

Sunday October 25, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

"Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. ² For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD." (Psalm 117) Let's pray.

Lord, we come to you this morning this morning to praise your name. We join with Christians throughout the world to praise your name. We sing songs in order to praise your name. We will listen to your word so that we might even more praise your name. With heart, soul, mind and voice we come this morning to praise your name. Please take away all distractions so that we can praise your name. Please blow away all our doubts so that we can praise your name. Please cleanse us from all our sins so that we can praise your name. Please join us together more & more so that together we can praise your name Amen.

Song – This is Amazing Grace <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPQKj2Zptr0>

Song – Great is Thy Faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAMa2HGGI60>

Bible Reading – Micah 5:1-4 (NIV)

5 Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

Announcements – 25th October 2020

- **Morning Tea.** It was so good to have morning tea last week and have a chance to catch up with people face to face. It worked so well that we will plan to have it each week from now on. We will do things in a COVID safe environment. And we need to work hard to keep our social distancing. And because we are outside there is no expectation to wear masks. But we will need two people to help out each service. So beware, you might be asked to help out in the coming weeks! But don't worry all food and drinks will be provided by the Church. But if you wanted to bring your own keep cup then that will help with the rubbish we will produce!
- **Face masks.** Currently the NSW State government strongly recommended that people wear Face masks if they attend places of worship but stopped short from saying you had to wear face masks. We would strongly recommend that you do wear Face masks in church at the current time.
- **Operation Christmas Child.** Last day to bring the boxes is today. If you have forgotten to bring them then you can drop them off at Koorong before the end of the month or give Kathryn O'Callaghan a call on 0424428 722 and she can arrange to pick them up for you.
- **Gingerbread House** is going to look a little different this year. The plan is to invite a friend to your own home and make the gingerbread houses together sometime leading up to Christmas. All you need to do is purchase the house kit from Linda Small 0422 014 250 for \$26 each (gluten free options available) and purchase your own lollies to decorate. There will be a short gospel talk that you can stream/listen to while you are making the house. You will be encouraged to post a photo of your houses on facebook and the aim is to try and invite your guest to a Christmas Day/Eve service. For more details please speak to Linda.
- **Prayer meetings.** Don't forget we now have just one prayer meeting for the church, each Monday at 7m on ZOOM. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89793950885>

- **Focus for October – Training.** Each Christian has been given spiritual gifts. So all those who come regularly to church should be looking for a way to use their spiritual gifts. But having a spiritual gift doesn't mean that you don't need to work at your skills. Hopefully we have done that this month and each had a chance to sharpen the saw so to speak. Now the challenge is to go out and find opportunities to use these gifts for the benefit of God's kingdom.
- **Training Event.** This Afternoon from 3-5pm via ZOOM or live at Church/Hall or via ZOOM Zoom access is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89056717828>. You only need to come for the topics that you are interested in.

Church

ZOOM/Church Hall

3-3:30pm Computer/EW (Mike P/Peter B)
 3:30-4:00pm Sound (Peter B/Jon B)
 4:00-4:30pm Sound (cont)
 4:30-5pm Music (Jo B)

Bible Reading/Prayer (Stephen T)
 Leading (Stephen T)
 Welcoming (Stephen T/Simon M)

For more information just contact Stephen

- **Bible Talks.** Would you like to think through how better to do a better Bible Talk? Come along Sunday 1st November 3-5pm and we will talk about the basics of putting together a bible talk and work our way through a practical example or two. This would be an ideal way for anyone (male or female, young or old) to think through the skills needed to communicate the Bible in this way. See Stephen for more information.
- **Hunter Bible Teachers Workshop.** Wednesday 18th November – 19th November 8:30 – 3:30. Simon Manchester will be talking to us about the book of Titus. For more details go to the Hunter Gospel Ministries Website.
- **JOY.** Friday 6th November 10-11, Belmont 16 footers.

Kids Talk – Quizworx.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZaY_1cgBYdmPsEyJjz9jblrY1bruUUP6

Song – While you were sleeping

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28le8EOGR1c>

Pastoral Prayer

Father in Heaven we thank you again that you are a Good and loving God, and we praise you for the way you sustain us. Today we thank-you for our church family and commit to you our care and needs. We pray for those struggling with ill health and ask for healing if it is according to your will, and comfort when healing is not forthcoming.

We pray for our ministers - Stephen and Jon; We pray that you will encourage them in their work, and that we will remember them in our prayer time at home. We pray that they will remain faithful teachers of your word, and good shepherds to the sheep. We thank you for our church at Swansea Congregation and some growth over the past 12 months, and that you will bless their mission of ministering to each other and to their local community.

For COVID-19 we pray for patience for those suffering from fatigue, and for skill and wisdom for those seeking to develop a vaccine. We pray that your church will be sustained and continue to grow through this time, and that those who are lost are still sought out and will indeed come to know you.

For the persecuted Church we pray for the Christians in Jordan. Converts to Christianity face harassment from the secret police, and surveillance of churches makes it difficult for believers from Muslim families to attend services. Despite this we rejoice that people have been coming to know Jesus, and we pray for continued growth in their Christian walk.

We commit to you our partners in Walaha, Vanuatu. We Pray for the integrated farming recovery project that it will provide sustainability into the future, for the leadership of the Church and village, and for the school as it seeks to finish the year's curriculum after being closed for much of the year. We also ask for an opportunity to send a team as soon as possible to build on relationships and strengthen each other in our Christian walk.

And we commit to you our HSC Students – Caleb, Juliette, Luke, Emma, Jannah, Phoebe and Tom Wylie as they complete exams over the coming weeks. We commit their future into your hands. We commit all this to you, the one true God and our Heavenly father, in Jesus name, Amen.

Bible Reading – Micah 5:5-15 (NIV)

⁵ And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders, who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they invade our land and march across our borders. ⁷ The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man. ⁸ The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue. ⁹ Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed. ¹⁰ "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. ¹¹ I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. ¹² I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells. ¹³ I will destroy your idols and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. ¹⁴ I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles when I demolish your cities. ¹⁵ I will take vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations that have not obeyed me."

Sermon – From Little things https://youtu.be/eih768oyj_4

Paul Kelly's song "From little things big things grow" tells the true story of an Aboriginal man Vincent Lingyaree and his victory against all the odds in achieving one of the earliest land rights claims in Australia. Vincent was a virtual nobody, from nowhere in North Queensland who stood up firstly to Edmund Vestey a third generation grazier & businessman, who was treating his indigenous workers very poorly. Then Vincent took his case to the politicians in Brisbane and Canberra before finally appearing before the high court of Australia.

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It took a long, long time to win his case. But after years of waiting, Gough Whitlam, Australia's then Prime Minister, came to the Gur-in-gee people and presented them with their land and in a symbolic gesture he poured a handful of sand into Vincent's hands. As Kelly wrote and sang, "From little things big things grow"

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Which I believe is the theme for Micah 5. From a little town God is going to bring forth a great ruler. From a small remnant of people God is going to defeat his most powerful enemies. From a people with little obedience God is going to change the world. From little things God indeed will cause big things to grow.

And that should give us great confidence today. For we are just a little group of people gathering today and around us are powerful nations, a destructive virus, an entrenched anti God bias and yet from a little thing like meeting together today God has the power to bring about big things in the Church, in the community and the world around us. How will he do that? Firstly through

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1. The Ruler God has provided (verses 1-6)

For our passage starts with a ruler who is powerless and defenceless. Verse 1, *“Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”* In fact our passage starts with God’s people being in a desperate spot. It is all hands on deck. Everyone needs to sign up and fight because God’s people are being surrounded & a siege is being set up with the aim of choking the life out of the entire nation.

And their king, their ruler? Well he can’t even protect himself, let alone protect his people. The invaders have stuck him on the cheek with a rod. He’s been humiliated. He’s helpless. And if the most powerful and important person in the nation is being treated like this, then the rest of the nation are in a diabolical situation. But wait a second, God is going to do something to completely change the situation. He will provide his people with another ruler

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“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Now you would expect a ruler to come from Jerusalem. That is where all the kings live. That is where the rich and powerful come from. But no God’s ruler will not come from the elite but the lowly. From Bethlehem in fact. A hick town of around 150 people.

A farming community. A town that if it was located in western NSW wouldn’t have a school or a bank but it probably might still have a pub. So just as one of our most popular prime ministers Ben Chifley came from being a train driver so God’s future leader will come from a backwater called Bethlehem.

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Now when we think Bethlehem we think Jesus and that is the right thing to do, but when the Isrealite heard Bethlehem they thought King David. David the youngest child of a weak caln from a small tribe lived in Bethlehem. And he went from the centre of nowhere to the centre of everything to become Israel’s second king. So with the current king being unable to do anything for his people, God promises to step in and go back to the source of the Davidic kings, back to Bethlehem to raise up a new ruler.

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But not just yet. The situation is bad but it will get worse before it gets better. ³*“Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son & the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.”* Israel will firstly be abandoned by God. God will do the unthinkable, he will walk away from his chosen nation, they will be on their own.

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Until the birth of this new leader. That will signify a change of fortunes. ⁴*“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”* In the past God has been the shepherd of his flock, Israel, now he will send someone to his people with God’s strength, with God’s majesty who will shepherd his people **on God’s behalf**. But he won’t stop with just shepherding Israel, this ruler will go global. His fame will travel worldwide to both the big towns and the small ones.

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For he will bring peace everywhere. ⁵*“And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders, ⁶who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they invade our land and march across our borders.”*

This ruler, this shepherd will raise up a number of under shepherds, 7 or even 8 of them. Heaps of them in fact. So at the same time God’s rule will be evident amongst his own people through a shepherd crook, God’s rule throughout the world will be brought about through a shepherds drawn sword. This ruler will rule by hook or by crook!

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Bringing peace. He will reverse the fighting and war that God's people are currently experiencing. He will overthrow the chaotic leadership that all the nations are experiencing. He will bring instead peace. And that is something that all of us want. Peace. Real peace.

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And isn't that what the angels proclaim to the shepherds? The shepherds, that's an interesting group that God sends the angels to don't you think, when they appear in the region of Bethlehem and say "Today in the town of David (that is Bethlehem) a Saviour has been born to you, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you. You will find him (not dressed in finery) but wrapped in cloths (and not in a palace) but in a manger, a feed trough". And don't the angels then burst into a Hallelujah like chorus, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."*

And ever since Bethlehem has become a place of pilgrimage for people throughout the world. Why? Because Jesus Christ, God's chosen king, God's chosen Saviour, God's chosen Messiah was born in Bethlehem. In fulfilment of this prophecy in Micah 5, God has raised from a small town a great ruler. God has sent his people a good shepherd. God has sent us the Prince of Peace. And in his first instalment that Prince has given us peace with God. And eventually the next instalments will bring peace between all men when he removes the source of all war, sin completely from our midst.

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The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 26 puts it this way. *"How does Christ execute the office of a king?"* And the answer, I think, in many ways summarizes brilliantly Micah's message. It answers, *"Christ executed the office of a king by subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies."*

Christ as King rules his people through a sharp two edged sword, which is the sword of the Spirit. The word of God. Where he brings a people to Himself and he lets lose his word throughout the whole earth to conquer the whole world. But it all started from a little town, Bethlehem. That is where our hope for peace comes from. And in Bethlehem's most famous son we find our security. In Christ. In Christ alone. The troops might be being marshalled around us. The problems might be building up and suffocating us. But we have with us God's ruler, Jesus, God's Saviour Jesus. Christ Himself is our peace. A ruler God provides &

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2. A Remnant God protects. (verses 7-9)

For not all of Israel will survive. Not all of God's people will experience the rule of God's promised King. But only a remnant. For in the nation of Israel not all of God's people were really God's people. Some just happen to be born into that nation but never adopted that nation's faith. In the same way not all church attenders are members of Christ's kingdom. Only a fraction, a remnant are the chosen ones.

So Micah turns to those who are the true Jews and he says ⁷*"The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man."* Those who are saved by God will be a real blessing to the people around them. Just like dew or light showers blesses the good and the bad, it doesn't discriminate at all. So having a remnant of God's people will cause great blessings to the people around them, even to the whole world.

Just as Abraham was chosen in Genesis 12 and was blessed to be a blessing. So the people of God will be a blessing to the people around them. But at the same time they will also be a bane to the people around them. They will refresh some and ravage others. Benefit some and overwhelm others. Because they will not just be like showers to the grass they will also be like a lion among a flock of sheep.

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⁸*"The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue."*

God's people will also wreak carnage among the nations. They will cause turmoil & trouble. Because the nations don't want God to do his thing amongst them. They want to keep living as they have always lived for themselves. And God's message of loving God with heart, mind, soul and strength is a good news to some but distinctively bad news to others. Good news to those who want to bow the knees and accept God's offer of salvation and bad news to those who want to keep on rebelling against their creator.

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But from that small remnant of God's people, God is going turn the world upside down. For some it will bring pleasure, others pain. For the people of God will polarise the nations. It will force them to make a decision. Will we follow this ruler or not? Will we trust in God for our peace or not? Will we accept God's offer of salvation or not?

And it all comes through the remnant that God has called out for himself. In the OT it was the true Jew & in the NT, the Church. But when you think about it, it is not really through us in the end. It is not that we bless or judge but as we speak and live the good news of Jesus before a watching world it will draw some to God and it will push others away from God.

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Listen to how Paul puts in 2 Corinthians 2:15. *"For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved & those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life & who is equal to such a task?"* You get what Paul is saying? When we the Church, the true remnant of God's people here in this world, when we proclaim the good news about Jesus, heaven and hell is being decided. Eternities are being worked out.

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So the Church becomes God's instrument in bringing both blessing and cursing upon the world. Some people hear the Gospel & it's like refreshing dew in the morning, like showers of rain from the Lord. And others hear only the snarl of a lion. For some people it is life from death; to others it's the sound of a prison door clanging shut. To some, it is the Father's announcement of our adoption into the household of God. And to others, it is the Judge's declaration of charges against us for which we have no answer. Do you see what's at stake?

From us, the little ole Church, ordinary everyday people from Nowhereville & Somewhere Town, destinies are being decided. From the little thing of sharing our faith in Jesus with our friends and our family, eternities are put into place. Heaven or hell. We can be the fragrance of life for some and the smell of death for others. Now that might make us want to shrink back and do nothing. I don't want to be the smell of death for anyone. But that is the job of the remnant. That is the task of those who have been saved. To pass on the good news of their saviour. To talk about their Shepherd, their King, their Ruler.

This is not an optional extra but our core responsibility. For this is the source of our peace. This is the hope that we can fully rest on. We now live securely and we want his greatness to reach the ends of the earth. But there is a catch. If we are going to do such a high & exalted task, we need to be equipped to do something as important as this. We can't just be the people of God in name only. We need to properly represent such a holy God.

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So we can't be just like everyone else. We are going to have to be different, distinct, holy. And so in verses 10 to 15 God again speaks to his remnant people and says you can't become holy by yourself. I have to do that for you. I am going to have to purge and purify a people for myself. And that is going to hurt. Because your sin is so deeply embedded within you. So get ready. A ruler God provides, a remnant God protects and lastly

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3. The Removal God plans (verses 10-15)

For at present God says to his remnant, you are too independent. You are too self centred. You are too self sufficient to do the work that I am calling you to do. So God picks up his scalpel and makes some incisions within the body of believers. For you to be properly fit for service I will need to get rid of everything else that you put your trust in, other than me.

¹⁰ *"In that day," declares the LORD, "I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots."* And the first thing that God's people tend to put their trust in is their ability to fight for themselves. In those days it was their horses and chariots, their alliances with foreign governments. Today it might be our alliance on the USA or on nuclear weapons or even the billions of dollars of worships, fighter planes and the skill of our armies and SAS.

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For so often it seems the sensible thing to do to put our trust completely in our military resources. And not on the Lord of the heavenly armies. But in the words of Psalm 20, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."* Micah says we can only trust in God like that when God removes our confidence in such things.

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And then God destroys our plans for safety as well. ¹¹ *"I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds."* It is easy for us when the tough times come to retreat to places where we feel safe & secure. In the days of the Israelites it was within the walls of the city or a place that could be easily defended. Today we might retreat to our normal routines, our houses, our Church buildings, our bank accounts even.

But that will not do if we want to be holy. So out of his love for us God might take some of those things away. He might expose us to the dangers around us and say don't trust in your plans and your ways, trust in mine.

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Remember what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:6-7, *"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

What is God doing when the tough times come? He's saying 'you need to trust in me'. He's stripping away all your own strength so that you may find your strength in Him. And he is getting rid of the things you might use to control your future. He is getting rid of your idols, the things you are tempted to put before God.

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¹² *"I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells."* ¹³ *"I will destroy your idols and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands."* ¹⁴ *"I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles when I demolish your cities."*

There can be no both and with God. We can't pray to God and also dabble with witchcraft. We can't come to Church and follow the ways of Buddha. We can't believe the words of the Bible and then spend more time looking at Google for our answers. God doesn't want to become beholden to other gods. So he will destroy and uproot and demolish anything, anything that is getting in the way of your godliness.

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In the words of preacher David Strain, *"Micah really is saying to the people, "If you won't smash the idols, God will. If you won't turn to rest upon Him and place your confidence upon Him, God will take drastic measures to make sure that He turns your heart back to Him."*

He continues, *"And now hear again, as you hear His Word, as He speaks to you this morning, hear that warning for yourself. Hear the Word of the Lord calling you to turn from your idols, from your self-reliance,*

*to cling to Jesus Christ. Smash your idols and flee to Him. Or, if you are one of His beloved children, God will take far more drastic action and **He'll do it for you**. He will bring trial and discipline into your life and it will grieve you for a time, for a season. You can be spared such grievous trials by turning from sin and self yourself and fleeing to Him. That was the warning that Micah was delivering. It's a warning we need to hear as well. You see, God is **far, far more committed to our holiness than He is to our happiness.**'*

Do you get that? God is providing the world with a ruler who has come from a little town. God will change the world through a remnant, a small group of people who will have a massive impact. But to make that impact he will need to change our little obedience into a great obedience, our sinfulness into his godliness. At this point in time God is far more interested in our holiness than in our happiness.

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So we need to be challenged to get rid of our self sufficiency & our complacency. And to do that we need to look at our prayer life. For prayer is where we attach ourselves to our ruler, the head of the Church Jesus. Run to him in prayer as your new place of safety. Come to him in prayer rather than rest on your skills & abilities. Prayer might be a little thing in your mind but it is a massive thing in Jesus mind. From a little thing like prayer big things will grow.

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And then we need to look at our Church life. Yes we are a small group meeting together today but do you realise this is God's vehicle to change the world. So are you just turning up or are you standing up. Are you committed to the work of God through his people? It seems so silly, so weak but in it is God's power and strength. And what about your spiritual walk?

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How is that going? It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will change you from the inside out, it is the fruits of the Spirit that will help lead us to holiness. Are you too self sufficient or are you growing in Spirit dependence? And what would it look like for you to depend more on God's Holy Spirit? To trust in Him & to look to him?

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It is in the small things that God will cause big things to grow. He has done that with his rule from Bethlehem. He has done it with the Church from 12 weak apostles and he will do it to his world through people like us. How did Paul put it in 1 Cor 1:26? *⁶" Brothers think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world... ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him... Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."*

Song – In Christ Alone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16KYvflc2bE>

Song – Live for the Kingdom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89LvReFill>

Benediction

⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

Morning Tea

Our morning tea is a vital way that we give and receive fellowship during a time like this. We don't want to be just consumers of Church, we want to be a part of the family of God. So why not give one or two people a call. Who might your ring now?