

Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches

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Dear Friends

As the tighter controls on social distance begin to have effect on all aspects of life, we are realising that there are many sides to the covid-19 story. Sometimes it is difficult to decipher which stories are too far-fetched and which are the reality. Make no mistake, this is a serious event in the history of the world, therefore we must follow the guidance offered by our Government and limit the speed of the spread of this virus. Please stay at home and if necessary keep your distance when in close proximity with others outside the family unit that we live with. However, In spite of this curtailment of activities, may we all be encouraged to set aside time each Sunday to have some form of worship. To this end, we plan to provide a weekly devotional available via email only, as a lot of travelling by individuals is not viable now. Therefore, to facilitate this, we request that, as many of you as possible, please forward an e-mail address to rmcelnea@hotmail.co.uk Regarding those with no e-mail, we request that if you can print this off, please do so and leave it with church members nearby and remind others to make contact via email. During these unprecedented times I shall be available to have a telephone conversation at any time, so please call anytime. May you be encouraged to pray at this time of uncertainty, pray particularly, for all health care workers and their families; many will be working long shifts caring for very ill people. Pray also for our government as they manage this crisis, and our communities as we get used to the constringent of social isolation and its effect on individuals.

However in these times of uncertainty in the world around us there remains God's word which has been our sure foundation in all generations and continues to proclaim our creators love for us today. As we approach the Easter season we turn our focus towards the cross through Mark's gospel. This week with a passage from the period of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

Mark 11:13-25 Seeing in the distance a fig-tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no-one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. 15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: ``My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'." 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, they went out of the city. 20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig-tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig-tree you cursed has withered!" 22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Let's imagine, you are standing on a high hill overlooking a long valley. Down in the valley there are villages, rivers, farms and roads. On one of these roads you notice a car been driven much too fast, along these winding roads. The driver is obviously hell-bent on getting somewhere quicker than they should. At the same time you notice another car, coming the other way, going about its ordinary business, you can see what is going to happen!

Jesus has been warning the people, up and down the country that God's kingdom is coming. This is what many believe is taking shape in the present time, God's kingdom is preparing to come. For the most part people prefer their own aspirations, and their own agendas. Society has been speeding on its way, eager to continue the revolution which prefers to turn God's law on its head. The concentration of society, would appear to be on the outward appearance and regulations rather than on the human heart, therein lies the heart of the matter.

As Jesus comes to the temple, the place where heaven and earth are supposed to meet, where God's forgiveness was supposed to happen. Jesus finds them ignoring the warning signs, like they are heading for the sharp bend, as Jesus is coming in the opposite direction.

His ministry to this point has been the announcing that this was now God's time. Jesus was making this happen as he healed the sick restored broken lives and families. He has been the person where heaven and earth meet, where forgiveness is received and relationships grow. He has now come to Jerusalem, and he is on a collision course with the temple and all that it has become, it has become a very corrupt place of man-made rules. Will there be enough room for them both?

Jesus meets us where we are in life, as we note the temple experience there is no room for both. V17 ... '*My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'.*

On our own, we do our own thing, following the crowd, often normalising the things which are contrary to God's direction for our lives. As Jesus enters into our life, the ways of living life, which are not God's way, must change to living life His way. Accepting that He is the one in control of our situation. Presently with COVID-19 this is part of the dilemma, man has no control of the situation beyond attempting to slow the rate of transmission. The cry is 'What can we do to stop this thing?' There are those who turn to Christ in the hope that they are so good that He will have mercy on them and they can somehow avoid this virus. Again this is the hope which man made and will not stand the test. However, as Jesus makes His way through the temple to Calvary, our hope is no longer in ourselves, but in Him who bleed and dies for our sin and was resurrected the third day victorious over both sin and death. The victory is in Jesus. **1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

May we firmly place our hand in the hand of God and with confidence face the days which are ahead of us with Jesus in our heart!

May the love of God surround you all in these challenging days and guide each one of us by His light that we may see the fullness of His Glory. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all today and forevermore? Amen

Your Minister and Friend

Roger McElnea

Some Scripture to ponder: Scripture clearly shows us -

The Fact of Sin

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

sins.

James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it,

The Penalty of Sin

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus Paid the Penalty

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Need for Repentance

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Need for Faith

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."

Need for Personal Response	John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--
Assurance of Salvation	John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."