

Reflection - Sunday 14th June

Psalm 27 & John 4:7-11 - Wait for the Lord, Draw deep at the well.

Over recent weeks and months I've spoken about how the our life together as a Church after this period of lockdown will be different. We've spoken about 'the return' when we looked at the passage in Luke's gospel of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we've thought about the promise of the Holy Spirit and the call to Refocus: on loving God, loving ourselves, loving others. On Pentecost Sunday we remembers the importance of being Filled, Interwoven, Refined and Equipped by the Holy Spirit for all that will come in the future.

While we still do not know when we will be able to reopen our Church buildings we continue to look forward to that day with hopeful anticipation. As Christians it is important to be aware of what God is doing now but always to have an eye to what God is calling us to in the future. In the words of the Scout and Guide motto it is always good to 'be prepared'. If you've read Trinity Times you'll know that on this coming Wednesday the Trinity Church Council is meeting. One of the items that it will discuss is the proposed plan for Trinity's life after lockdown which was circulated with Trinity Times. It is a proposal which has been put together by the Church Growth Team but one on which we very much want to hear the views of the whole Church ahead of the Church Council meeting. I want to share some of that proposal with you this morning but more than that I want to invite you to enter into the core spirit of the proposal which is all about waiting on God together.

As we begin I invite you for a moment to think back to your childhood, if your childhood was anything like mine there will have been moments when you came across a wishing well. At lot of my childhood outings were in the Peak District where there are wells a plenty and even well dressing festivals! The thing is I never understood, never got, was wishing wells! Why would you want to waste your well earned pocket money by tossing it in a well and wishing for something! The young scientist in my knew very well that a wish wouldn't come to anything.

I'm sure for many people they are just a way to contribute to a good cause but there are some for whom wishing well, or other ways of hoping for a better future are taken much more seriously. For some wells, rivers are spiritual places where they look for a different way, where they in some way find a strength.

Our current reality of lockdown leaves us all with questions, wonderings, wishes, emotions. I know I have had moments of wishing it would all be over, wondering how everyone is feeling, days when I just want to curl up and cry because it is so alien to not see people and be stuck in doors. This very unusual period in our lives is having a huge impact on everyone and on one level that impact is about where we can be, who we can see, what we can do. But there is also an emotional and spiritual impact for us all which is going on at a much deeper level and for many people at a level which is very difficult to express or articulate.

When the Church Growth Team met to share and pray about what our life as a Church might look like after lockdown we were led by God to a place where we didn't expect. That places was one where God spoke very powerfully to us about the impact of lockdown on peoples lives: physically, emotionally and spiritually. In our meeting we realised how important it will be for everyone to

have the opportunity to express the impact that lockdown has had on them and that God is calling us as a Church to be a place where people can share, where people can be heard, where people will be listened to.

As the world around us reopens, as schools seek to help people learn again, as business restart and want to catch up, as shops open and encourage us to spend it will be so easy for peoples emotions and experiences to be ignored or buried deep within. As a Church we have the opportunity to offer people, those who are part of the Church family and just as important the local community, a space to share, a space to be heard, a space to be listened too. Not just any space but a space where God is present and where the transforming power of God's Holy Spirit can be experienced.

As a Church Growth Team we believe as we emerge from lockdown God is calling us to be a Church which offers people spaces to be listened too, spaces to pray and spaces to worship. We believe by prioritising these three things for a period of time with God we can help each other and the local community to re-orientate after this lockdown experience.

When the samaritan woman goes to the well she goes looking for water, water to drink and water to take home to use in her cooking and washing. When she gets to the well she meets Jesus and enters into a conversation with him. A conversation which is all about a different sort of water, not running water but living water. If you know the rest of the story you'll know that through her conversation the women's life is changed and she becomes one of the first evangelists as she goes and tells others about Jesus.

In the few verses we heard today in response to Jesus' request for water the Samaritan woman says *'you have nothing to draw with but the well is deep'*. We know that well of Living Water which we find in Jesus is deep, we know that with God's help all of the emotions we feel about this time and the impact that lockdown is having on us can be shared and processed, we know that the living water Jesus offers is deep enough to bring life out of all that we are experiencing at the moment. We know that what Jesus offers through the Holy Spirit is not a wishing well where we hope for something better, wish for something better, but a deep well, a deep well from which we can draw living water, from which we can draw life in all its fullness.

For many in our community they either have nothing to draw or do not know how to draw from the deep well of Jesus. We have an opportunity to offer people a space, a well where they can talk and share, a space where they can draw on the deep well of Living Water rather than the wishing well. I believe that as a Church by offering people spaces to share, spaces to listen, spaces to be heard they will draw deep from the well, from where they can draw on the living water of Jesus, where maybe they can meet Jesus for the first time. I believe by offering space for together for people to process their lockdown experiences we will all draw on the living water of Jesus.

In Psalm 27 the psalmist reminds us and encourages us about three things. Firstly the psalmist reminds us that God is above all, that God is our light and salvation and that even though the realities of the world surround us, enemies and armies and wars, we can still be confident that God is above all. Secondly, the psalmist encourages us to dwell in the house of the Lord, in fact the psalmist tells us that the one thing they ask for is to be able to dwell in God's house all the days of

their lives for when we dwell in God's house we are kept safe. Thirdly, from verses 7 to the end the psalmist encourages us to seek God, to let God teach us his straight paths through which the psalmist is confident that he and we will see the goodness of God in the land of the living.

I believe that God's call to us as a church, in the first few months after lockdown, God's call to be a place where people can worship, pray and be listened to, is a call to do just what the psalmist encourages us to do here. I believe it is a call to trust that God is above all things, a call to dwell in the presence of God and a call to be heard by one another and by God.

If you've read the proposal to the Church Council it comes with the recommendation that as a Church we focus on these three things of worship, prayer and crucially providing listening spaces for at least three months after we are able to open the Church building.

You might be thinking well surely we should be getting back to what we use to do, surely we should be offering an Alpha course for all the people who have thought about God during lockdown, surely we should be making sure we start some new groups.

These are all good thoughts and ideas but we felt God very strongly speak to us that before we reshape our programme, before we start any new groups this period of re-orientation, of worship, prayer and listening is crucial. In this period of re-orientation we believe we will see the goodness of God in the land of the living, we believe in this period we will be waiting on God, that through our waiting we will be strong and take heart, that through our listening to each other we will wait on God. That by our waiting at the deep well of living water we and those we are called to serve will be able to reorientate and in our reorientation be transformed by the grace and power of God.

It will be a time of waiting with God not a time of waiting for God. By waiting with God, by helping others to share and be heard, by listening to each other I am confident that God will also reveal to us his plans and purposes for us as a Church in the future. I believe in our waiting and listening God will show us whether an Alpha course or a new group in the right next step, God will show us God's plans rather than us creating our own plans. It is of course God's plans that will lead us to life, lead us to fulfilling our God given vision.

I believe and the Church Growth Team believes that the proposal we are bringing to the Church Council is the one that God has given to us, we believe it is one which help us to engage through listening with the local community we serve, thought which we will be witnesses for Jesus, we believe it is one through which God will show us the plans that he has for us as a Church, plans to help us flourish, plans to help more people know of his saving love.

We also believe that by sharing the plans with the whole Church that they can be honed and developed as more people contribute to them. So as you read them, if you haven't already, please do share your thoughts with members of the Church Council so when we meet on Wednesday we can continue to hone and develop them to God's glory. They are of course at the moment broad plans because we simply cannot put dates and times to them but in the coming weeks and months we'll develop those details. Please do share your thoughts on the plans so as many people as possible are involved with these conversations.

You might be wondering whether this reflection is really just a planning announcement!

It isn't of course, because the call to worship, to pray and to listen isn't one that is only relevant in the future, it is relevant to us all now. The deep well of living water is available to us all here and now, the deep well of God's grace is present with us in this time of lockdown.

So today I want to encourage you to think about how you can draw on that well of living water and how you can help others to do the same. How can you create space to wait on God during the weeks ahead, how can you find a well, a place where you can draw on the living waters of God. This might be a place you can find to pray, it might be a place where you can sing hymns or songs to God, it might be a place where you can read scripture. The psalmist tells us that we will see the goodness of God in the land of the living and I believe if we make time and space we will do exactly that.

I also want to encourage you to make a space with a well to listen to those who might not have a space to be heard. That sounds very grand but it isn't! A phone call to a neighbour to ask how they are, with a few open questions such, how are you feeling, what's hard at the moment, do you see the light at the end of the tunnel, have you seen any silver linings in lockdown. These questions so easily open up conversation through which people are given a space to share and a space to be heard. They also give us the opportunity to share where we see God in what we hear, maybe by acknowledging the light in the tunnel as the light of Christ or the silver linings as the work of the Holy Spirit.

The samaritan women goes looking for water at the well, she probably went wishing that she would be there alone. When she got to the well she met Jesus, she found living water and she went away with her life transformed. I hope that each of us will accept the invitation from God to make space in our lives to draw on the deep well of living water, to make space to worship, to pray, to listen to each other and to God.

I believe that by doing these things we will be reminded that God is our light and salvation, we will see the goodness of God in the land of the living. Most of all I believe if we are attentive to these things that we will wait on the Lord and help others to discover what that means. I pray that by waiting on God and listening to each other more people will discover God's love for themselves and we will discover the plans God has for us, plans in the words of Jeremiah for us to prosper and not for harm.

In these coming weeks and months may you be touched by God as you stand at the deep well of living water and may you discover many more blessings that you ever would if you stood at a wishing well.

Amen.