God to be with us in a personal way – strengthening us by his Spirit within so that it's as if Christ is actually living inside us in person. And so, in those moments when we feel like giving up because we're tired of living in a world that thumbs its nose at God; when we feel as if we're living in a spiritual desert, the Lord personally provides what we need to be renewed and strengthened as we hope in him, so we can continue to live for him and in him, to his glory.

Please pray for others as you finish:

1. Please ask for God's help and blessing as we look forward to recommencing worship in the church next Sunday, all being well. Remember all who would like to be there but feel they can't just at the moment whatever reason, especially those with health issues. Pray that those who are able to come will not be put off by the restrictions that make things very different within the building in terms of seating and movement, as well as the content of worship itself.
2. Continue to pray for schools as staff and pupils get used to the new environment and procedures that are necessary to keep everyone as safe as possible. Pray that despite the restrictions, school-life will be as enjoyable and positive as possible for everyone.
3. Pray for all in the congregation who aren't well at the moment or who have other issues that are making life difficult and stressful for them. Ask that the NHS will be able to offer the help people need when they need it and that waiting lists will be reduced as quickly as possible despite the ongoing Covid-19 situation. Remember the Health Minister, Chief Medical Officer and everyone acting in advisory roles – pray for wisdom and guidance as they continue to monitor and take appropriate action to limit the impact of the virus in society.

Thanks for joining with us today. And may the blessing of the Lord God be upon you and all whom you love. Amen