

Good Morning. We are back to our Worship at Home provision for a few weeks as the Andrews Government has us locked out of our Church building. We expect now that this directive will remain in force until after the 20th July. Then, who knows? The imperative is that we keep up our loyalty to our Saviour, our commitment to the fellowship and patience with one another over this time. It is easy to let things slip.

This week Laurie Maskell is the scheduled speaker, and he has kindly put his thoughts down on paper. Chris Tringham is scheduled as service leader and it is our regular Communion Sunday. So before we begin just ensure that you have on hand the two elements that Jesus gave to us to remind us of His sacrifice. The regular things not on hand? You may have to improvise. That is quite in order!

Next week, according to Green Leaf, the service is to be organised by Coralie and the message by Chris Tringham.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”

Our opening prayer today:

Almighty God and our Heavenly Father. We come in prayer before your presence in the name and through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you Lord for your love and kindness toward us. Let this time that we remember your things though individually but we believe together, be a blessing to us. Draw us closer to yourself and one another we pray in Jesus name.

If you can sing, read and hum, or just browse the words of -

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changes not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou for ever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided -
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord to me.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own presence to cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!

Thomas Chisholm 1866 - 1960

Today being the second Sunday in the month is a Communion Sunday. We must each make our own provision of bread and wine. It could be that you have been caught short. However the rule is Compromise. Maybe you do not keep a stock of these elements on hand. Simply use whatever is to hand. The reality is spiritual, not physical. The emblems are simply that. On that first night, Jesus simply picked up what was to hand and used that. We see that His symbols were suggestive and meaningful. And yours can be too. We prepare our hearts with a dedicated well known Communion song.

Here O my Lord I see Thee face to face;
Here would I touch and handle things unseen,
Here grasp with firmer hand th'eternal grace
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

Here would I feed upon the bread of God
Here drink with Thee the royal wine of Heaven
Here would I leave aside each earthly load,
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven

The Communion Table:

'And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." '

Take and eat the bread now

'And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." '

Luke 22:19 & 20ESV.

Take and drink the cup now, then the last verse of our Communion hymn.

Feast after feast comes and passes by,
Yes passing points to the glad feast above.
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
The Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.

Horatio Bonar 1808 - 1889.

Prayers of the Church:

Our Heavenly Father we come to you now in prayer with the needs of our people upon our hearts. Lord you know all things, and you understand the demands that this day are placing upon us. We bring our people and our nation and our brethren to you. This virus that is afflicting us, and many, many others is causing all kinds of unwanted stresses and misunderstanding because we are not able to meet and discuss things with one another. Our written communication skills are not good. Help us to be patient, understanding and forgiving when the other person hurts us and to show loved in return.

We pray in particular for Wendy who has received a new diagnosis of Cancer and now has to undergo more medication. Help her to tolerate the stresses that this causes. Help her friends and family to be fully caring and understanding especially constrained by the virus precautions that are forced upon us.

We remember too those suffering due to the Covid 19 infection. Those who are bereaved, seriously ill, missing income, or locked into uncongenial conditions

We pray for our missionaries who are greatly inconvenienced by all the added restrictions and demands that are placed upon them. Please enable them to meet these new demands as well as the regular requirement of service, often in a foreign and sometimes hostile community.

Please provide for them from your bounty the resources of strength, finance and initiative that they need to get their work done and done well.

We remember too the work of the fellowship at Glen Park to meet the spiritual needs of the community in which we find ourselves. And the people with whom we live and work. We pray for our governments that they will be constrained to meet the needs of people with wisdom and compassion. May they be rule wisely and well.

At this time we confess our sins and faults, the things we do before we think, our selfish responses and demands, our inconsiderate actions. Forgive us, even as we forgive those who sin against us. May we be more like our Lord Jesus in all we do and say.

Lord, we pray, make us a blessing to others. These things we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Now it is time to hear and heed Laurie's message:

At the time of preparation of this document it appears likely that we will be looking at this from home so I have prepared it a little differently. Where I have written "Consider", pause and write a few suggestions before moving on. If you are looking at this with somebody else toss a few suggestions around with each other. Maybe compare your answers with mine (on the last page) after you have thought about it a while.

Choices.

Every day we make choices, mostly simple or mundane, like what to wear (some may claim that is not a simple choice) or what to have for breakfast. Often we handle the more routine decisions by (Guess what!) By having a habit. For example, we always have "witties" for breakfast. Having habits (or routines for a group of sequential habits), we free our minds for other things. When making any decision what do you believe is important? "Consider."

I hope one of your answers was relating to the importance or possible consequences, of the decision. to ourselves or others either short term, or possibly for the rest of our, or their, lives.

For these more important decisions, what do we need to consider?

Let's take a look at some of the examples of decisions people have made from the Good book. As we consider then, ask yourselves some questions about the decision making processes they appear to have gone through, and all too frequently, what went wrong.

We discussed Genesis Ch. 3 last time and saw that Adam and Eve were tricked into believing that Satan was the good guy and that God was holding something desirable back from them. How come they were so easily tricked? "Consider."

I believe that their decision is not really surprising as this was likely their first encounter with evil in the "very good" world that God had prepared for them. They had not yet learned that not all beings could be trusted. The clue that they did have was that God (with whom they were in fellowship) had told them not to eat that particular fruit. They did not wait to consult their friend. Their actions are as if they have decided that they have found a better friend. Their newly found 'wisdom', rooted as it is in distrust of God, cost them (and all of that very good creation) dearly.

Turning to Genesis 4:3-8, another well known story, the story of the first murder. What went wrong? "Consider."

Was Cain also in fellowship with God before this? The words "in the course of time" that are used in introducing this event suggest to me that this was not an "out of the blue" event. This was most likely not the first offering that these sons of Adam had brought and offered. Why was Cain's offering rejected? Each had brought produce of the labours of his hand. Abel had brought "of the first born and the fat portions of his flock". Those words strongly suggest that he had brought the best that he had. What had Cain brought? An unspecified offering of "the fruits of the ground". Those words suggest that Cain had not taken much thought as to what he would bring, or possibly had he deliberately chosen to keep the best for his own benefit. This interpretation is I believe supported by the words of verse 5 "for Cain and his offering." God did not regard either of them with favour.

God, in His mercy, speaks to Cain and assures him that he would be respected if he does well. He also gives the warning that he must not allow this perceived setback to rule his actions. Why does Cain disregard this advice? Is it just depression, or is there something deeper going on?

I have been hearing and reading recently of the problem of "victimhood" which is becoming prevalent in our society today. (Really, this problem has been there for some time, but now, there are groups actively trying to destabilise the societies which are based on Christian values with the aim of bringing in a totalitarian form of government. These groups encourage the victimhood attitude and try to hijack their perceived just cause to get wider support and disruption in the community.) Briefly, victimhood is this. If you perceive that you, with others who are like you in some way, (for example; in skin colour) are a victim of something, (which is generally perceived as somebody who is in authority over you), then your troubles are not your own making and that it is of no use to do anything such as find work or get training to better your lot. You are righteous and can justify any action against those you perceive as victimising people like you. You have convinced yourself that there is no escape except to destroy that authority or that rival which according to your perception is holding you back from what you deserve. This is generally what you think that *they* have, but you have no hope of getting because *they* are in the way.

This kind of perception would explain what happens next as Cain disregards God's good advice, lashes out and destroys his perceived rival instead. Did he gain what he wanted? That he did not is evident in his outburst against God, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. You have driven me out from the face of the earth and from Your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond and everyone that finds me shall slay me." (I wonder, did Cain find comfort in the promise that his death would be avenged sevenfold?)

In Genesis 6:9_8:17 we have the more noble actions of that just and righteous man, Noah, who, at God's bidding willingly undertakes what must have been a task which would bring him into ridicule from many of those around him and occupy him and his family for many years. Noah and his family stood firm while the world around them turned away from God and went their own ways.

How did Noah and his family stand firm? Little is written outside of the words in 6:9; Noah "walked with God". Is that a summary of the best way to make decisions?

I remain challenged by words I once heard a long time ago from a preacher saying "If you find it difficult to know with certainty what God wants you to do in a certain situation then look back over your life. Look carefully and you will find some point where you knew for certain what God wanted you to do but you were not prepared to do it. You need to confess that as sin." If we look at the rise and fall of King Saul (starting at 1 Samuel:10) this appears to me to be very much the case.

For Joshua also, we can see that when he takes his counsel from God, he and the armies are successful, but when they make decisions without consulting the Lord things go bad. (Joshua 7:2-10 and later 9:14 & 15 has longer lasting consequences for the nation.)

There are other cases which I remain puzzled about, such as slaughters in the wars against the Benjamites after consultation with the Lord in Judges 20. It may have to wait until I can ask the Lord about it, IF I still want to.

Certainly the Bible is simple enough for everyone who truly seeks to find what they need to know for salvation but complex enough to keep the scholars arguing for a lifetime.

I am one of those who does not always know for certain which way to decide on something so I find that teaching about looking back over past decisions to be very challenging. If you are like me in this, then let's take time to review some of the decisions we have made in the past and see if this be true for us also.

And that is where I will leave it for us today. May God's blessing rest upon each of us.

Consider 1

The seriousness of the consequences has bearing on the time needed. (Unless the answer is obvious.)

Who are the stakeholders? Do we need to consult them/Have they been consulted?

What are the options available?

Consider 2

Is it wrong to respond to something that appears to be good?

Had they ever before encountered deceit?

Did they have any reason to be distrustful?

Consider 3

Why was Cain so angry?

Why did he respond negatively to the advice he received from God Himself?

Did his emotional response blind him into a hasty decision?

Our Concluding Hymn: Take Time to be Holy

Take time to be Holy, Speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, And feed on His word.
Make friends of God's children. Help those who are weak.
Forgetting in nothing, His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy. Let Him be thy guide.
And run not before Him What ever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, Still follow thy Lord;
And looking to Jesus Still trust in His word.

Take time to be holy. Be calm in thy soul.
Each thought and each motive Beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit To fountains of love,
Thou soon shall be fitted For service above.

William Long staff 1822 - 1894

Now, The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. Amen.