

Sunday Update
8th November 2020

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Today is Remembrance Sunday. We mark the day by remembering those people who have given their lives in the cause of peace and freedom in two World Wars and in many conflicts since. We remember those whose names are on the war memorial tablets in the vestibule of our church building, whose stories we told, and whose names were on crosses in the church garden two years ago. How different Remembrance Sunday 2020 will be for us: we can't be together in the church building to stand together during a two-minute silence; any outdoor gatherings need to be tempered by the Covid-restrictions if they happen at all. You will see below that we are still marking Remembrance Sunday and you're welcome to join us on Zoom for the service at 10.30am if you wish, even if it has not been your habit. The wreath will be in the church garden if people want to take time to reflect on their own.

2020 marks a significant anniversary, 75 years since the end of the conflict that was the Second World War, marking VE Day in May and VJ Day in August. These anniversaries bring with them a whole load of mixed emotions: there is a sense of joy and delight at the end of the war, a celebration that the war is over and that those who were trying to disturb the peace are defeated; but there is also a deep sense of loss and mourning for those who were not able to return home at the end of the war because they lost their lives in the conflict. Many people celebrated, but many people found these celebrations hard because their grief was overwhelming. These mixed emotions run through Remembrance Day and quite rightly so. We give thanks for peace and freedom, but we pray for those who bear the scars and continue to pay the price for these blessings. Today, we continue to pray for peace and remember those who have died this week as victims of terror.

There is a similar set of mixed emotions in our Bible reading today from 1 Thessalonians 4. At the heart of the reading is the notion that Jesus is coming to the world for a second time and that when He does come again, God will bring a new world to existence. This notion came from Jesus Himself: *"they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory"* (Matthew 24:30) and some of His other teaching bears out that simple promise. Some of His parables are clearly given to the disciples to prepare them for the time when He will come again and to prepare them for the time in between, before His return. When He left them at the end of His ministry, the disciples were told: *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:11) From then, the Christians developed the faith and the hope that Jesus will come again and when he comes God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

From the way in which Paul writes, you can catch a note of confidence. Seven times, the word "will" appears: here are so many ways in which God will act and we will be blessed by God. Jesus died and

rose again and we will share in that resurrection; the Lord will appear again from heaven and the sounds and sights that accompany that appearing suggest power and glory; we will be with the Lord forever and share in His life and in his glory. Paul is repeating some truths that they have heard before and is wanting to build (or re-build) hope in their hearts. Nothing will change these promises and they should find hope and courage in them. For people who are being persecuted for their faith, here is the hope that life will get better one day, and that God will vindicate them by setting the world to rights for ever.

But there is a question, a concern, a doubt even. Some people had died. What would happen to them? Would they miss out on the new world because they had died before Jesus' coming again? Will they have a part in the great and glorious day? This was obviously a question that was bothering the Christians of Thessalonica and maybe adding to the grief of those who were mourning their lost family members or friends. Paul answers this question in three ways: first of all, he describes those who have died as *"those who fall asleep"* (4:13) as if death is not something permanent; then he says that those who have died in Christ will be first in the great victory parade, before those who are still alive at the time; thirdly, of everyone in Christ he says *"so we will be with the Lord forever."* (4:17) Their hope is strong; it would be even stronger now that Paul gives them this reassurance.

Tom Wright asks "how can you describe the colour blue to a blind person?" and then "how can we describe the new world that God intends to make one day when Jesus Himself appears and everything is changed?" There are ways by which we can do both of these things, but they leave more questions than they answer. Certainly, whenever I have preached a sermon on the theme of Jesus' second coming and the new heaven and new earth, there have been more questions afterwards than on almost any other subject. "What about...? What happens...? What will... be like?" Usually these are questions which I can't answer because the detail is not given to us. We are told that Jesus will come again; we are told that it will be a day of glory and power; we are told that God will set things right, but beyond that it is a mystery.

The early church had a keen expectation that Jesus would come again and that it would happen soon. For us, two thousand years have passed, and that sense of keen expectation has been dulled somewhat by the passing of time. James S. Stewart was a great preacher of the 1960's and a professor of New Testament at New College; he was an old man by the time I heard him preach and this was his subject. Most of all, this sticks in my mind. He said "I know that Jesus will come again one day and that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. How do I know? Jesus promised and I trust His promise!" Here was an old man who had been through the cut and thrust of theological discussion in the academic world, full of scepticism and question, yet faith and hope were simply based on a promise made by someone that he could trust.

We wait patiently for the Lord. It is still part of the creed that Jesus will come again. It is still part of our Christian hope, though I suspect most of us are less sure than we might like to be. It seems unlikely; it seems a long way away; the world is in a mess! The prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord and there are mixed emotions: there is a dark side, the day of the Lord as a dark day, a day of judgement on a godless world, when God will set things right (Amos 5) ; but there is also a side which is full of light, a day when swords will be beaten into ploughshares, a day when the wolf will live with the lamb and *"the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah chapters 2 and 11) We wait patiently for the Lord to come; we have questions for which there are no answers today, but we pray for a world to be at peace, for people to have hope in their hearts despite the present circumstances and we pray *"Come, Lord Jesus!"*

Prayer: Lord, we thank You for the promise that Jesus will come again, and that day will be full of power and great glory. Give us that hope in our hearts; when the hope is flagging, breathe new life into it. Bring peace to our troubled world; give hope to many people's hearts when they are in despair; come, Lord Jesus!

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For those who are specially affected by Remembrance: those who bear the scars of war, physical, emotional, spiritual; for those bereaved by war; for those serving in the armed forces today, afraid of their next posting, but unable to confess these fears; for service chaplains, looking to bring grace and the presence of God to troubled lives and situations.
- For our country with conflict and discord bubbling under the surface of national life – pray for peace, for wisdom in those who govern and for a nation to be at peace with itself; pray for the churches to bring grace and the presence of God to many people's lives.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital start to climb again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Rejoice the Lord is King	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh0BYrdd-8o
The Lord's my shepherd	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL47k2Io04I
Christ be in my waking	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4emGI1gHPA
Behold the mountain of the Lord	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77y2p2jfgUw&t=3s
All I once held dear	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r8XfE_VNb0

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of “EVERY DAY WITH JESUS” Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the “WORD FOR TODAY” Booklet and “WORD 4u2TODAY” Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and “OUR DAILY BREAD” for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.

Shoeboxes – we’ve said already that we won’t be making shoeboxes up this year; the way in which we do it is just not possible given the Covid restrictions. However, we would encourage you to donate the money you might have spent on shoebox material to Blythswood and Jean Dewar is happy to act as the channel for your donations, either in cash or by cheque. You can also donate online at <https://blythswood.org/donate-to-shoe-box-appeal/> Margaret Black in Balerno is sending some shoeboxes and Tillie Boulogne has some leaflets, though you would really need to make up a whole box by yourself.

Tearfund Quiz – Saturday 14th November from 7.30pm on Zoom. We have done this in the Hall for 2 years and this year we will do the Quiz on Zoom. Your “ticket” will be a donation to Tearfund, which you can do online by a donation into the church bank account with the reference “Tearfund” or by giving the minister some money and he will send it on.

Remembrance Sunday – today is Remembrance Sunday. As part of the service we will have an act of remembrance around 11am; there will be some appropriate bible words, the traditional words of remembrance and the 2 minutes’ silence. There will be a recording of the wreath being laid in front of the communion table as part of that service. The wreath itself has been placed outside the church building this morning and will sit in the church garden until lunchtime to allow anyone who wants to take time to remember in a personal way to do so outside. We’re not allowed to hold any formal act of remembrance outside in a way that would gather a crowd, so please stay safe. Later in the day, the wreath will be placed at the war memorial in Currie as part of our acknowledgement of those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of our peace and freedom.

Remembrance

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

God of comfort,
in all the stories of our lives, you are with
us.

As we turn to each other, and turn to you,
may we give and find all the comfort that
we need,
knowing that it is in such shelter
that we hear the echoes of your great
kindness.

Amen.



Play together...

Play "*I went to the supermarket and I bought...*"

If you're not sure how to play then
the instructions can be found here:

https://www.goodplayguide.com/play_idea/supermarket-game/

Question...



What kind of things do you use as reminders?
Either as a reminder of a person, or an event,
or of something you need to do/buy?

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess+4%3A13-18&version=NLT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.

If you want to make this more active you could come up with different actions for key words such as died, grieve, hope/encourage, Jesus, rose again.



Talk together...



In today's verses Paul reminds the people that when sad things happen, Jesus gives us hope.

- Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?
- Have you ever felt sad about something but still had hope?
- What do you think hope is or means?
- How can we have hope in times of sadness?
- Why does Paul say that we can have hope when people die?
- What does the poppy symbol mean to you?
- What is your hope for the future?
- God has given us family and friends who help us when we're sad. Paul calls this "encouragement". How might you help others who are sad or grieving?

Pray together...

Hope blooms: You'll need shallow water in a tray/sink/paddling pool, paper squares, pens/pencils.

What do you hope for in the future? What do you hope the world will be like? Write your hopes and dreams on a piece of paper. Fold the 4 corners of your paper so they meet in the middle. Carefully place your paper on top of the water (folds upwards!) Now wait as your paper slowly unfolds. How do you feel as your hope prayer blooms?

Praise together...



Living Hope by Phil Wickham:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f2FXxDVO6w>



Make something...

Hope cards: you'll need A piece of A4 card each, glue, cotton wool, pens, yellow card, scissors.

- Fold the card using the [step-by-step instructions](#). On the front of the card make a cloud by sticking on cotton wool and writing the words "Behind the clouds...".
- For the inside, cut out a circle from the yellow card and stick it on the raised edge inside the card, as shown on the instructions. This creates a sun that pops up when the card is opened. Write the words "the sun still shines".
- Decide who your card is for and write a personal message inside. Work out the safest and best way to deliver your card, then do it!

Play something...

Play "*Fortunately, unfortunately...*"

Here's instructions if you're not sure how to play:

<https://www.bbbpress.com/2014/10/drama-game-fortunately-unfortunately/>