**20th September Reading Reflection and Prayers.**

**Reading Philippians 1.21-30**

21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. 29For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – 30since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

**Reflection**

During Covid 19 we have been forced to face the reality of death. We know that this virus is very dangerous to certain people, and that we have had to make major adjustments to how we live in order to protect them and ourselves from infection, and to protect the hospitals from becoming overwhelmed by patients.

However, the side effect of this has been to reveal what we think about death, our own death. I have been surprised by the number of folk who are really frightened of dying, and who are not prepared for their own death, or the death of loved ones. That sounds crass as it is written, but nonetheless, I have had pause for thought about what we as Christians believe about death, and how we cope with the reality of the end of life.

We know that Jesus in John 14 reminds us that he is preparing a place for us in heaven, that he will take us to at the end of our lives. We know that Jesus’ life death and resurrection gives us freedom from sin through forgiveness given by Jesus. We know that God who created us, and loves us, will welcome us home to a place where there is no more crying. We know “Jesus said “I am the resurrection and I am the life. Those who believe in me shall live, though they died, yet shall they live. And those live and believe in me shall never die.”

But we have been living as if we must avoid any risk of death … quite a contrast!

Read what Paul wrote again **“21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue”**

I do fear pain, and I fear causing the pain of my death to my family, but I know where I am going, and I try to live so that I am ready to die. Being right with God, living in such a way as to be sure to confess my sins, to know that I am a child of God means that I am prepared. Of course, I have regrets at things I have done or not done, the chances that I was too scared to take, but I have done my best at the time to live life with all its fullness. Everyone is going to die! Everyone! And no amounts of evasive actions will stop this, or help us control our death. But we can choose how we live up to and including our death.

**Henri Nouwen** wrote this:

*“The friends of Jesus saw and heard him only a few times after that Easter morning, but their lives were completely changed. What had seemed to be the end, proved to be the beginning; what seemed to be a cause for fear proved to be a cause for courage; what seemed to be defeat proved to be victory. And what seemed to be the basis for despair, proved to be the basis for hope.*

*Suddenly a wall becomes a gate, and although we are not able to say with much clarity or precision what lies beyond that gate, the tone of all we do and say on the way to the gate changes dramatically.”*

There is no guarantee of length of days. Over 25 years of talking about death, preparing funerals and memorials means that I am too well aware that death is not reserved for the old or the evil, for those who are prepared. Death often comes without warning and does not wait until we are ready.

Remember the wonderful words of commendation

“Go forth upon your journey from this world, dear soul

In the name of God the Father who created you

In the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for you

In the name of the Holy Spirit who strengthens you

In communion with all the saints and angels

May you dwell this day in peace. Amen.

But we are Christians. We believe in heaven, we believe in Jesus’ promises, we know the love of God. Why should we not be more like Paul, as he says “23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.” But to reach this point, we need to take a bit more of Paul’s advice: “27Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”. That is the best way to prepare for your eternal life.

Another pearl of wisdom from Henri Nouwen:

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| **Dying Leads to Love by Henri Nouwen** |
| Am I afraid to die? I am every time I let myself be seduced by the noisy voices of my world telling me that my “little life” is all I have and advising me to cling to it with all my might. But when I let these voices move to the background of my life and listen to that small soft voice calling me the Beloved, I know that there is nothing to fear and that dying is the greatest act of love, the act that leads me into the eternal embrace of my God whose love is everlasting. |

**Prayers for Sunday 20th September 2020 – Land’s End Benefice**

**Lord our God**, teach us we pray to live in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. We ask for courage that we may not be intimidated by opposition or criticism, but that we may have the grace to listen to others, and to reply in your name as we seek to grow your Kingdom. Keep us firm in the faith you have set before us – through Christ our Lord, **Amen**

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord**, we pray for our leaders in your Church, here in the Lands End Benefice, and across the world. We give thanks for their ministry with us, and we ask that they may feel supported, loved and welcomed wherever they go. We give thanks too for all our volunteers in our churches, members of church councils, church wardens, and all those whose contributions have had to stop or change because of the pandemic. We need each other now, more than ever, and we need your Spirit to fill us with love for the world and all your people.

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord,** we ask for your blessings on all employers who are striving through this time in a spirit of fairness and understanding, and who are trying to keep others in work. We pray for those who are unemployed, and for all those people on low incomes trying to make ends meet. We ask that all who prosper may share with others, and help those in need through the gifts of their time, financial resources and expertise.

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord**, we pray for peace in our world. We pray that the leaders of governments may act freely in truth, through reconciliation and through restorative justice to make amends for dishonesty division, and unfairness. We pray especially for the people of Beirut and the Lebanon, for the refugees at the Moria Centre in Greece, and for the people of the western USA facing fire and homelessness. We are sorry for the damage we have done to your creation, and we ask for your forgiveness as we try to make things right.

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord,** we pray for all people facing the effects and after-effects of the Covid 19 coronavirus. We ask for your love and support for everyone who provides us with medical care, for those engaged in scientific research to find a solution to the pandemic, and for all who are dealing with the wider impacts of this disease. We pray for ourselves, that we might find the strength to face new challenges, and the humility to accept help and advice.

We pray now for all those known to us who are ill in body, mind and spirit, especially…..

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord,** we give thanks for all those who have been faithful workers in your name, and in your harvest for the world, and who are now no longer with us in this world. May we too come to rejoice with them in your everlasting kingdom. We remember especially….

***Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen***