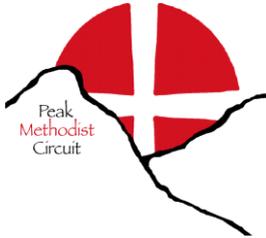


**Worship and Pastoral Resources
week beginning 23 August 2020**



Dear Friends

It's good to be with you once more and to share with you this week's "Staying Connected" material.

I will be continuing to reflect on this week's Lectionary Readings at Sunday's Zoom worship – but have decided to base this material on just one of those readings – that of Romans 12 1-8 and then pick up two on Sunday evening.

As David reminded us last week – during lockdown it has been all too easy to concentrate on self – when fear, particularly in the early weeks – kept us behind our closed doors. Our lives had suddenly come to a grinding halt – and to move on from that has not been easy for anyone. But wherever we are in history, life does have to move forward – and as we will see as we look at today's resources – much has been the same for generations in times past, just as today.

But move forward we must – and we will – and the message given by Paul to the Romans today should prompt us to reflect in a similar way – that is to look at where God is directing and leading his Church today.

So share with me now.

Love and blessings

Heather

Call to Worship

Romans 12:4

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Hymn: StF 351 In Christ Alone <https://youtu.be/JWiFYJMGas0>

Prayers:

Loving God

We meet again, as your people, to praise and to worship you
Though we are spread over many miles, we are all joined together as your people
Though our lives take many different paths – they all lead us to you
Though our faith may sometimes be weak – you comfort and uphold us even when we do not acknowledge it
So may we join now to thank and praise you for your abundant love
Thank you for calling us – and for giving us many and various gifts
Gifts that you wish us to use to spread the word of your Kingdom
Gifts that enable us, by your Spirit, to continue to work and live in the ways which your precious Son showed when he lived amongst us.

We thank you for our families and friends
For the neighbours next door - and those who live many miles from us
For those who concern us – and those we rejoice with
Help us to be true neighbours to all we meet
And strengthen and guide us to meet people's needs when we are able

And forgive us Lord when we ignore your requests
When we are too self-centred to listen or look
When we fail you in so many ways – which we know must hurt you
But we know that if we are sincere in our asking – then you are always willing to forgive
And so we ask for that forgiveness now.

May we move forward this week – with your hand in ours
And may all who meet us, know that you live within us and enrich our lives with your abundant love.

We ask these prayers in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 440 Amazing Grace <https://youtu.be/Jbe7OruLk8I>

Chapters 9-11 in Romans were Paul's attempt to give some kind of coherent shape to God's activity in choosing first Israel and then *all* who believe in Christ. Now, in Chapter 12, Paul is back to practical-sounding advice to the Christian community in Rome – and given that these words were originally dictated to someone (a Secretary), then preserved, read aloud and continually copied and recopied for wider distribution, it's hardly surprising that they don't always flow very naturally from one paragraph to the next!

Here Paul has identified that the problem with the law is that people put their trust in that Law rather than God, and believed that they could stand – or fall – by their own efforts alone. So he urges them:-

Romans 12: 1-8

A Living Sacrifice

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

Paul cuts through all the usual attempts to make moral systems that allow us to continue to live lives unchanged. “Do not conform to the usual pattern of this world but give yourselves to God” he says.

Discipleship is a bit like belonging to an Army. When the order is given, you march where and when you are told – and you need to be awake and ready for that order!

Paul is urging us to look squarely at our own strengths and weaknesses – our gifts and our talents - and thank God that they are balanced out in a Christian community. He calls us together – to help each other out – rather than having to have all the virtues in our own individual person.

Driving along the motorways, I often look for Eddie Stobart vans. It's a sort of ritual on every motorway journey I make – how long before I spot the first. They're everywhere – a nationwide transport group – and many people, just like me, look for them. It's something I have done since my children were little and bored with car journeys, and now it's somehow comforting, the little detail you can always rely on. Sometimes I have to do quite a few miles before I spot one – but I've rarely been let down.

But I notice too other lorries – and vans – other names and countries. One from France with a name I can't pronounce – a lorry from Warsaw spelling out a name full of Xs and Zs and almost no vowels. Another from Spain, one from Budapest and another from Italy – then Prague – and pot plants from Holland.

The whole human family seem to drive along the M1 – well, maybe not quite the whole family – but a large part of it – all before my eyes. Different languages – different cultures – different customs – but all human – just like us. They will have families at home and a lifetime of commitment.

They are all to be welcomed, even cherished, for the richness they bring to our lives. And if we look really hard, we may just glimpse the image of God in each one.

So let us remember today's message which is so vitally important for us in these difficult times. We may be apart because of circumstance – but together we are still God's church and God's Army and we need to be ready to move forward and carry out whatever is asked of us – whenever the call may come.

Amen

Prayer

Lord, your world is a beautiful world – full of beautiful people
Yet somehow the image gets distorted – out of perspective
Problems get magnified and exaggerated
Suspicion instead of trust – secrecy instead of openness
Jealousy in place of appreciation – anger where love should be

Lord, keep my vision clear – unclouded by distrust and fear
Keep me open to walk in your light – not darkness – with joy
Help me to respond to others – and not distort their needs into threats to me

As I pray for myself – I pray for others
Those who make decisions – and who try to make peace
Lord, give the ability to see the whole – the wisdom to concentrate on the essential
And above all – give us loving kindness in our judgements.

Amen

StF 693 **Beauty for Brokenness** <https://youtu.be/3kVHKuldZyw>

Prayers of Intercession

Living God

In you we find life – and life eternal
You love us with an everlasting love
You give us the freedom to turn to you or turn away from you
You don't compel us to love you – but invite us to know you and your love
Help us in our desire to know you – and to be more faithful to you
For blessed are you Lord, for ever

We give thanks to you for all faithful people
We rejoice in the fellowship of your saints and all who have been loyal to you
We remember before you those who are new to the faith –
And all who are seeking to deepen their faith
We pray for all who are tempted to turn their backs on you –
Those troubled by doubt – and those finding their faith a challenge

We give thanks for the gift of power you have given to people and to nations

May we all use our powers to your glory – and the benefit of others
We think of all who suffer from the misuse of power
All who are oppressed and wrongly imprisoned
And those who suffer from violence
Lord, grant us peace in our hearts – and peace in our world.

We give you thanks for those who brought us to know and love you
We remember our teachers and preachers
We pray for our friends and our families
May our relationships all reflect a good relationship with you
But we too remember all who have been betrayed in love

We give thanks for all who have committed themselves
To work for your glory and the benefit of others
We remember all who feel let down, deserted or lonely
We pray for the persecuted and the marginalised in society
We ask your blessing on all who are ill – at home in hospital
And on all who seek healing or deliverance
And we remember those known only to us, who need our prayers today

You Lord are the giver of life eternal
And we remember before you those who have departed from us
We ask your blessing upon loved ones and friends who are at rest with you
May they rejoice in the fellowship of the saints – and the fullness of life eternal
Merciful Father – accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Hymn: **Blessed Assurance** <https://youtu.be/rDeiy9-t2GE>

Blessing:

Go back to the daily round of life
and may what we have shared here
transform all you do and experience there.
In the name of Christ

Amen.