

### **Quiet Time – Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022**

Good evening, and a warm welcome to our evening time of reflection which is coming to you from Orchardhill Parish Church in Giffnock. Whether you're near or far, a regular or first-time attender we are joined together not only by technology but by the Spirit of the Risen Lord!

Few people beside Jesus himself, have had such an impact on the church or the Christian faith as the Apostle Paul. It is to his vision, energy, and enthusiasm that we owe the transformation of Christianity from a branch of Judaism to a worldwide faith which still today continues to grow. Yet few people could have seemed more unlikely candidates for such a job, given Paul's hatred for anything to do with Jesus, unparalleled in his time. Admittedly he had many ideally suited gifts which God was able to make use of, but there were equally as many characteristics totally unsuited to the demands of his calling, not least his poor health, his unimposing presence and his so called "thorn in the flesh" whatever that might have been. Yet not only was he used uniquely by God, in those early days; he continues to speak equally powerfully today, his letters together making up a substantial portion of the New Testament. Today, then, we stop to consider both the man himself and the message he preached. What can we learn from the way Jesus changed Paul's life? What lessons can we draw from his experiences? And what does he have to say concerning our own faith and discipleship? If we are willing to explore such questions, we will find the voice of Paul speaking to us here and now and, through that, the voice of God Himself.

Let us pray together:

Sovereign God, we thank you for the way you have spoken across the centuries, the way you have repeatedly changed people and transformed situations in a manner which, to human eyes, looked impossible.

Inspire us this evening as we reflect upon one such example of your renewing power and help us through that to understand more clearly everything you are able to do in our own lives and the world today.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

Let's hear now the reading from Galatians 1: 13-24.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas<sup>[b]</sup> and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

<sup>21</sup> Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.

A Reflection by Paul:

It looked impossible at the beginning, utterly beyond me.

And I don't mind confessing there were many times when I felt like giving up, throwing in the towel and cutting my losses.

Surprised?

You shouldn't be.

After all, just look at what I was up against – me, Paul, called to take the gospel beyond Jerusalem, beyond Judea, out to the ends of the earth!

It was a tall order by anyone's reckoning, and when you remember how the Jews felt about the Gentiles, and how the Gentiles felt in return, well, you can begin to understand the scale of the problem, can't you!

I was up against it from the very start, doing my best to keep a foot in both camps to avoid causing offence, trying to share the good news, but forever keeping one eye over my shoulder, knowing the snipers wouldn't be far away. It didn't help I suppose, with my own people anyway, me being a Jew myself, schooled as a Pharisee and expert in the law to boot!

They thought I was betraying my roots, reneging on my convictions, denying the faith of our fathers.

And as for the Gentiles, many simply wondered what I was doing, pushing my nose into their affairs.

So, yes, I had my doubts, to put it mildly!

Wouldn't you have felt the same?

Who was I to overcome that sort of prejudice, to break down the barriers between us, to bring people of such contrasting backgrounds together into one family of humankind?

Who was I to talk of a new way of thinking, of building a different sort of kingdom, of sharing a different sort of love?

Someone else perhaps – but me?

No way!

And yet the mystery is, I did!

Somehow, in a way I'll never understand, I found the strength and the words I needed when I needed them most.

I found energy to begin new tasks, courage to meet new people, faith to dream new dreams.

I unearthed reserves I never knew existed. And achieved results I never imagined possible – all kinds of people in all kinds of ways, discovering the joy of sharing and working together, discovering a faith that answered their deepest needs – a faith to live by.

It looked impossible; you can't argue with that – wonderful yet altogether ridiculous.

But it wasn't, for I've discovered since then, much to my amazement, much to my relief, that I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Sovereign God, the challenges you set before us may be very modest compared with those faced by others over the years, but they can seem daunting, nonetheless.

We feel inadequate to meet the task, acutely conscious of our lack of faith, the limitations of our gifts and our inability to serve you as we would wish.

Yet time and again throughout history you have taken the most unpromising of material and used it in ways defying all expectations.

You have turned doubt into faith, weakness into strength, timid service into fearless discipleship, and you go on doing that today through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Give us, then, the faith to respond to your call, trusting that, whatever you ask of us, you will be by our side to help us see it through, to the glory of your name.

**Amen**

Let's now listen to 'You call us, Lord' –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdd4NaWih44>

Let us now share in our prayers for ourselves and others:

Our prayers for others bring us to our knees in gratitude for what we have and in desiring for the needs of those around us.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

Having experienced heatwaves which floored and discomforted so many of us, we pray for all those across the world who daily have to deal with such temperature extremes. Those whose houses are flimsy and unstable and uninsulated against cold or heat, those who have no place to find retreat and rest from the heat. Lands become parched more readily and crops wither. Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya are facing extreme hunger if rains don't come soon. May we and all the world find ways to support each other and reduce our impact on the climate, that all, now and in the future may live more sustainable, healthy lives with food enough for the day.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

For all those who work in Social Care and the Health Services in our country and around the world, where underfunding, lack of resources, lack of support and misuse and abuse by so many causes stress to staff, deteriorating care at crisis times, delayed diagnosis, and insufficient support. We pray for those who work, who plan for, who fund and who need to use such services.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

For governments and regimes around the globe who find themselves in turmoil. We pray for a wider recognition of the needs of all and seek equality and fairness for all humanity. We pray that we may, in our small way, be part of the solution. For those who seek to flee corrupt and violent regimes and

who put themselves in danger to simply find a better way of life. May they find, welcome, care, love, support, and guidance as they journey.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

For those without faith or moral compass, who do not seek the Kingdom of God, the support and love of God, who do not seek or know the burning of the Holy Spirit in their lives. We pray they may see the spark in others and be drawn to faith and find the love and comfort that faith can bring.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

For those who still work tirelessly on Covid research and prevention. For those who diagnose and nurse, who support and care for those infected. For those who still need to shield to keep safe and virus free. For those who suffer from long Covid and all whose mental health has been impacted by the virus and the change in our way of life, those who struggled with lockdowns and who find it hard to re-join society, who have become reclusive and fearful of being in crowds.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

For the lost, the lonely, the ill, the dying and the bereaved, that in times of pain, confusion, and grief they may find comfort in God, in family, friends or neighbour, in a touch, a word, a smile or companionable silence.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

This day, these are our prayers for those whose lives touch our lives, our consciousness, our very being, they are the prayers for the people whose needs weigh heavily upon our hearts and lives.

Holy Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer. Amen**

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, and we share now in saying the prayer he taught his followers:

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.***

As we prepare to go our separate ways, let's receive God's blessing:

May God the Father prepare your journey,  
Jesus the Son guide your footsteps,  
The Spirit of Life strengthen your body,  
The Three in One watch over you,  
on every road that you may follow.

**Amen**