

PARISH OF LATHERON (SC034424)

NEWSLETTER – JULY 2020

Since about the third week of “lockdown” the opening lines of Charles Dickens novel, “A Tale of Two Cities” has been popping into my mind.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way

Dickens was comparing the year 1859 with that of 1775 which the time of the French Revolution. They were days of great uncertainty and yet days of hope of a better future. When we fast forward to 2020 I find those words to be just as relevant today “*It was the best of times it was the worst of times*”. COVID-19 has changed and challenged societies throughout the world. Fear and anxiety has pervaded our everyday living; long held traditions and customs have been suspended: we have seen unprecedented riots and demonstrations; the death toll has been huge and every one represents a grieving family. Social distancing became the norm – “lockdown” across the world! Yet, we have also witnessed humanity at its best as local communities rallied round to help neighbours; hot meals, shopping volunteers and the dedication and commitment of all NHS and care staff, key workers in all walks of life. In conversation with a member of staff from the Church Offices in Edinburgh she was saying how by working from home she had got to know her next door neighbour and was a volunteer for collecting and delivering prescriptions from the chemist. She was determined that when “normal” returned that she was going to continue to be involved with her neighbours. I wonder what the best has been for you and what the worst has been? For me, the best has been having time in the evenings (no meetings!), time to reflect and time to spend on the crosswords and catch up on reading etc. It has also been time to catch up with my extended family via telephone or online chats. The worst has been not being able to visit folk in hospital or in bereavement; a degree of lack of motivation and on a more general note trying to keep anxiety for the future at bay! Recently it has been great to be able to see my grandson again and to meet up with friends. I am aware that for many of you with families settled further afield that this will have been even more difficult. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”what does this mean for you? The Bible has many passages to encourage us in our fears and anxieties. One of my favourites is from Isaiah 43: 1-3:

*“But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;”*

In the best of times and the worst of times we can be sure of God’s presence.

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labour, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.
(Annie Johnson Flint)

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Re-opening of Church Buildings:

As you will be aware from the media reports it is unlikely that we will be able to worship in our church buildings any time soon. The constraints around social distancing and the health/safety requirements provide real challenges. Andrew, Kirsty and Lorraine have undertaken an inspection and measured up so to speak. At present we are unable to open our buildings but the situation will be kept under review.

There is no doubt that Church in the future will be different and we are all learning during this time that different platforms enable us to worship with Christians all over the world. In conversation with some of you I know you have been joining in through TV; internet; zoom church services.

I too am enjoying all of these platforms and yet there is a sense that we must not lose sight of being "local church".

Fellowship is important – one of the most difficult things I find at the moment is not being able to shake hands or hug grieving families!

I miss meeting with you all.

I and your Kirk Session would like your opinions on how we could possibly grow our local church during this time. I ask you to consider the following ideas and let me know which, if any you would like to happen:

- *A Parish of Latheron zoom service fortnightly or monthly?*
- *An online fortnightly Bible Study group*
- *An online book club (discussing a particular book)*
- *An online fellowship session – catch up with a cuppa!*
- Or give us some of your suggestions

Please let me or one of the Office Bearers know if any of these would be of interest to you by 18th July.

Presbytery Matters

Presbytery hasn't met since March but we are going to be having a zoom meeting on 14th July.

It is time for us to review our Presbytery Plan. This involves a review of the number of ministers and other full/part time workers we need. It also means assessing how we can best deploy resources available. With the ongoing shortage of full time ministers this process requires prayer and vision for the future.

I represent our Presbytery on a Committee that is progressing our transition of uniting all the Highland & Islands presbyteries into one. Again, this process is not an easy one: the geographic area and cultural differences make for interesting conversations!

However, with the advantage of modern technology we envisage local presbyteries and local congregations to be free from cumbersome administration and be freed up for ministry and mission in the local area.

National Church

The National Church in common with many organisations have furloughed a number of staff and introduced home working for many employees.

Our new Moderator, Rt Rev Martin Fair is experiencing a very different moderatorial year and has dedicated himself to supporting what he calls first line ministry! He has set himself the task of phoning every minister in Scotland for a chat.

I was privileged to receive mine on 26th June and he was interested in how I was rather than anything else and he finished with a prayer. I felt truly blessed and supported.

God's love surround you, God's Spirit guide you, God's whisper cheer you, God's peace calm you, God's shield protect you, God's wisdom arm you, wherever God may lead you.

Rev Heather