

25 July 2021

Brooklands Church Update

Friends

'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God 22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.'
Genesis 28:20-22

Above we have a vow made by Jacob as he takes his long Journey back to his father Isaac's house. Today we might make a similar vow as some 'return' to the church building after a long absence. May we experience that same safety that Jacob prayed for!

Of course, as we have mentioned so often, we have been able to continue to worship during this pandemic and we are so grateful for that. And as such, we will continue to ensure people can continue to worship with us from home should they wish - please know that we consider you every bit as part of our 'gathering.'

For those of you in the building, please be mindful of others - wear a mask, use hand sanitiser and respect any distance boundaries that some may wish to keep. We as a church leadership have done all we can to ensure your time in the building is as safe possible and we will review our practices regularly.

Having said all this, today I want to celebrate that some are 'returning.' It's been such a long time without getting meet you as your pastor. We can also sing! I know how many of you have longed for that.

Next week we will gather for a family service and tea and coffee will return after the service. The following week Kids' Church starts back (you can refer to last week's update for a more detailed run down of our own 'roadmap').

I wanted to say a little something on the topic of giving. Thank you so much to those of you who have continued to give faithfully throughout the pandemic. The local church cannot exist without the generous giving of the congregation. As part of our service we will start to mention giving again as part of our worship. There will be a basket towards the back of the sanctuary for people to put their offering in on their way in and out of church (we cannot justify passing the basket for the time being).

I speak of all this returning and I am not even with you this Sunday - I'm enjoying time with my family who are visiting from Glasgow. Lucy is preaching and she will do a great job, no doubt. I'll be back with you next week.

Peace,

Mick



Pop-up Café open on Thursdays

Important Dates

- 01/08 Family Service followed by refreshments
- 08/08 Kids Church restarts

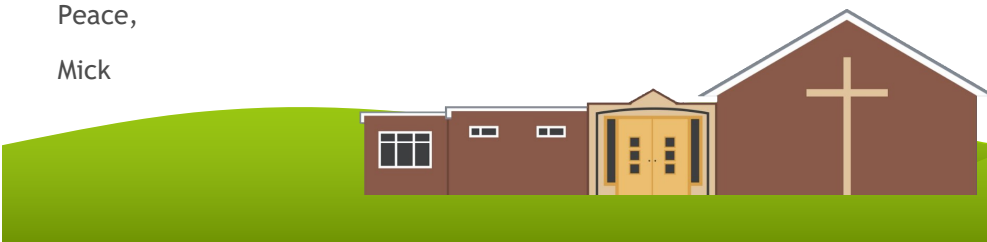
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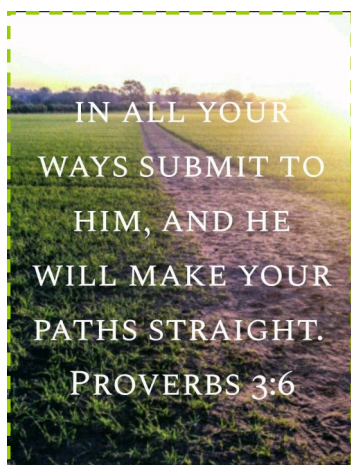
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Daily Reading and Prayer Guide for This Week

Date	Reading	Pray for
Monday 26th July	Acts 20:7–38	Mark, Joanne and Tom Bolton
Tuesday 27th July	Acts 21:1–26	Audrey Bolton and family
Wednesday 28th July	Acts 21:27–40	Jack and Leah Bolton
Thursday 29th July	Acts 22:1–29	Robert Bond and Annette
Friday 30th July	Acts 22:30–23:22	Val Batty and family
Saturday 31st July	Catch up	John and Ann Beattie and family
Sunday 1st August	Acts 23:23–35	Vivienne Best and family



Prayer requests

- ⇒ Pray for the safety of our church as we adapt to the change in government restrictions.
- ⇒ Pray for John Beattie who will continue with his cancer treatment following a short break.
- ⇒ Pray for Colin Dunbar who is very ill in hospital with circulation problems in his leg.
- ⇒ Continue to pray for Alan Roberts, son-in-law of Val Batty, who has cancer.
- ⇒ We continue to pray for others in our congregation who need healing. Including, Jon F, Isobel, Claire H.
- ⇒ Pray for the continuing work of the church in the local community.



Sermon notes for 25 July 2021

Ephesians 3:14-22: Paul's Prayer for Power

Lucy Frost

This week we are joining with Christians around the world in studying the New Testament lectionary reading for this week- Ephesians 3:14-21. We're returning to modern day Turkey. Known in Paul's day as Asia Minor. The other week we studied Paul, Barnabas, and Mark's missionary journey through the treacherous rocky mountain roads to Antioch. Now we're heading west to the vast, beautiful, and prosperous port city of Ephesus. Perhaps the fourth most important city in the world at that time, Ephesus and the outskirts contained a quarter of a million people. People of all different ethnicities and nationalities from around the empire had made it their home. It was steeped in Paganism, magic, superstition, and materialism. Archaeologists have found thousands of pieces of evidence of magic spells, curses, and other occult activities. Step of the boat and you'd soon see a coded sign on the pavement (that survives to this day) directing you to the brothel. If you wanted to be discreet a secret tunnel led there from the impressive library! One could choose to worship the Emperor, Caesar Augustus. Referred to as saviour, the Roman calendar was changed in recognition of his birth. More than fifty different gods and goddesses were worshipped. The predominant one was Diana who was also known as Artemis. The Ephesians built a temple in her honour that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, four times the size of the Parthenon.

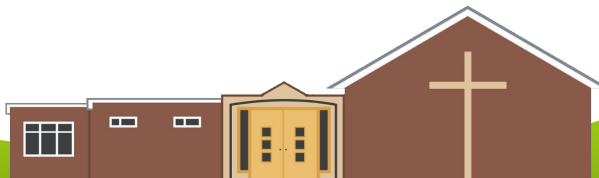


Between 53-56AD Paul lived in Ephesus. He preached for a few months in the synagogue then to the wider community via the lecture theatre. Against the odds, during his time there Paul established a successful Christian community and the Gospel spread rapidly in the area. As time went on greater success meant greater opposition. He led many people to faith but the silversmiths who made icons to the goddess Artemis were incredibly angry. They were losing business and they started a riot. You can read about all this in Acts 19.

After that Paul travelled to Macedonia, Greece, Malta, Jerusalem, and many other places. But at the time of writing this letter Paul was in Rome under house arrest. Paul knew the enemy was doing everything he could to stop the gospel spreading. Paul himself had been stoned, put in prison, had threats on his life. Now he found himself in 'lockdown.' Chained to a Roman guard at all times, he could only evangelise through receiving visitors and writing letters. Despite the limitations he maintained his joy and confidence in the Lord.

After a very hot and sticky week Ephesians is an ideal book to explore. This short little book is full of beauty and encouragement. I encourage you be to do as I did earlier this week and read the whole book. It takes around twenty minutes. This short letter that Paul wrote to the Christian community in Ephesus is as relevant today as it was back then. It really helps deepen our understanding of the Gospel. It is also a notable book for the way it emphasises the importance of the Church in God's eternal purposes. How appropriate that we should find ourselves in this book for our first Sunday of a more normal form of church after more than sixteen months of restricted worship!

Chapter 1 teaches us about our new life in Christ. Last week we looked at part of chapter 2 where we read about God's grace being freely available to all. Chapter 4 focuses on unity and maturity as individuals and more importantly as a Church family. Pastor Mick was telling me earlier this week that although we think of Paul's theology as being predominantly about grace, it is something else that he writes about the most. Paul devotes most of his letters to the importance



of unity. Paul knew that the Devil would try to sow seeds of division amongst Christian communities. It happens today as much as it did then. As individuals we can be swayed by the world around us. Our Christianity can become lukewarm. We can become discouraged. Or we can become proud, conceited, and judgemental. Churches can become places of gossip, cliques, and petty arguments. If God's purposes are to be worked out through Church, we must be constantly on our guard and fighting against these evils. It's why many people don't want to set foot in a church and why many churches are dying. I am so proud of our welcoming and inclusive church. It's why after my first visit here as a very broken young woman I came back and stayed. It is something very special that must be protected and nurtured.

Although often read incorrectly Chapter 5 is a beautiful discussion of how men and women can exist in marriage honouring and respecting one another. I think Chapter 6 is one of the most important in the whole Bible. It's a reminder that the forces of evil are very real. We try to protect ourselves from coronavirus with masks, hand sanitiser and vaccinations. To protect ourselves from evil Paul reminds us to put on our armour every day. Being rooted in scripture, truthfulness, peacefulness, and faith is how we thrive as people and communities of God. Sandwiched in the middle of the book of Ephesians is the section we're focusing on today.

It's notable that the church at Ephesus was a happy and thriving community. Despite this Paul still wrote to them reminding them of the basics of the Gospel and living in community together. It's as useful today as it was then. It serves as a personal and community health check. I have software on my computer that regularly prompts me to 'scan now' to find 'errors and hidden junk.' When I read Ephesians, I find myself scanning myself and finding junk and errors. Times all too recently when I've been judgmental, impatient, or ignorant. Although I can't press a button to erase these faults straight away, I can pray to God in humility to do better.

Although it may seem strange, often in Ancient Jewish writings, pivotal pieces of information went in the middle rather than the end. This section in chapter 3 is about God's power freely available to us. It's this power that helps the protection unity, and growth talked about in the rest of the book to thrive. Given the toxic, demonic activity going on around them it makes sense that Paul refers frequently to spiritual forces. They needed to be reminded frequently that it is Jesus who has Lordship over all.

The first half of chapter 3 reveals God's inclusivity to everyone, regardless of race, nationality, social or economic standing. The manifold wisdom of God is to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms by the Church. There's debate about whether Paul is referring to cosmic forces of angels and demons or political and economic leaders in society. I would say that the two can't be separated. Economic oppression, racism, slavery and corruption are fuelled by demonic power. Our society today might not worship pagan gods but we face evils of drugs, alcohol, materialism and atheism.

God wants the Church to reveal and enable a new way of doing things. The word used to describe God's manifold wisdom is *polupoikilos* which means diverse and multi coloured. It was used to describe everything from flowers to beautiful tapestries and Joseph's coat of many colours. It's through the beautiful diversity of the Church that God wants his wisdom to be revealed. Ushering in God's kingdom of fairness, equality and justice. In our church we are proud of our work welcoming in people into our building who are hungry, lonely, isolated and have never heard the Good News of Jesus.

I am so encouraged that over the past few months young Christian footballers have risen to prominence for their faith and faith in action. Young men like Bukayo Saka, Raheem Sterling are vocal about their Christianity. They are living out Kingdom principles, fighting against racism and inequality. From our very own community here in Wythenshawe Marcus Rashford is working to feed hungry children and fight illiteracy. As always there are powers and principalities full of hate working to discourage and belittle them.



The later section of this chapter is a prayer for God to reveal His power but also to impart this power to His Church. It is because of Christ's great reconciling work that Paul feels compelled to pray with great fervour. The normal posture for prayer was to stand but to kneel showed great humility and intensity. Paul asks for strength for believers, pointing out God's glorious riches. It is through the Holy Spirit that we gain this strength. We can do very little in our own strength. God's love is immeasurable and so is His power. Our attitude, expectations and prayers are often too small. Here Paul is at pains to show God's power is overflowing, abundant, extraordinary. His prayer is as relevant for our church, our community, and God's people today as it was back then. Let's pray this morning just as he did for renewed strength, power, and energy to do the work of God.

