

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

Come Holy Spirit, reveal Jesus to us. Come Holy Spirit, lead us in the way of Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit, with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

This past week, not only have we said farewell to some of our church family, but as a nation we said farewell to Captain Sir Tom Moore. I think we all can remember the valiant effort he put in to fundraising for the NHS and how the nation got behind him, helping to raise £33million to pay for every day small things – not protective clothing, actually – but small, important things nonetheless, things

that made a big difference, in particular, to NHS staff amidst this pandemic.

For a brief period of time, Captain Tom's life was an example and we rallied behind him, and for a brief period of time we also did Clap for Carers last year and we rallied behind that. Yet eventually, it seems, our enthusiasm does wane, we lose interest in each new initiative, and we go back to "normal", huddling down and turning in. It's good to have these individuals, these and campaigns, that help us turn out again but part of me wonders: how do we nurture long-term change? Not only within society, but within the church as well?

Last week, Jim gave such a powerful and encouraging sermon on "becoming", on growing in the way of Jesus. So, how do we grow in the way of Jesus such that it

becomes core to our identity and we walk in it all the days of our life? Because Jesus, as we've seen earlier in the book of Philippians, is the most powerful example of someone giving away their life for others, and yet,... after 5 weeks in Philippians, where can you say your life has changed, where have you grown in the way of Jesus? Or, what about our children? We tell them of the love and death of Jesus, which was for them as much as for us, and yet, how many walk away from the faith and have nothing to do with the way and the community of Jesus? I wonder, do you wonder about these things, in you, ever? Do you long for things to change? I hope you do. I hope there are many of us that wrestle and wonder and question these things; and, Yes, long for change, both in your own lives and in the lives of our world and community, that together we might pursue our core

purpose of ‘inviting, encouraging and enabling all ages to follow Jesus Christ’.

So, what has all this got to do with our passage this morning? Well, in Philippians today we’re introduced to Timothy and Epaphroditus, two individuals who served alongside Paul, and he highly commends them both.

He says of Timothy:

‘I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.’ (Philippians 2:20-22)

Timothy has grown in the way of Jesus; Timothy is not only looking to his own interests, but to the welfare of others and to the cause of Christ.

Epaphroditus also walks in the way of Jesus, and is described by Paul as:

'...my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier...he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died...he almost died for the work of Christ.' (Philippians 2:25-30)

In Timothy and Epaphroditus, in the life of Paul as well, we see individuals who have grown in the way of Jesus, and part of what grabs my attention here, is that in the pairing of Paul and Timothy we see growth across the generations; we see that the way of Jesus is relevant for all the generations and that the generations need one

another. Equally, **in the pairing of** Paul and Epaphroditus we see something else: we see that no matter your background, the way of Jesus can change your life for the better and also bring great unity, even to two people who would have written one another off normally – Paul the strict Jew, Epaphroditus the Gentile – two completely different backgrounds, two completely different ways of life, and yet brought into unity because of Jesus.

In these three individuals, I see a deep and lasting change that led them to give away their lives for the sake of others...

and for the sake of Jesus, **and it leads me to ask :** how? How did this happen, Lord? And what can your church today learn that we might not simply turn up to church here in this sanctuary or at home, and never change, or

simply share the faith with children and young people and yet never see them grow-up and own that faith themselves? How, Lord? How can this be?

I'm afraid I don't have the answers. I don't have a 2- or 3-point sermon to give us a nice easy solution by the end of this morning. Because these are huge seismic issues in our church, not just at Brightons, not just in the Braes not just the Church of Scotland, but the church across our land, Yet, I do want to highlight a few things, because for me they raise more questions than answers.

Firstly, we know that core to growth in the way of Jesus, is to know Jesus for yourself; to have met with Jesus and to keep meeting with Him. I think that's why Huddle, that

I talked about earlier, excites me, because the core question within Huddle each week is:

“what is God saying to you?” and then, “what are you going to do about it?” Imagine the growth we might see in ourselves, and in our young people, if we all could answer those questions and then go and help other people answer those questions for themselves as well. But how do we nurture that? How do we facilitate that kind of learning? Because clearly, what we were doing before the pandemic, even what we’ve been doing these past 12 months, isn’t fully nurturing this yet? How Lord? How can this be?

Secondly, it’s true that Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus knew Jesus, **but none of us learns within a vacuum and none of us** thrives within in a vacuum as we’ve been

finding these past 12 months; we all need community, we need one another, and much recent research suggests that for the generations to thrive need one another, both in the church and outside. Clearly, this is limited in our present circumstances, but it's been great to see the church launch this intergenerational penpals idea ,... and it's been encouraging to hear of Pastoral Groupings being in touch with one another and maybe even meeting together, even by Zoom or for outdoor recreation within the restrictions. **What else could we do just now? It's only limited by our imagination and willingness. You don't necessarily have to add more activity. What are you doing that you could just do with someone else? You're going for a walk, could you invite someone else to join with you? And when that great day comes and we can at last all be together again, what can, or should, our life be like**

together then? Are we just going to return to “normal”? Because remember what the Moderator of the General Assembly said, returning to normal is returning to a church that is declining, and that’s true for Brightons as much as for anywhere, that our membership numbers are dropping and in five, ten years time we might end up going off a cliff and not being able to continue doing what we do just now, even in this lockdown. How might we create the means for all generations, and peoples of all backgrounds, to experience a degree of community, a degree of family, that truly nurtures them in the way of Jesus?

How, Lord? How can it be?

Friends, as I said in Tuesday night’s video, there is more change ahead, that we are called to tack, and if you don’t

what I mean by that go and look at Tuesday's video recording. I do realise that we probably want more messages of comfort and encouragement at this time and those will come. But the message of Philippians calls us to walk in the ways of Jesus, to grow in the ways of Jesus, maybe especially in difficult times both individually and as a community, sure we could leave these questions and the wrestling it produces till later in the year, till beyond pandemic, but that's not the Lord's call for just now, and I think that's strategic so that when we come out of the pandemic we go forward. So, let us all lean in to this, I invite you to lean into this to where He is leading us just now, to engage with the questions, to engage with the process, that together we might chart a way forward so that one and all, all generations, might grow, truly grow...

in the way of Jesus, in this place, and across the Braes, for generations to come. May it be so. Amen.