Marksman February 2021



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From the Manse

Happy New Year!

I wonder if you started the New Year full of hope and optimism or with concern and anxieties still pressing in on you because of Covid 19?

Traditionally New Year is a time of looking forward with anticipation to what lies ahead, and also looking back and remembering people and times long ago. Both are especially pertinent this year.

Life is a mixture of high points and low points, of mountain top experiences (sometimes literally), and of being down in the valley. In reality, at the top of the mountain, the views are terrific, there is a real sense of achievement, and figuratively, well, life is great, all is going well, and we are pleased with how things are going. In the valleys, life is more of a slog. Many people think 2020 was a long slog, with restrictions and isolation and masks and everything that has gone with the Covid 19 pandemic, and already 2021 is seeming more of the same.

The Bible talks a lot about valleys – physical valleys, and metaphorical ones. And although it can seem hard work plodding on through the valley it is then that God can help us grow. King Ahab was a king of Israel, and he was being attacked by the Syrians and their allies. One year they attacked and God led the Israelites to a surprising victory against them. The following year the enemies reassessed their plans, and decided they had lost the previous year because the Israelite God was a God of the hills, and had fought with the Israelites, so they devised new plans and attacked in the middle of a large plain. This time, again, the Israelites were vastly outnumbered, but God led them to victory. (You can read the full story in 1st Kings 20). They learnt, as their enemies did that their God was a God of the hills **and** a God of the valleys. We are reminded of Psalm 23:4 "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me".

Our God is the God of our discouragement. Most of our lives are not lived on the mountain tops, they are mostly lived in the valleys, in the mundane, in the humdrum of normal life, free of excitement. Since that may be especially true this year, it is important for us to remember that the down points are an inevitable part of being human. Depression,

disappointment, distractions and despair are all part of normal human life. They are not a punishment from God because we have done something wrong. Even when we are at the centre of God's plan difficulties arise. Jesus was himself tempted by the devil, (Luke 4:1-13). In 1st Peter 4:12 we read, "My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering," in John 16:33, Jesus himself said, "The world will make you suffer".

So, don't be surprised when life is tough, that's just life. It's part of living in a broken, fallen world. These times happen to everyone, and many people are struggling at the moment. But God helps us in our troubles, Psalm 46 tells us "God is our shelter and our strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So, we will not be afraid.... The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

St Paul tells us how to cope when life is tough – he says to put on the armour of God, including the helmet of salvation. Salvation is our ultimate weapon. No matter what happens today, we will spend eternity with God. So, release your troubles to God. Put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation. Not just salvation from sin, but the hope and assurance of salvation – which can impact on our daily lives, breaking through like a ray of sunshine breaks through the clouds. The physical helmet protects the cyclist's head, the helmet of salvation protects our soul, with it we have the power to live a spirit filled, joy filled life, keeping our eyes focussed on what is eternal, not on the next tussock of grass, or puddle in front of you, or on the weeks of restrictions that lie ahead.

May God's grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus, and may he comfort and sustain you.

Your friend and minister, Sonia

Worship Matters

All Church services and a 'Word 4 Wednesday' are only available online at the moment due to the Covid-19 restrictions. It is not anticipated that we will be resuming in-person services in Church any time soon. Please access services via our website at Stmarksoldhall.org.uk or via our facebook page, or on You tube.

Lent

Lent begins on Wednesday 17th February, which is Ash Wednesday. Holy week begins with Palm Sunday on 28th March, with Easter Sunday being the 4th April.

There will be services throughout Holy Week, which will be available online, and hopefully in Church – if the Covid 19 regulations permit. More information closer to the time.

Foodbank

Thank you to all those who have been donating to the Renfrewshire Foodbank.

In the current lockdown they are not accepting any donations of products, although financial donations can be given at https://renfrewshire.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/
I will let you know when they start accepting donations of food/cleaning products/toiletries again.

Thank you Sonia

Peter's News

Christmas 2020 will certainly be remembered as being very different. Everything about the run up to Christmas and Christmas day itself was strange and not what we are used to. Online services, limited numbers in church, and no carol singing were all part of what made Christmas at church challenging. But we were still able to celebrate, whether with less people or online or through phone calls, we still celebrated Christmas Day. Because no matter what is going on in the world, the joy of Christmas cannot be ignored. Recognising that the love of God was shared with us. God became flesh. It is great joy that is "for all people". Hope was born. We are reminded that God is bigger than anything going on in the world.

During the Advent there were still a lot of things going on. The church was able to host the schools end of term service. From the church sanctuary I was able to "see" all the young people from Ralston primary school in their own classrooms. At the service we were looking at what would make a perfect Christmas and had classes voting on what they would prefer from two options. I then spoke about how Christmas this year might not be perfect but there were still a lot we can enjoy. The discussion then moved to the first Christmas morning with Mary and Joseph having a baby in a strange town staying with the animals, which was not perfect for them. It was not perfect for them but it was how God planned it all so it was perfect.

Throughout advent TRASH has still been going on through Zoom and still have the same group of young people coming along every Sunday night. In the run up to Christmas we were looking at how different people prepared for that first Christmas. Since the New Year we have been studying the book of Ecclesiastes and some of the challenging passages in that book. We will be looking at other material over the next few weeks and then start to look toward to Easter when we enter Lent.

As we look ahead to Easter, we would normally be preparing for our holiday club. Plans were in place last year to run our holiday club only for them to be postponed because of the start of lockdown. This year we won't be in a place where we can run the holiday club as usual but I am keen that we try and do an online holiday club in some form. I do not want us to have two years where we don't run a holiday club. A lot

of the local children will be used to doing lessons online as well as meeting with youth organisations and clubs digitally. At the moment we are working out the best ways to do this, to provide engagement for the young people as well as their families.

Something that we did during the tighter restrictions was to hold church quizzes online. I am planning on running a couple of these over the next few weeks. These were fun events that allowed people from the church to interact with each other, even when we cannot meet up. Times and dates of these will be on the church website and facebook page.

I have just started to read through the book of Ezra- where the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem after their time in captivity and exile. They had been taken away from their normal life and routine and for 70 years were far from their home towns and from Jerusalem where they would go to worship God. It was a time of renewal and rebuilding for the Israelites, they were starting over. They did not start the reconstruction by rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem or the palaces, they began by building the Altar where they could offer their worship to God. They rebuild the place of worship so that people could reconnect with each other and with God.

This last year we have been taken out of our normal life and routine and it has been difficult for everyone and we will be living with the current restrictions for a time. However, we can look forward to a time of renewal, like the Israelites did, when we are able to come together as a church family to again offer our worship to God together. And a time to reconnect with each other and with God.

I look forward to seeing you all soon, God bless,

Peter

Bible studies

Hello again!

Our current Bible studies are going very well - challenging us and making us think!

We have three more studies to do for this session:

- √ 6 February
- √ 20 February
- √ 6 March

We will then break for two weeks and pick up again after Easter. These will run for 6 weeks

- √ 17 April
- ✓ 1 May
- √ 15 May
- √ 29 May
- √ 12 June
- ✓ 26 June

At this time the title of the studies hasn't been decided. However, you'd be most welcome to join in for this next session.

Books will be purchased(usually about £5) and you can have a book even if you can't join the group meeting.

This time round we are thinking about whether we continue just as a Ladies Group and separate Men's Group, but for now the invitation goes out to all.

Feel free to contact me or Bob for any information. We currently meet on Zoom on Saturday mornings at 10.15 for 10.30 until just after 11.30. More details nearer the time.

Thanks Irene

<u>Irene.pollock03@gmail.com</u> or <u>pollockrjb@icloud.com</u>

Finance report

2020 was a very difficult year for Church finances. The closure of the Church and the halls for most of the year meant that many of the regular funding streams available to St Marks for example, giving via the open plate, hall hire and the various regular fundraising activities which normally happen, were not available.

I am therefore delighted to report that over the year St Marks finances ended the year with a positive balance of £7748. This has been down to the increased giving's of the congregation and a reduction in our expenses. The Government furlough scheme was used with our employees, notably our cleaners Gillian and Robina and the organist. Further savings were made by not replacing our Church Officer with a paid employee. The monies recovered from the furlough scheme almost exactly replicated our "profit". The furlough scheme will continue to run until the end of April and we shall continue to make use of this whilst we can.

An equally important contribution came from Church members switching from weekly giving via free will offering envelopes to regular donations via direct debits and standing orders. This allowed the Church to receive regular income especially just now when we are prohibited from meeting together or in very restricted numbers. In addition, I would urge members to remember to use the gift aid scheme if you are eligible by being a tax payer. If you have any doubts please contact myself, Sandy, Julie or your Elder.

The positive balance will help replenish our fabric fund which was severely depleted following the manse renovation, however, there remain significant financial challenges ahead with a likely upgrade of the church heating system being required this year. I would continue to remind members to regularly review their giving's and use other fundraising channels such as easyfundraising,org and smile.amazon websites if doing any online shopping. We have raised over £2000 in the last three years via these sites.

Once again, the Finance Committee would like to thank you for all your support over the past year.

Best wishes, Gordon Forrest, Treasurer

●NOITULOVE

The ongoing restrictions means that we are still unable to meet in church. Eileen and Jen continue to meet virtually with the teenagers each Sunday lunchtime but regretfully we still can't meet with the younger group.

However, despite the restrictions and the reduced number of people that we could have in church we still managed to involve all the Evolution members in our "Socially Distant Nativity Service" I hope that you enjoyed the service and that we still got the Christmas message across despite not all being there in person. A big thank you to all who recorded parts for our disrupted telling of the Christmas story from Luke's gospel, Jo for the Scripture reading, Alexandra for the prayer with carols and Euan and Alasdair for the Christmas Story Illustrated using film titles.

After many years of helping with our young people on a Sunday morning, Alison McLintock and Lindsey Goodall have intimated that it is time them to step back from this role. I wish to thank them both for their many years of service and for their guidance to many of our young people over the years. Their commitment, support and dedication is much appreciated.

1st East Rainbows - Wednesday Night

It has been a while since I wrote to tell you all about the Rainbows. In September we started back virtually meeting once every 2 weeks on zoom this was to support the brownies who were meeting the alternative week to us as we share siblings.

In September we welcomed 9 new rainbows who joined us for the first time in a very different format. I was still delivering monthly activities for the girls to do in the comfort of their own home. Leaf Caterpillars, autumn Spirals, bird feeders and Stick owls.



In October we

Had a virtual visit from The Essex Reptile man and his wonderful creatures. The girls joined up with the 39th A Brownies for this. We made cakes in mugs live online. Made spooky lanterns, climbing spiders, paper lanterns, mummy's and did a science experiment with milk and skittles. We also attended the division Halloween sleepover.



November We made poppies with items in our house.



And we designed our own Towns as part of our construction badge. We had a scout leader called Skip who lives in west Sussex who tested the girls. He is a chartered surveyor, and this was a fabulous night the girls had all put in loads of hard work in designing their towns, parks, and streets. Skip asked loads of questions and the girls were able to answer them with a little prompting. The town planners in the rainbows show off what their local environments have, we had loads of parks, ponds, play areas, a castle, a school, the church and even purples house. We had flat plans, and 3D. The girls did amazingly well and virtually make this more of a challenge for both the girls and me as I had to find someone to help. Never could I have done this so well in a hall.



December

We joined the 39th A Brownies for a Virtual pantomime with Peter Duncan from Blue Peter (showing my age) in it.

I delivered presents to all the Rainbows on Christmas Eve from Santa as he had dropped them off at me to help with social distancing. Our risk assessment was passed by the Church of Scotland and the Safeguarding Team at Girl Guiding UK and we thought we would soon be back face to face Total Lock down = Virtual Guiding

January 2021

We started back with a fun night full of games and activities about money. Then we were joined by Zoe from Shiny Kitchen who taught the girls and some of the leaders how to make rock cakes.



I think I have the future bakers for the church coffee mornings here. We have been very lucky in the grant funding we have received this year. I have had £500 from Tesco Covid 19 fund, £400 from Neighbourly, £250 from Girl Guiding UK and recently I secured £670 from The Gannochy Trust Developing Guiding Grant for growing Guiding. These have been difficult times for us all and without these funding providers as a unit we could not have afforded to send home monthly home link packs since March 2020, and I thank our funding providers for their support.

I have had 12 new girls make enquiries through Go our membership system 9 who have joined and 3 whose parents want to wait for return to the hall. The rainbows as you can see from the photographs have remained active and busy and have completed, animal lover, Agility, Nature, Helper, Construction interest badges, Camp, Reflect, Make Change Level 1 skill builders, and we have awarded 2 bronze awards so far this year.

We have more virtual events planned and will continue to support and grow guiding in St Marks and the local district and division. If you or your child would like to join any of the units at St Marks, they can register an interest at https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/joinus/ Lesley S Barclay Rainbow Leader

39th Paisley Brownies (Tuesday)

Brownies have continued via Zoom, with most girls joining in with us each week.

Our St Andrews Night event was fun, with a selection of Scottish produce available at home for snacking, and a knowledge check of what we know about our country. Claire lead a chorus line of Scottish dancers on screen.

Our virtual pantomime in the lead up to Christmas was an absolute tonic. Well done to the ingenuity of Peter Duncan and cast for pulling together a family show which had us all chuckling along.

Since starting again in January, we've been focussing on the girls achieving their own interest badges, working at home on these over the school holidays. So far, six Baking badges awarded and more in the offing, as well as Out and About in the Dark.

As a group, we've started to look at Languages, and instead of the normal French, German and potentially even Gaelic, I've introduced the girls to alternative alphabets and sign language. We are learning British Sign Language (BSL) with the help of a work colleague, and we'll also learn a bit of finger spelling. We've all had a go at spelling our names using the Phonetic alphabet, and I've downloaded the Braille alphabet, so that we can see what looks like, while trying out our own skills in "reading" a few dominos with our eyes shut.

Our Skills Builder is about Living Smart, and that's got some interesting challenges around tools, shopping and job skills, which I am sure we will enjoy on Zoom. I'm hopeful that after Easter and the warmer weather, we may be able to meet out of doors face to face once again.

Stay safe everyone.

Sheena Tonner, Brownie Leader

39thA Paisley Brownies – January 2021



In December, the Brownies are usually very excited and looking forward to visiting the Pantomime. Obviously, that was not possible this session so our final meeting of the year was a joint meeting with the Rainbows during which we watched an online version of Jack and the Beanstalk pantomime. Not as good as the live performance but as good as we could do in the circumstances.

Now another month has gone by and unfortunately we are still unable to meet face to face. We have returned to virtual meetings on Zoom. We appreciate that many of the Brownies do not feel comfortable with this way of meeting but we keep trying to engage with them in the hope that they want to join in again when we return indoors.

We have been very lucky to have a new volunteer join the Pack. Maria decided, during the pandemic, that she would like to "give something back" and that is going to be with the Brownies!! Although Maria has not been able to meet the Brownies face to face yet, she has met the leadership team and not been "put off"!!! Over the last 2 months, Maria has joined in our Zoom meetings and has been highly amused at the antics of the Brownies!!!

In January, the Zoom meetings have seen us complete one part of the programme entitled Live Smart. As part of this we made simple pizzas and everyone agreed they were delicious.



We are now planning for more programme activities as well as fun games while we remain in lockdown. However, we keep hoping that we might get back to indoor meetings soon.

Christine Hair

Brown Owl



On behalf of everyone at Erskine I would like to thank the congregation of St Mark's Church so much for the generous donation of !37.00 which was received from you recently and was the proceeds from your collecting cans. Royal Marines Veteran Frank was delighted to hear of your very kind and thoughtful gesture and thanks everyone most sincerely for their continued support during this very difficult period.

I am pleased to inform you that the church has now donated £15,482 since you began raising funds for Erskine.

Over the last hundred years we have provided care for over 104,000 Veterans. Through the generosity and commitment of our donors we will continue to provide Veterans with the high quality care and support services which we believe they so richly deserve.

Every donation we receive makes such a huge difference and ensures that we can continue to provide a broad range of support and activities that enrich our Veteran's lives. Physiotherapy, Speech and Language and Recreation Sessions are key elements of this support and without you we would simply not be able to provide this.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Watret Community Fundraiser

World Mission

Christian Aid Virtual Gathering 2021

Christian Aid are holding their Scotland Supporter Gathering online. Join them on 16 February to hear about some of their partner work.

Netsanet Feleke and Solomon Woldetsadik from Christian Aid Ethiopia will speak about the impact of climate change, locusts and conflict on vulnerable communities. Also, on the programme will be new ways of celebrating Christian Aid Week. As well as a look forward to COP26 to think about how everyone can get involved in the fight against climate change. And you'll meet some of the faces on the Christian Aid Scotland team.

Please save the date and invite others to join. Email to register and receive joining instructions: edinburgh@christian-aid.org

Fair Tax Now Campaign

The Fair Tax Now campaign was launched earlier this month by Church Action for Tax Justice, a programme run by the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility of which the Faith Impact Forum is a member.

The Vice Convener of the Kirk's Faith Impact Forum, Rev Alan Miller, said: "The past year, during which the Covid-19 pandemic has shown in stark contrast the inequalities in our society and our world, challenges us to find ways to address these issues in ways that provide lives of dignity and worth for every person, serving the common good. A fair and just tax system that ensures that people and businesses contribute according to their means is a vital building-block for the development of a society and a world in which every person is valued, and where the fight against poverty, exclusion, hunger and disease is properly resourced."

Thank you

Bob and Irene would like to send their thanks to everyone who has been in touch via phone, card or email on the recent death of his mum. We have been overwhelmed by the kind thoughts and prayers of so many. It has been very much appreciated.

Prayer diary for February 2021

Monday 1

Our streets and people living there this week are **Springfield Avenue**, **Strathmore Avenue**, **Tylney Road and Woodend Drive**

Tuesday 2

We pray for all the young people connected with our church, whether that be through Evolution, Trash etc, organisations or school. Bless them as they are unable to share with their friends as they normally would. Protect them from isolation and loneliness and help them understand You are with them in all situations.

Wednesday 3

Word for Wednesday continues online. Pray for this time of worship. Zoom Prayer Group meets tonight at 7:00. All are welcome to join, and it would be great to see you there.

Thursday 4

Remember our Brownies and Guides, Anchor Boys and BB, as they continue to work with the youngsters through Zoom etc. Be with the leaders as they have had to learn to adapt to new ways of doing things, and thank you for their commitment and enthusiasm to keep going!

Friday 5

Pray for Peter and the technical work he does to ensure we have online services. Also for the CD/DVD ministry to those who don't have internet access.

Saturday 6

Ladies Bible Study meets again this morning at 10:15 for 10:30 on Zoom. Again, you would be most welcome to join us.

Sunday 7

Remember Sonia as she brings God's message to us. Help us to prepare our hearts to listen to what You have to say to us. She has now entered her second year of ministry with us and what a year! Thank God that He has indeed been with her, guiding, directing and strengthening her, and ask that He continues to do so over the coming year.

Monday 8

As several of our members, adherents and regular attenders live outside our catchment area, we pray for them and their streets and local communities. Remember too, our school pupils and staff, as they have a mid term break. Again things are quite different and there aren't many places to go, or things to do. Pray that they will be able to relax a little despite this.

Tuesday 9

We pray for the ladies of the Guild. This has been such a difficult year for them, meaning many have been unable to meet with friends and share a cuppa. Many of them are contacting each other by phone, and we give thanks that they are doing what they can to keep in touch.

Wednesdays 10

We bring before you those who are homeless, fighting addiction or struggling with financial or health issues. Lord, help them find You, and help us to do our part to support those in need. From all the good things You have given us, make us good stewards and generous givers.

Word for Wednesday this morning and Prayer Group tonight.

Thursday 11

Give thanks for all who work to keep our church running during this pandemic – pray for our Treasurer and Finance Team, those who clean the church, those who attend to the practical side of things and our Pastoral Team. We remember our Session Clerk and Depute, and the administrative work that helps us stay in touch.

Friday 12

We bring before you all mission workers throughout the UK and the world. We ask that you will give them protection from this virus as they seek to do your work. Be with the people they work with in various situations. Let your love be shown through the workers.

Saturday 13

In our Bible studies we have been looking at hope, and learning how to change our focus from circumstances around us to looking to God, as our ultimate eternal hope. One way of doing that is gratitude and we heard about a quote which is useful. Gratitude is to be lived as a discipline. Cultivate gratitude and it produces joy. Joy is a function of gratitude, and gratitude is a function of strength. Help us find gratitude in the small things around us today.

Sunday 14

As we gather for worship online we pray that we may feel Your presence with us. We give thanks that we are able to be Your church even though we cannot meet together in church.

Monday 15

We remember all in **Allanton Avenue**, **Alton Road**, **and Atholl Crescent** this week. May your love shine in to these streets and the people who live there.

Tuesday 16

We bring before You all we know who are in retirement homes, care homes, living on their own or far away from their families. Help them know Your presence, love and care during this time. Drop a wee line or give those you know a wee call if you can.

Wednesday 17

Lent begins today and lasts until 1 April. Help us reflect over the next few weeks on the journey Christ took and the culmination of Easter. Think about what that cost Him, and give thanks He did this for us.

Word for Wednesday online this morning.

Our Prayer Group meets again this evening at 7:00.

Thursday 18

As the pandemic continues, we pray for the roll out vaccination programme. Hopefully by this stage all those over 80 will have had their jag, and things will be moving on to plan. Pray that there will be equitable distribution of the vaccine, that governments will listen to the scientists and medical staff, and make decisions wisely.

Friday 19

We bring before you all the men in our fellowship. We remember those who have served St Marks faithfully for many years, those in eldership positions, those who are suffering from ill health, the younger men who are currently involved in supporting the church in various ways, and those who are on their own. Make yourself known to them today, and help them be aware of Your presence with them.

Saturday 20

World Day of Social Justice.

World wide situations flood our newspapers, TV and online platforms. We pray for those countries where there is poverty, famine, corruption and natural disasters which impact on the people and their economies. We pray for justice and for those agencies who work tirelessly to give people new opportunities to help themselves.

Sunday 21

A time for coming apart from the everyday chores and, perhaps tedium, and an opportunity to sit in God's presence and listen for His voice. Be with Sonia as she shares Your message with us today.

Monday 22

Our streets to focus on this week are **Auchmannoch Avenue**, **Blair Road and Balfron Road**. Pray for your neighbours if you live there.

Tuesday 23

Pray for health care workers, medical staff, scientists working on the vaccine, administrative staff who are helping with the roll out programme. Ask that God will bless their work, and be with exhausted and traumatised staff. May God give them peace.

Wednesday 24

Word for Wednesday online today. Zoom Prayer meeting tonight again. Please feel free to join us. Check with Irene for the link.

Thursday 25

We bring before You countries where there have been disasters recently. We think of Norway, Indonesia, South America, and here at home in the UK where people have lost lives and homes. Bring restoration and resilience as they work to rebuild shattered lives.

Friday 26

Once again, we bring our young people before You and ask that You would help them deal with the situation they have been thrown into this past year. Many are finding it difficult to cope and some are struggling with mental health issues. We don't know what the long term effects will be on them, but pray that God will be with them, and they will turn to Him as the source of strength.

Saturday 27

We are almost at the end of another month of 2021! Give thanks as you look back over the last two months for the good things you have received. Look forward to the hope of Spring, as the snowdrops and daffodils are appearing. Enjoy the beauties of nature that God has given us.

Sunday 28

We pray for Sonia, her family and her ministry here at St Marks. Today is Communion Sunday. Our service will still be online, so we look forward to sharing together in this time. Pray for Sonia as she leads us in worship and communion today.

Office Hours

Tue, Wed & Fri 11:15am - 2:45pm