

## **Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches**

Rev. Roger McElnea  
52 Caledon Road, Aughnacloy  
BT696HX  
H 02885557500  
M 07738763747

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**rmcelnea@hotmail.co.uk**

*Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

Dear Friends

As your minister, it is a great privilege that I have in bringing this weekly devotion to you. Our theme today is 'What fills Your Heart'. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-22** *Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. Amen.*

**Prayer** - *Timeless God, what we thought might be a short pause, now seems like an eternity; what we began describing as extraordinary times, are beginning to feel pretty ordinary; what we first experienced as an interruption to our lives, has merged into an unwanted new normal. We need you to stay our hearts, giving staying power for the long haul, but also helping us stay put for the moment with patience and restraint.*

*Lord we Pray for those who are working to develop social distancing in workplaces, shops, schools and other everyday settings, asking that God would help them to find viable ways of enabling a safe return to greater normality in coming days.*

*We pray too, as decisions are made, relating to the easing of lock-down, we pray that we as a society will give each other the room and social distance we need to protect ourselves and our families as we go out and about.*

*For those in our own congregations and communities, who have spent time in hospital recently and those gaining strength at home or in residential homes, may their strength be renewed, and they may know your refreshing for their lives. Lord may your spirit be with us today as we worship together in spirit yet separated by distance locally. Hear our prayers Lord in Jesus name. Amen.*

Today may I ask the question; "What fills your Heart". In these verses, Paul highlights a number of brief statements which will help us make the **right choice**, bringing blessing and peace no matter what life brings us, these will give us the strength to continue and strengthen our faith as we grow in Christ day by day.

**Be Joyful Always! V16** - Make the choice to rejoice. Many people consider it the role of someone else to make us happy. I think Paul would suggest that what people need is JOY not happiness. Happiness rises and falls with what happens in your life, but joy remains constant regardless of what happens. If you have Jesus, you already have joy. **John 15:11** Our joy will be complete at the return of Jesus! Joy is more than a feeling; it's an attitude. You may say, "I don't feel like rejoicing." That's okay; rejoice anyway. Paul was in prison when he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord. I'll say it again, rejoice." He didn't write, "Rejoice in the prison." He said, "Rejoice in the Lord."

**Be Prayerful! V17** - "Pray continually." Connect with God continually. This doesn't mean you have to constantly be praying an audible prayer, that would be impossible. It means you should maintain a constant connection with your Heavenly Father. Every believer should have regular times of prayer when you are only focusing on God. In Daniel 6, Daniel was in the habit of entering his chambers three times a day, facing Jerusalem and getting on his

knees to pray. That's what got him thrown into the lion's den. What happened there? That's what Daniel was doing the entire night he was in the lion's den, praying continually!

**Be Thankful! V18** - "give thanks in all circumstances." The Bible doesn't say "Give thanks FOR everything." It says, "Give thanks IN every circumstance." It is difficult to say, "God, thank you for this difficult period of illness." But, "God, I thank you that you are sovereign, and I thank you that your grace is sufficient in time such as these." Alexander Whyte was a famous Scottish pastor famous for beginning every prayer with a word of thanksgiving to God. There was a particular Sunday when the weather was awful. It was cold and grey with the temperature near freezing. A howling wind was driving the rain sideways. There were only a few parishioners who showed up for church, they were waiting to see what their pastor could thank God for on such a miserable day. Alexander Whyte prayed, "Lord we thank thee" he paused, then continued, "We thank thee that the weather isn't like this every day."

**Be Sensitive! V19** - "Do not put out the spirit's fire". Here, the Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire. When God called Moses, He spoke through a burning bush. Then there was a pillar of fire that led them through the wilderness. The prophet Jeremiah wrote that he tried to quit preaching, but God's Word was like fire in his bones. Fire speaks of warmth, purity, and energy. Jesus said in Luke 12 that He came to bring fire on the earth. He meant that He came so we could experience the warmth, purity, and energy of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Sometimes we quench the Spirit. Sometimes when the flame of the Holy Spirit ignites our spirit, we throw a wet blanket over the fire. God intended His church to be a place where God's fire falls and His people are ignited for service."

Don't smother it. Obey Him, and your life will be a testimony of the warmth, purity and energy.

**Be Attentive!** - 20 "Do not treat prophecies with contempt". Respect the preaching of God's Word. In the Old Testament, prophets were servants of God who had a ministry of both foretelling the future, and forth telling the truth. Most of their messages were not about the future. They delivered God's message for the people to repent. In the New Testament, the gift and act of prophecy was not predicting the future. It was forth telling the Word of God. We would call it inspired preaching.

**Be Discerning!** - V21 "Test everything" .... Filter every teaching through God's Word. Paul meant that you are to test every message from another Christian. The Apostle John wrote the same warning, **1 John 4:1**. There appears to be so much fake news about these days and what do you believe about Covid-19. Don't believe everything you read on the internet or in the papers. **Acts 17:11**, makes a good observation about the Christians in Berea.

**Be Faithful!** - V21 "...Hold on to the good." Don't stop doing what is right. In terms of doctrine, once you have heard the truth and determined that it is the truth, don't let go of it. Keep a firm grip on it. But this goes beyond good belief. It also involves good behaviour. Good behaviour won't get you into heaven. But if Jesus is in your heart, there will be the evidence of good behaviour, this will be consistent, faithful good behaviour. **Galatians 6:9**

Goodness isn't defined by what you refrain from doing. It only happens when you do good deeds.

**Be Wise!** - V22 "Avoid every kind of evil". Run from anything that appears to be evil. Of course, we know of the big evils we should avoid, we reflected on those in the early verses of chapter 4, but we are to "avoid every kind of evil". Joseph in the closing chapter of Genesis, was a great example of someone who held onto the good and ran away from evil. Even though his brothers sold him into slavery, he still worshipped and served God. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph literally ran away, leaving his tunic in her hands. It's better to run away with your reputation intact, than it is to give in to sin.

Paul's, path to blessing and peace. Be joyful; be prayerful; be thankful; be sensitive; be attentive; be discerning; be faithful; and be wise. The key to this blessing and peace I believe is "Don't put out the Spirit's fire." If you are on fire for Jesus, then you'll be joyful, prayerful, and thankful. You'll honour God's Word, test everything, and hold on to good, and reject wrong.

**Prayer** - Lord of love and compassion. May the presence of your Holy Spirit be evident in the lives we live day by day. Ignite us Lord with the expectant hope you have given us on the day the fire of your spirit fell on the disciples and moved among the crowds at Pentecost. Inspire us Lord encourage us as we hold your truth in our hearts, for no purer light shall mark the road that leads us to You. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest remain and abide with us all, this day and forevermore. Amen.