

Sunday 6th September – NEW SERIES: Deuteronomy 6:1-9 ‘Homemade Faith’

INTRODUCTION

We live in unusual times. The last few months have seen dramatic changes to our lives in all kinds of ways. There has been so much grief for many of us – not just the grief of losing loved ones, but also grief at not being able to see family and friends, or losing a job, or not being able to do the things you love. All forms of loss can cause us to grieve. The whole way we do community has been forced, temporarily at least, to fundamentally change – and that too has felt disorientating.

Our church life has been no less affected. More or less overnight we had to radically reshape what Christian community looked like, and I want to thank all of you for joining with me on that journey. Many of us have been surprised by how much we’ve been blessed by that journey. We still miss some of what we used to do, of course we do, but we’ve also found ourselves being fed and nourished perhaps in ways that we didn’t expect.

It's clear that this season is going to be with us for some while yet. Whilst we've been able to open the church building on Sundays and for occasional other life events, the restrictions applied to what we can do mean that we can't yet offer face-to-face community in the ways that we did.

This is particularly hard for some, and less so for others. But either way, I sense that our best route forward is to embrace the current reality and focus on how we can be the best church community we can be in the light of it. Since most of us are spending a lot more time at home, the primary focus of our faith currently is how to live well at home, not just in terms of our spiritual lives, but also our family, our work and our other relationships. In short, **we need a thriving Homemade Faith to carry us through this season....**

...So that's what we're going to offer! Over the next 3 months we'll be reflecting together on what homemade faith looks like - homemade peace, homemade joy, homemade prayer, homemade worship, homemade relationships - you get the idea!

One of the great things about the last few months is the way we've been able to involve so many us in our online worship: every week between 15 and 30 of us contribute something important - readings, responses, prayers, photos, videos and other creative contributions, tech support.

I hope this will not only continue, but will actually grow. This series is tailor-made for all of us to contribute - I'll be inviting people to share their tips and ideas on how they've developed their own homemade faith to include in these services, and I hope that many of us will join conversations about how to put our homemade faith into practice, especially those with shared life-experience. There's so much wisdom in our community and I want to benefit from all of it!

My hope and prayer is that this series inspires us, and energises us to keep going with this current reality – in fact not just to keep going, but to see our faith grow and to see our community grow with it. Following Jesus is an everyday reality – and I’d love to see us all inspired to live out that reality in our homes and everyday lives.

To begin our series, let’s read a lovely passage from Deuteronomy as Moses, by now a very old man, encourages God’s people to continue in their faith.

BRIEF REFLECTION

It might seem odd to say it, but our situation is not so very different from the one God's people faced as they listened to Moses. They were about to inhabit a new land, and that prospect filled many of them with anxiety. Who would they meet, would they settle, would they be able to live in peace?

We too find ourselves in a new land as well. We too face anxiety as we wonder what that new land will be like. We know it will be – it *is* – different. There has been hardship and sacrifices, but also unexpected blessings. More simple lifestyles, more time in creation, a church life that now reaches directly into our homes.

And Moses reminds God's people that God is in this. They had doubted that numerous times in the recent past – but God had always been there. And Moses gives them this great reminder – **there is only one God, and this God is yours**. And our response is simply to love him and trust him.

But there's also a bit of practical advice. If you want to know God's blessing, if you want to carry your faith into this new land in a deep and meaningful way then **you have to put God at the heart of your home**. We need not just to know God's ways, but also share them with our family – as Moses says, talk about God at home. Find ways to remind yourselves of God's wisdom where you are.

This idea of Homemade Faith is not a whizzy title I thought up – though I was quite pleased with it! – it's well over 3,000 years old. It's the way real faith has always been. It's great to worship in a building: but faith is first and foremost something we practise in our everyday – at home, with your family, in your daily life and relationships.

Maybe, just maybe, this crisis has done the church a huge favour. It's forced us to go back to our roots – it's put the church back in people's homes. It's put God's word back in people's homes. And our homemade faith, rooted in the one true God, is well able to carry us through this season.

Dear God, grant us all grace to know you more clearly, to love you more dearly and to follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

To respond we'll sing one of our favourite hymns. But let's place the emphasis on the end of the first line: Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.... with you, in your home, right now.