

Sunday Sermon 8 August 2021 – Fiona Gardiner

Lord, call us, teach us, and inspire us to live together in the flow of your love.

It's good to be with you this morning! I have missed you.

It was the water dripping through the kitchen ceiling that alerted me to the fact that something was going on. The dripping water and the unusual silence. Usually our sons were a healthily rambunctious pair ...silence was not a good sign.

In the seconds it took me to get to the upstairs bathroom I was imagining a number of disastrous scenarios. The sight that greeted me as I slammed through the door was a sink full of water, the tap still running and two little faces covered with shaving foam. The razor in Alasdair's hand was just about to make its first foray up his cheek. Of course the reason was that Daddy shaved every morning...an astoundingly interesting procedure apparently, so they were just doing the same.

Imitation, they say, is the sincerest form of flattery. We learn from each other, don't we?

I wave my fingers at a baby and the baby tries to wave back. We play peep-boo and there is great hilarity as the little one hides his face and then shouts 'Boo!' back.

Of course, it takes time to learn new things, new skills. We watch demonstrations (just as our boys watched their Dad shaving!). Sometimes there's a guiding hand over ours showing us just how to handle that saw carefully, how to whisk the cream without splashing it everywhere. How to sew or draw or plant seeds or do the washing up. Then, we're encouraged to try it for ourselves...and yes things may go wrong, we might drop a mug and break it, or pull up seedlings instead of weeds, or trip over our own feet instead of performing the perfect pirouette.

So much of our learning is this mixture of imitation, absorbing information and experience. New skills take practice and time and effort and patience. They need that magical combination of a having good teacher and being a willing pupil.

St Paul understands that we are just like children to God... dearly loved children, he calls us.

And like all children we are sponges, soaking up new skills, new information about living the kingdom life. Every day is a school day, the saying goes. Oh...and we're never too old to learn!

Our Heavenly Father has modelled kingdom living for us through Jesus. Jesus said, didn't he, if you have seen me you have seen the Father? And sometimes, I'm tempted to think I'd be a much better Christian if just for once I could really see Jesus, be with him and see his love in action.

Of course, it's much simpler than that. When we came home from our seven week sojourn in Scotland two weeks ago Nicki phoned us to see if we needed anything and appeared at our door five minutes later with a bottle of milk so we could have a cup of tea that night and breakfast in the morning.

A little thing? Yes, but it meant so much. What a blessing. Jesus' love in action. (DT is always reminding us to do the little things...)

Being with others who are followers of Jesus is very important. We're all different, but we're all trying to head the same way...to become more and more the people God calls us to be.

So I am hugely grateful for all the things you teach me, as I chat with you, worship with you, share communion with you, discuss Scripture with you, pray with you, watch you shine as lights in the darkness, as you embody hope and faith and joy even in the most difficult times.

And thank you that your faith and your compassion have helped me through bereavement and times of great turmoil, because in those times, you truly were as Christ to me.

Thank you; too, for the encouragement to keep slogging on when it would be so much easier to stop. Thank you for making the kingdom journey with me, and allowing me to make the same journey with you.

I'm sure we all have our favourite passages from the Bible. One of mine is from Matthew 11:

²⁸ *"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."*

I love that picture of the Lord being the wise teacher as we're yoked together: of learning how to match my steps with his; of following his gentle encouragement as I travel his way with him, learning how to live this Christian life. We have each other. We have the Lord. We have the Bible.

As we read the Scriptures and think about what we find there we are enlightened, blessed, uplifted and maybe puzzled. Sometimes perhaps we'll feel completely stumped...what on earth is the Lord trying to teach me through this passage, we might find ourselves thinking. Come on, Lord...please explain!

That again is why we have each other. To bounce ideas off one another, to explore the mysteries and the challenges of this huge treasure trove together.

I can't do it all on my own. I need the Father to keep calling me on, the Holy Spirit to jilddly me up, fill me with inspiration, keep me moving on. I need Jesus as my example, my friend and my brother. I need you to keep being as Christ to me and to explore the Scriptures with me. We all need one another....that's church, that's family!

And, of course, there's prayer. Being with praying people encourages us to pray too. Listening to others pray is such a privilege, be it in a Sunday service in Church, or sitting on a sofa during Life Group, or even praying on the phone with a friend. Saying my bedtime prayers with my parents is one of my earliest memories; listening to my Granny singing "What a friend we have in Jesus" is vividly with me.

*What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

I am who I am today because of the teaching, example and prayers of those around me. Good examples to copy and be influenced by!

One final thought. Paul talks about taking off the rags of our past living as we follow Jesus. Without soft-soaping anything he talks directly about such things as lying, stealing, idleness, rudeness, bitterness, foul temper, violence and name-calling. What must that early church have been like? Well...real, normal!

But, importantly, Paul finishes by talking about being kind, being compassionate, forgiving one another.

Following Jesus is not about not messing up. We all have pasts. We all do things that are a lot less than wonderful. But these are not the things that should define us and are not the things we should constantly be throwing in each other's faces. The past is gone, let's move on. There's something much more important.

In John 13 Jesus says to his disciples:

"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I've loved you, you must love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

This Christian life: the Imitation Game! Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery...let's imitate the Lord! Let's be yoked to him and learn to measure our steps with his steps as we journey onwards together. Let's encourage one another as we forgive and love and share and support each other.

It IS good to be back. I HAVE missed you. YOU help me to be who I am! Let's spend more time together!

Let's listen to St Paul as he says to us:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Amen.