



PORTSOY CHURCH

FAMILY NEWS 7/7/24

Welcome to our weekly news bulletin, keeping you up to date with the latest information on what's happening in Church life in Portsoy, Fordyce and Sandend and also giving you a digest of John's sermon for the week. It is also available on the CFN page of the Church website.

If you know of someone in the community who isn't online and would like a copy delivered please contact John on 07941 511192.

Weekly Prayer Topic

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

Please pray for God to bless teachers and pupils during the school holidays. May He keep them safe, give them rest, peace, refreshment and enjoyment this summer.

Annual Thrift Week: Thank you to everyone who helped with last week's Thrift Shop and to everyone who supported it with donations and by coming along to shop. £2062 was raised for Guild charities and the Church.

Coffee 'n Company: Coffee 'n Company is back this week and every Tuesday morning from 10.00am until 12 noon. Please come along and enjoy a cup of coffee or tea, scone and pancakes and a time to catch up with friends old and new.

Monday Prayers: Our morning prayer gathering takes place every Monday at 8.30am in the Church Centre. Everyone is welcome!

Message from John Gow

2 Corinthians 12: 2-10

In the reading we're looking at in church this week, the apostle Paul speaks of a man who was shown visions of heaven –and although he's speaking in the third person, as if it happened to someone else, it's himself he was talking about. *'On behalf of this man I will boast,'* he says, *'But on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.'*

Paul's boasting though, it's not the kind of way we normally think of boasting. For most folk, boasting is a way of building themselves up to those around them. We see it all the time, in sport, in the media, in politics. But in this instance Paul isn't boasting about his strengths, he's boasting about his weaknesses.

And he goes on to write, *'To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh.'* To stop him from boasting about the visions he'd been given, he's given what amounts to a pain in the neck.

We don't know what the thorn in the flesh was. Maybe it was physical, maybe it was some form of persecution, maybe it was spiritual, but whatever it was doesn't really matter. Whatever it was, it was unpleasant, likely very painful – probably physically, maybe emotionally, maybe both. It might have also been embarrassing, for all we know.

I think one reason we're not told exactly what it was is because we can relate to it better without knowing the specifics. We've all got thorns in our lives, we've all got problems that won't go away. We might ask God to take them away, but still we're stuck with them. So it doesn't really matter what Paul's thorn was and it doesn't really matter what our thorn is, that's not the point here.

We begin to see what the point is, though, when we hear God's answer to Paul's prayer to take his

thorn away. God effectively says 'no'.

So what do we do when God says no to us, or when we don't get a clear answer? Well, we keep praying. Scripture is clear that when we don't receive an answer from God, we should keep on praying. Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow to teach us this lesson in Luke 18, where verse 1 says: *'Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.'*

Paul knows this this, so he prays, and he prays again. And the answer he receives from God is, *'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*

In this I think we find the point. The point isn't that Paul didn't boast like others – though Paul's type of boasting was designed to lead us to this point. The point, it's not about what Paul saw in his vision – if that was the point of this passage, he'd have told us more about heaven than just that he'd been there. God's message to Paul is clear. He's telling Paul that His power isn't just perfected in weakness in general, but in Paul's weakness, by Paul's imperfection... and by extension, our weakness, our imperfection.

With this, Paul learns that his thorn has a purpose. With this, he learns that even though God won't take away the thorn, he won't take away his weakness, that God would remain with him.

Paul learns it's more important to have God's presence, in the midst of the suffering the thorn brings, in the midst of all his imperfection, than to have the thorn removed.

So, Paul learns – and we learn – that not only does God remain with us, and with His grace he provides the strength we need when He chooses not to remove certain trials and difficult circumstances, certain weaknesses, certain imperfections from our lives, but he actually reveals His power, His strength, though them.