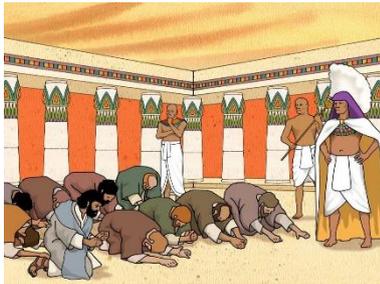




# St Andrew's



United Reformed Church  
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

19<sup>th</sup> February 2022

## **Weekly newsletter - issue 102**

Dear friends,

There are a lot of reasons to be afraid right now: The Covid-19 pandemic, a plummeting economy, job losses, the threat of a war between Russia and Ukraine, etc., etc. And yet, God's Word says, **"do not be afraid"** more times than any other command in the Bible.

What does this mean for us as Christians? How can we not be afraid? Does trust in God mean that no harm will come to us?

When we considered this, we can go back to the story of Jesus calming the sea in Matthew 8; 23- 27. The narrative is a short one:

***And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. And the men marvelled, saying "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?"***

Sometimes we may feel like one of the disciples on the boat with Jesus. In the global pandemic, which is not yet over, less people are still dying, the whole world is changing the way we live our daily lives to save lives. It is still hard. It is so hard that we may relate to the feeling of drowning that the apostles must have had as Jesus slept while the boat was being drenched in waves.

Often, when we encounter a **"storm"** in our lives, we become angry with God and say, ***"Lord, here I am, trying to live a good life! Here I am trying to follow you, and this, this is what you bring upon me? What did I do to deserve this? How could you let this happen?"***

But as this scripture shows, and as Jesus says many times, ***"Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me"*** (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23), that's not how God works. Being and living with Christ does not mean that no harm will come.

We see in this weekend's scripture that Jesus is with his disciples in the boat that is being ***"swamped by the waves."*** The disciples are

so sure that they are going to die that they even cry out, "***we are perishing.***"

And what is Jesus' first response when he is awakened? It's not to calm the storm. In fact, Jesus rebukes the disciples before he rebukes the winds and the sea. Why? What's the message?

In this story Jesus is pointing out that while he can do anything, there is more than one kind of peace. There is the peace that comes from having no conflict and there is true peace, which is peace that comes from being in the presence of God.

True peace is peace that comes despite conflict. True peace is knowing that our lives are in God's hands. True peace is knowing that God can handle any hardship that may come no matter how long that hardship lasts. If we choose to trust him, he will take care of us, even through long-suffering and death.

Part of being a Christian is knowing and hoping for the joy of eternal life in Heaven with God. Being a Christian is knowing that God can handle every situation we encounter. It is knowing that God will give us the grace to overcome any situation we encounter. It is also knowing that should a situation lead to long-suffering or death; he will help us through. He will make sure that we rise with him into eternal, joyful life.

So, during the pandemic and threat of war, let us learn from this scripture. Let us learn from Jesus' rebuke to the apostles. While we may be afraid, we can also be at peace. God is with us and will help us handle this pandemic no matter what the outcome.

## NEWS

It is great sadness that we heard this week of the passing of our dear friend and member Mrs Agnes Nurse. Well over one hundred years, Agnes has always been a faithful member of St Andrew's, even though she has not been able to attend over the past years due to being almost completely blind. She however avidly received the weekly newsletter. For a number of years Agnes has been cared for by the staff in the Thomas Court complex and her dear friend Mrs Joan Boon, who has constantly taken care of her needs. We will provide further information on Agnes's funeral when we have more details.

Just a reminder about our belated New Year Lunch will take place in the Church Hall on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2022. If you have not already provided your name and an indication of the meal that you require, can you please contact Jill, Christine or I with the details.

Following Church last Sunday, we held a training session on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and using a defibrillator, provided by members of St John Ambulance Cymru. This was enjoyed by the participants and felt to be really relevant. Some members asked if we could extend this at a later date and provide a Basic Life Support session. We hope to undertake this training soon and will provide further information in the Newsletter.

We have provided our weekly '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/sCKZcQj77B4>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

*Des*

## **Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson**

### **SERMON**

Once upon a time, two children were playing with toy figures. One had a comic book superhero and the other had a princess from an animated cartoon show. When an evil villain appeared in their adventure, a problem occurred: ***Who would rescue hostages and bring the villain to justice?*** Each child thought their figure should be the one who did it. Both characters wanted justice and knew it might take self-sacrifice in order to give hope at the end of the adventure. The superhero wanted to bring the villain to trial through violence and the princess wanted to appeal to the villain's good side with a magical song that would compel them to stop hurting people. The superhero's approach has a primal appeal — throwing power around through violent retaliation. The princess' approach is an interpersonal one —using supernatural gifts to give someone a second chance to do better. Which do you think won out?

In contemporary western culture, media and advertisers tell us that, in order to have a happy life, we need to be wealthy, and if we cannot be wealthy, then we should have enough followers to make us a social media influencer, which usually ends in some kind of wealth anyway. We have also been shaped by the examples of conflict resolution that require power over another through retaliatory violence — physical, emotional, mental, and/or sexual. In television and cinema, superheroes and princesses are not real people, and, in their worlds,

justice often occurs by the wielding of power, either through violence or magic. Typically, neither superhero nor princess is poor or non-violent. While these make entertaining stories, the insidiousness of privilege based on wealth and justice through retaliation and not reconciliation is reflected from our current culture back to us. There is no place for God here. So, what does this mean for a follower of Jesus?

The complexity of God's role in reconciliation is exemplified in the story of Joseph's encounter in Genesis 45: 3- 15, with his brothers, throwing him in a pit and leaving him to be sold into slavery. Joseph, of the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat fame, comes face to face with his brothers years after his entrapment and enslavement. He dismisses his servants and speaks with his brothers alone, sobbing uncontrollably. Asking after his father, first reveals that his primary concern is for that relationship and not the one with his brothers. It is an intimate moment where Joseph confirms his identity, and it also reveals the ways in which God has made meaning and good from actions that were rooted in sin and tragedy.

Human nature being what it is, the brothers do not know what to make of Joseph's behaviour. As shock ebbs away, they are overwhelmed and amazed that this person who they wronged is not sending them away or executing them. After all, that is what they likely would have done if their roles were reversed. Reconciliation is a process used instead; Joseph tries to make their relationship more equal by dismissing the servants so he could speak freely in Hebrew with his brothers, but he still speaks from a place of power and dominance because of his station in Pharaoh's household. He tries to show that what God has done in his life is independent of everything

that had happened between them and that now, Joseph can show how God's concern for life is for everyone, not just him. None of this works immediately on the brothers. They are simply too unsure of what is happening to trust what Joseph is telling them. Full reconciliation occurs later in Joseph's story.

No matter which time period we are in, reconciliation is a process and can take many forms. Many people believe reconciliation means going back to being; the way you were or forgetting what happened and moving forward from there. In a world of violence, reconciliation can only come after an attack and must be desired by both parties – if it happens at all. Better yet, is there a way to avoid needing to reconcile in the first place? Jesus speaks of a different way of responding when facing violence to the heart, body, and/or spirit. There is no Christian justification for vengeance and retaliation. While some early Christians were soldiers, it was not encouraged because the Roman religion that was tied to serving in the military was seen as idolatrous. Furthermore, killing another human being was wrong on principle. Jesus taking away Peter's sword at Gethsemane was one of the compelling arguments for the latter.

Today's Gospel from St Luke 6:27-38 challenges the disciples and us to think beyond the culture of violence in which they lived. Luke is writing to the communities of Gentile Christians in Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor. A question for this community was: ***'Could they be both Christians and good citizens of the empire in which they lived?'***

Systems of ethical teachings circulated widely throughout Greco-Roman and Jewish societies during Jesus' life and the first centuries of

early Christian tradition. Luke's theme of discipleship is clear and has Jesus going even beyond the ethical standards of the day.

Both then and now, Jesus' instructions about accumulating wealth and possessions and responding to hostility can sound weak or simple. However, when we dig deeper into what Jesus is teaching, there is nothing passive about his aggressive commitment to non-violence and his repudiation of using wealth and privilege as power over others.

So, how often in our lives do we feel powerless when we are up against wealth, privilege, and violence? Jesus' teaching is radical because he invites us into a very active and powerful response to these things. As disciples, we are not asked to roll over and accept violence; instead, Jesus lists the ways we may be attacked and then tells us to actively do something additional, something that those who oppose us do not expect. I am sure that the present situation between Russia and Ukraine would hope that non-violent action will directly combat the dark underbelly of materialism and hostility. This has been proven effective in other large and small ways. The website '[stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)' says that if we are faced with bullying in schools and in public places, being an **upstander** — someone who intervenes, interrupts, or says something to stop the activity — instead of a **bystander** — someone who watches and does nothing — significantly curtails bullying. The life of the late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu also showed us numerous examples of non-violent response, especially in his longstanding work of opposing the state-sponsored racism known as **apartheid** in his native South Africa. Jesus, of course, gives us other examples in our Gospel this weekend.

An individual making a non-violent response makes a difference, and a group of people does even more. This is where our behaviour as disciples is key. Both Jesus and Archbishop Emeritus Tutu teach us how to actively counter violence with non-violence. This leads us to wonder what the world would look like if we actually did this as individuals, groups, and communities? People notice how and when we respond to the violence and corruption of the world around us. When we reaffirm our Baptismal and membership vows in the words of the Covenant, we say that we will persevere in resisting evil and that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves. ***This is our call to action.*** May we follow Jesus now as disciples in this modern world, transforming it with God's help.

***AMEN.***

## **PRAYERS**

Almighty God, help us to hold high the standard of your teaching, even when it is hard to apply to our modern way of life. May we strive to never lower your standards, or to change what you teach, but to pray diligently for a realistic understanding of what you want for us in every aspect of our lives.

Gracious God, we pray for your blessing on our congregations and for your presence to be seen clearly in what we do and say each day. We pray that your joy and love will flow freely in and through us, and that we might never be seen by those around us as falling short of the teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Creator God, as we see the situation in Ukraine, we pray for your world, we ask that you take from us all hatred and prejudice. Give us your spirit of love for all people whatever their race or creed. Drive away despair from our politics, revive our dreams of justice and truth, and restore our passion for what is good and right. Establish your just and gentle rule throughout the world especially where there is conflict; when peace seems so far away and so many have lost everything, we know that you can provide hope for a peaceful future.

Father God, we pray for our local communities. We ask that each of us will make use of the individual talents you have provided, to enable each chapel or church group to flourish as a witness to you, so that we can serve our friends and neighbours who are in need.

Loving God, we ask for your healing touch on all who are ill or suffering. We especially pray for those we know who are experiencing emotional pain, or are broken in spirit, because of personal or family problems. Almighty God, we ask you to draw close to all of those mentioned so that they may be aware of your healing presence, and we ask you to provide your peace and comfort for them at this time.

Merciful God, give courage and faith to all those who have been bereaved either recently or at this time of year. We pray that by sharing their concerns and grief with you they may find the strength to face the future.

Everlasting God, send us out into the world, renewed by our worship and strengthened by our fellowship, so that we may be a witness to

the Gospel of your son Jesus Christ and bring healing and reconciliation to our wounded world.

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

**Amen.**