

WITHINGTON METHODIST CHURCH NEWSLETTER

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Reflection from Krystyna

'As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.' Zechariah 9,11-12

Dear Friends,

It's amazing how often you can read the Bible and still come across phrases that trigger off new ideas. One of my newest favourite Bible verses is a line from the book of Zechariah: 'Return to your fortress, o you prisoners of hope, I will restore twice as much to you'. What really spoke to me was the phrase 'prisoners of hope' - what a strange and powerful image! It reminds us that no matter how we might feel at the moment, and perhaps some of us are a bit discouraged, frustrated, or worried - we are all called to be prisoners of God's hope. We are wrapped up in hope, caught up in hope, we are imprisoned in hope - there is no escaping the life changing hope that God has given us in Jesus.

But how does one become a prisoner of hope? First of all, you need a prison. Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness. For hope to exist in our lives there has to be darkness. For hope to be real, there has to be a prison. And we, in the prison. I'm sure we are all respectable, law-abiding citizens, but for the past three months many of us have felt like we have been under house arrest, we have completely lost control over our lives. I'm wondering if maybe this 'prison experience' will help us to become more hopeful, faithful followers of Jesus.

I would like to share with you a story that explains what it means to be a prisoner of hope:

When Hugo Gryn was a young boy his whole family were sent to Auschwitz. For a while he and his father shared a barracks. In spite of the unspeakable horror, oppression and hardship one evening one of the inmates reminded them that tonight was the first night of Hanukkah, the Jewish feast of lights. Hugo's father constructed a little menorah from scrap metal. For a wick he took some threads from his prison uniform and instead of a proper candle he decided to use butter. At this point Hugo, who was constantly hungry, protested to his father - what a waste! How could he use the little food they had to light a stupid candle, wouldn't it make more sense to share the butter on a piece of bread than burn it? At this moment Hugo's father spoke words the teenager never forgot: 'My son, you can live three days without water, you can live three weeks without food, but you cannot live for three minutes without hope.'

Sadly, Hugo's father didn't survive the war, but until the very end he remained a prisoner, not of Nazi Germany, but of hope. After the war Hugo moved to London, where for many years he was a well-liked and highly respected rabbi. He regularly appeared on BBC Radio 4 where he had his own programme called... 'Three minutes of hope'.

Being a prisoner of hope is a conscious choice. Hope is planting a tree knowing that we will be feeding the worms under the tree before it starts yielding fruit - we need to decide whether we want to focus on the worms or the vision of our tree in full bloom. As someone once said: 'hope is rooted in faith with feet mired in suffering' and again - we need to choose whether we want to focus all our energy and attention on the mud under our feet or raise our heads and look at the sky.

Wishing you strength for today and hope for tomorrow,

Rev. Krystyna



Reflection from Caroline Wickens

Have you ever read Psalm 119 right the way through? It's the longest psalm in the book, at 176 verses, and it's an acrostic poem. It consists of 22 sets of eight verses, and in each set, every line begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Today, our lectionary brings us verses 105 – 112, and in Hebrew, all the verses start with the letter n.

(Please quote psalm 119:105 – 112)

The whole psalm is a meditation on the blessings of God's law. 'Law' is not always the best word to translate the Hebrew torah, because when we hear about laws we tend to think of a long list of rules. God's torah is much more like a blueprint for how to live our lives well. The images in this section of the psalm help us see that.

God's word is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path. When I was young, living in the country, I rode a bike (still do, actually, just not as fast these days!) I remember riding home from a friend's, in the darkness between villages, no street lights, just the glimmer of my bicycle lamp lighting up the road in front of me. It was enough to enable me to see where I was going, and get home safely – and that's what the psalm wants us to understand about God's word to us. It enables us to see where we are going in life, and get home safely.

God's decrees are our heritage, a precious inheritance passed down from one generation to the next. One of my precious things is a tiny, hand-coloured photo of my great-grandmother, who was also named Caroline. It's come down in the family to me, and I treasure it. The idea of heritage is another lovely picture to help us make sense of the Israelite understanding of God's law. It's like a precious gift, handed on through careful teaching because it's so valuable and important.

These verses sit alongside the Gospel reading, the well-known parable of the Sower. It too speaks of the wonderful gift of God's word, and how, buried in the right soil, it can bear rich fruit. The psalm helps us see the same truth: God's word is the light that banishes darkness, the life-changing inheritance, the seed of promise which can grow to maturity in our lives.

Zoom Worship and Social

As usual, the site will open at 6pm. and worship will start at 6.30. Here are the details-

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84344057526?pwd=Z3d0ZW90TUlnZhdITktrZmtjZ3grUT09>

Meeting ID: 843 4405 7526

Password: 1901

Or dial in on your mobile with the following number and codes-

+442039017895,

84344057526 #, 0#, 1901#

Nick has also arranged a social meet up from 8-9pm with the following joining details-

<https://zoom.us/j/99859831840?pwd=LzVNZko5RUhEc3hxeK12TERhR1B1QT09>

Meeting ID: 998 5983 1840

Password 124

Family News

Last weekend Mercy Bedu-Ado returned to her home in Denmark. She has been worshipping with us for 2 years and we are sorry to see her go, more so because there was no opportunity to say a goodbye. We send her our love and very best wishes.



Prayer Concerns

This week we remember in our prayers-

Those who wrestle with mental health issues, that God will grant them support, care, understanding and love.

Refugees and asylum seekers affected by the pandemic.

Medical workers in Greater Manchester and around the world.

Those suffering financial hardships.

Those who face an uncertain future.

Those who are overwhelmed by anxiety and stress.

Heather and family.

A bit of fun – Bible People Pairs

Untangle the below to reveal two names of well-known Bible pairs. Two names have been woven together in each line. Can you separate them? You do not need to change the order of any of the letters.

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|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. ADEAVEM | 6. DESLAIMSLOANH | 11. MAMARRTYHA |
| 2. GODALVIAITDH | 7. CABAIELN | 12. SANAPAPNHIIRAAS |
| 3. BROUTAHZ | 8. ABSRAAHRAMAH | 13. ISISHAMAAECL |
| 4. JESACAOUB | 9. MOASREONS | 14. RACLEHEALH |
| 5. SIPLAUASL | 10. PARIQUISCILLALA | 15. CJOASLHEUBA |

ANSWERS – 1. Adam & Eve, 2. David & Goliath, 3. Ruth & Boaz, 4. Jacob & Esau, 5. Paul & Silas, 6. Samson & Delilah, 7. Cain & Abel, 8. Abraham & Sarah, 9. Moses & Aaron, 10. Aquila & Priscilla, 11. Mary & Martha, 12. Ananias & Sapphira, 13. Isaac & Ishmael, 14. Rachel & Leah, 15. Joshua & Caleb.