

REFLECTIONS FROM THE TWO CHURCHES WALK

The Benefits of Perseverance

Current events and developments remind us that life is never straightforward and simple. We have just come through a period of political uncertainty as we waited for the election of a new Prime Minister; we are facing a fuel crisis as we head into the winter; the inflation rate is expected to continue rising; and we are looking in all sorts of directions for solutions to our problems. We are now going through a period of national mourning with the passing of Queen Elisabeth on Thursday 8th September 2022.

The thread of adversity is woven through our lives and in times of joy and happiness we know that things can quickly change. Learning to cope with it is the challenge we all face. But learning the benefits of it is a great blessing. In the words of American author, Napoleon Hill, 'Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.'

Recreation

It is great to have time for **recreation** in our hectic world. A recent visit to the beautiful Island of Skye was an opportunity to meet new people, learn something of the stunning beauty of the Island, and reflect on life in the panorama of the teaching of the Bible and its light on our paths.

It was a beautiful day! The sun was shining brightly in the sky. It was a perfect day to explore the area and to top up our Vitamin D levels. We stumbled on the **Two Churches Walk** in Dunvegan which starts in the car park at the Duirinish Church of Scotland and takes 45 minutes to an hour according to the sign. We scanned the words on the notice board quickly and, ignorant of what lay ahead, we headed off with great expectations.

Alas, we soon left the sun behind. The direction arrows led us in among the trees, along what was at times a wet and muddy path. We soon **regretted** choosing to embark on this walk. We were close to concluding that we had made the wrong decision, and that it was time to turn back before things got worse. We hadn't read the detail on the notice board. If we had, we would have known what to expect.

Life is sometimes like that. We wish we could rewind! We wish we could press the reset button! Of course, we know that this is impossible. We must soldier on! The adversity is not the whole story! We must remember the words God has spoken on life's notice board in the Bible and His promise that 'when we pass through the troubled waters of life (Isaiah 43:2); that if we persevere, we need not fear because He will be with us. In the words of Corrie Ten Boom, 'When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.'

The Reward

Perseverance has its **reward**. We emerged from the trees into open landscape and immediately the uncertainty was gone. The struggle had been worthwhile as we paused at the **Millennium Stone**, a prominent viewpoint over Dunvegan village.



(The Millennium Stone & The Macleod Tables)

From the Stone we could see the village of Dunvegan and its stunning beauty against the background on the magnificent Macleod Tables – the flat-topped hills comprised of Healabhal Bheag and Healabhal Mhòr (see picture). It was a moment for reflection. We looked back and remembered the point at which we were tempted to go back. The whole scene in front of us highlighted the sheer awesome wonder of God's creation so that the struggle was soon forgotten.

The Stone reminded me of the significance of the cross on which the Lord Jesus died. The cross of Jesus is life's defining landmark! Along with His resurrection on the first day of the week, it marks the turning point of history.

It is here that we receive the 'reward' of God's grace when we navigate through life along the path God has set out in His Word and persevere through times of adversity and difficulty. Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the Light of the World. He is the great Shepherd of His people who cares for His people, and who by the Holy Spirit reveals to us more and more of the awesome love with which He loved.

The Rest

The view of the Macleod Tables was magnificent, but a more personal discovery was to follow. We descended the hill from the Millennium Stone towards the A850 road between Dunvegan and Portree and arrived at St Mary's Old Church, a roofless ruin of a church which was built in 1694 (see picture).



(St Mary's Old Church from the Millennium Stone)

Genealogy is a fascinating study! Who are we? Who are our ancestors? As we read the tourist information boards at the Church, we discovered that for a long time the north aisle and the sanctuary of St Mary's were used as the family tomb of the Chiefs of Macleod, with at least five Clan Macleod Chiefs at rest there. We had clan connections dating back centuries, making this a special personal moment, and adding a new dimension to the view from the Millennium Stone.

We now understood what the Two Churches Walk is all about. We understood the bonds of the clan to which we belong in a new way. We went off to what was home for a few days, thankful for the journey, and now to find **rest**.

Rest is what God promises to us if we persevere through adversity, taking the way of the cross of Jesus, and following God's prescription for the life of faith and faithfulness. We discover our roots and origin in the family of God. The names of God's children are 'written in the Lamb's book of life' (Revelation 21:27). This means that 'for all those who love God all things work together for good' (Romans 8:28). It means that 'God will guide us with his counsel, and afterward receives us to glory' (Psalm 73:24).

We reflect on the passing of Queen Elizabeth and give thanks to God for her Christian faith and example. Speaking at the end of the year 2000, and reflecting on the true start of the Millennium, the Queen said – "For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example." May we follow Her example! God does not promise us prosperity or the absence of pain. But if we persevere, He does promise us His presence, His power, being part of His plans, and finally our passage into the final paradise where we are promised permanent peace and the absence of pain.