

Hello everyone

We've had some glorious days weather wise over the last few months, haven't we?

And the manse garden is a lovely space to pause in during a working day and sit with a coffee and reflect on God's creation. For me of course that counts as work too.

Not just watching the lifecycle of the plants unfold, but all the birds that fly across the garden. Maybe I'll see one sweep towards the bird feeder, but then a second will appear followed by several more.

You will probably have seen a similar procession yourself. One bird finds the seed and soon others follow in its footsteps.

As I thought about that, I Realised that in preparing the garden, I also had been following in someone's footsteps too. My father was a keen garden and this week as I watched the birds, drank my coffee and thought about the theme of the holiday club-creation, I realised that subconsciously the manse garden-that's the ground behind the manse- contains similar plants to the garden I grew up in. Dahlias, Penstemons, Peonies,

Roses, fruit trees and grass. But more than that the actual shape bears a resemblance on a much smaller scale to that Gravesend garden which is now the site of several houses. Following in my father's footsteps just like the birds and the bird seed. But yesterday I took thought even deeper; the garden doesn't just reflect my father and my child hood garden, but it also reflects Norma and my lives since we got married. There are certain plants that we have planted in every garden we've had as we travelled north from Chorley to Banchory via Girvan, Perth and Echt. The list is quite long but includes a burning bush, a dwarf Rhododendron called Hoppy, Hostas to feed the snails, roses including a beautiful yellow rose called keep smiling, Dr Roope, a clematis and Astilbes. Walking in the footsteps of people and places that have shaped our lives is part of life and I suspect many of you will be able to point to examples of people and places that connect your life together.

But in that we are no different from Jesus disciples. Luke ends his first book, his gospel with the disciples returning to Jerusalem to wait for the holy Spirit to come. It arrives and there is a great outpouring of the spirit. We call it the day of Pentecost. But of course then

the disciples have to tear their eyes away from Heaven. Jesus didn't want them to spend their lives staring into heaven, he wanted them to focus on earth which is not yet heaven like. It's a place of needs and Jesus wants his followers to step into his footsteps and act in his spirit.

To follow in his footsteps. As I've said many times, Luke is very keen to show the two important commandments being lived out. Love God with all your heart and love others as your neighbour, Jesus said.

And that is exactly what we see the disciples doing in the reading this morning.

Pentecost has been fulfilled. Now we see the two commandments in action in the lives of the disciples as they follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

They are on their way to the temple to pray at the correct hour: 3 o'clock. Love God with all your heart.

On their way they see a lame man being carried to the beautiful gate so that he could ask for help from those entering the temple. Luke tells us that the sight of the man affects both Peter and John. They looked intently at him. The Greek can be translated as Peter and John stared at the man.

In the Old Testament Moses, Elijah and Elisha were not just allowed to stare at heaven – to spend their time worshipping God, they had to focus on the needs of the people.

Peter and John do the same. Love others as your neighbours. They follow in those footsteps by helping the lame man who jumps up and dances around as the three of them praise God near the temple.

The story is a marvellous picture of how Jesus followers are to show that the Messiah, Jesus, who can no longer be seen, is still around to help the needy through us. This may be a story of one man being healed, but you can just as easily substitute all the needy people of the world into the story or in fact all the difficulties of the world into the story.

This is one huge intercession prayer for everything and as the disciples follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we, through our baptism become part of that group and are urged to follow in Jesus footsteps and that involves two things. It involves worshipping God, but also taking action to help those in need. In the footsteps of Jesus we live out those two commandments he highlighted. Worship and action. It's not just about coming to church

and singing and praying. We need to act as well. But look at the actions of Peter, John and the man they help. Their first response is to dance with joy because Jesus, who they no longer physically see, is still helping them out. The two commandments are intertwined in life. Enjoy worshipping God in the way you find meaningful and at the same time help others.

But the story tells us more. The people watching were filled with awe and wonder. They had seen the needy man begging many times at the gate, but maybe not connected him with the needs of the world.

Peter has to explain it to them. This is Pentecost in action. Why are you surprised? Why do you look at us as if we have helped this man by ourselves? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sits behind this and that is the God who raised his servant, Jesus, out of death.

It is faith in Jesus that has helped this man and you can have that help too. You can change and be part of eternal life from now on.

A new day dawns in the story and Peter and John find themselves in trouble from the authorities for their actions of praising and helping out.

Following in Jesus footsteps is not always easy. Yet when it came to punishing them, the authorities found it hard to deny what so many had seen and so can only ban Peter and John from speaking about Jesus. Nothing more.

They were quickly back out on the street talking with their friends and Luke tells us that they were filled with the holy spirit and continued to speak the word of God boldly.

It's a reminder to us all. Yes we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Yes we follow the commandments to praise God and help our neighbours, but Luke is keen to stress these actions are bold ones to carry into all aspects of life.

Peace be with you,

Amen.