

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley
Extraordinary Times
a magazine to help us through COVID-19
Issue 19 **July 26th 2020**

From the minister...

One of the things that has struck me during lockdown has been how important and useful the scriptures are in a real situation. It may be tempting to consider our current crisis as a modern and unique phenomenon, but as it says in Ecclesiastes 1:9, there is "nothing new under the sun". in fact, to quote in context:

*What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there anything of which one can say,
"Look! This is something new"?
It was here already, long ago;
it was here before our time.*

Certainly, the Bible is full of plagues, diseases and suffering. The fragility and uncertainty of human life is constantly displayed. Take Isaiah 51:6, for example:

*The earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.*

Cheery stuff, I'm sure you'll agree. But note the verse that follows:

*But my salvation will last forever,
my righteousness will never fail.*

And this promise is the common thread running through the whole of the Old Testament and into the New. Basically the message is: The world is a dangerous place, humanity is flawed, but God alone is good, holy and righteous. And crucially – He loves us.

In the so-called "developed world" of 2020, we often take our safety and security for granted. We have expectations – from going to a supermarket and expecting food to be available to us, to having the expectation that we will be looked after and cared for. We have developed a huge sense of entitlement, and we become angry and frustrated when we don't get something that we believe we should expect to have. The Coronavirus has demonstrated that such pride and expectations are shallow and ill-founded. Whereas last year it was commonplace to criticise and complain about the NHS, this year we have found ourselves putting banners in our windows to thank these same health care professionals for saving our sorry lives! Whereas last year, in the midst of Brexit, some of us couldn't wait to send foreign workers back to their country of origin – this year we realised that the NHS can't actually function without them. So we stood on our doorsteps every Thursday evening applauding them!

"What has been will be again..." as we read the Biblical accounts of the nation of Israel, we see a constant cycle of people becoming too proud and starting to believe themselves invincible. Then they fall prey to sin or disaster; so they call upon the Lord, and He delivers them. Time after time. In these uncertain times, as our former securities and pride vanish like smoke before us in the face of the pandemic, let us turn again to the Lord. Because we have this promise:

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

He's still here. He is our rock and salvation. In Him we will trust.

God bless, *Ralph*

Ralph's Prayer...

Father, forgive us

When we have become so secure in our humanity

That we turn aside from our Creator

Forgive us

When we have trusted in the securities of our material possessions

And lost our spirituality

Forgive us

When in our prosperity we have nurtured a spirit of entitlement

Replacing humility with pride.

Shake the drifting sand of our foundations

And lead us to the rock that is higher than we could hope to climb

Where we can behold You clearly

And meet with you again, face to face, upon the mountain top.

Thank you Father for your faithfulness

AMEN

What's On This Week

Sunday 26th

10am *Taketime Live* join in a meditation in real time, or later by pasting
<https://mixlr.com/taketime/> into your Web browser

10:45am live worship with Rev Ralph

Tuesday 28th

During the afternoon sometime Live message from Rev Ralph in St Paul's

Wednesday 29th

2pm Wednesday worship with Rev Ralph

All will be linked on St Paul's Facebook page and website

Prayers at 6 & 8

Continue to pray for the gradual safe opening up of our church for worship.

Please pray for

Geoff being cared for at home by his wife Jean and the family

Continue praying for anyone we know who has needs known to ourselves.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list



**Congratulations to Lyn and Richard Gorrige
who celebrated their 24th Wedding Anniversary
on the 21st July**

**And to Jill and Howard Mason celebrating
their 45th Wedding Anniversary this Sunday,
26th July**

Barry's Isolation Diary week 16 – More normality

Life is returning to normal. For example, this week I have been to my dentist for a routine check-up delayed from April. Though it was not altogether normal, since it consisted of prodding round my teeth as usual, but without the use of any fluids, no suction, no swilling my mouth, and definitely no high pressure jet wash plaque removal. Fortunately, all was well, although to be fair, as my dentist remarked many years ago the main thing I have to worry about with my teeth is metal fatigue. This is the result of having had the majority of my teeth filled by my early twenties, perhaps one of the less satisfactory consequences of the immediate post war diet!

We also sadly attended a funeral at the crematorium of our next door neighbour who died a few weeks ago. The maximum number allowed in the chapel was twenty six, all on socially isolated chairs, and with no mingling either before or after the ceremony. Shades perhaps of Church to come! He was eighty six and, up to just before he died, he was still riding his bike and, as we learnt in the eulogy, would often put it in his car, drive to Brighton and ride along the seafront, finishing up with fish and chips before returning home. The coffin had one floral arrangement which at a quick glance I thought was either his name or "Dad" but on closer inspection it turned out to be a bike in black flowers. So appropriate. Now, after nineteen years, we will have new neighbours.

We have also had our first purely social outing, taking coffee in Stephanie and Laurie's back garden with another couple, all six of us maintaining reasonable social distancing in the open air. This was a particular pleasure, as for the last thirteen weeks we have been having a virtual coffee morning together over Whatsapp, but actually meeting face to face made us realise what we had been missing.

Thus "life" slowly returns to normal and we will all have to decide what we are comfortable doing in this new normal. I read this week that they think the reason Japan was not as badly affected as expected was partly because they are not a very touchy feely society, preferring more formal means of greeting, such as bowing etc, and also because they practice the three "C's", avoiding Closed environments, Crowds, and Close contact.

Keep safe and God Bless, *Barry*

Easy money

If you're not supporting St Paul's yet on #easyfundraising, please get involved! You can shop online with over 4,200 retailers and raise free donations for us at the same time! Sign up now:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/stpaulsmethodistchurchcrawley/?invite=LRZ7K6&referral-campaign=c2s>



When the Music Fades

On the 16th February, four weeks before St Paul's doors were closed for the lockdown, we celebrated with a *Songs of Praise* service. We sang StF 437 starting with the words *When the music fades*. A strange thought until you know why the song was written.

In the late 1990s, Matt Redman's home church in Watford was going through a spiritually tough time. The worship band's musical creativity was on a high, making new songs for the local church which impacted church worship nationwide – even worldwide. "But", recalled Redman, "there was something missing. So the pastor did a pretty brave thing." He asked his congregation to consider what they were bringing to God in worship, or were they just there as consumers, soaking up the wonderful music. His belief was that the band and church had lost their way in worship, and, as he saw it, the only solution was to strip out every distraction, including the sound system and all musicians and singers. For them, that was when the music faded.

Matt Redman remembers that at first unplugging everything just led to an embarrassing silence. But eventually the congregation rediscovered their own voices, singing unaccompanied, offering up heartfelt prayers and encountering God in a fresh way. By the time they felt sufficiently ready to reintroduce the musicians and sound system, the church had found a new perspective on worship: that it's all about Jesus, and that it demands a response from the heart. Matt's song *'The Heart of Worship'* simply describes what occurred.

*When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come
Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless your heart
I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus*

Well, the music has certainly faded for all sorts of choirs as well as church congregations now. When we eventually restart services with a congregation in our church, we will not be able to sing together – a very strange thing for Methodists! However, during the last four months, those of us who have joined in Rev Ralph's services online, whether in real time or catching up later, have experienced God-based, Jesus-based, Bible-based worship. Yes, we miss singing together, but we have perhaps learnt more about what is at the heart of it all.

And singers and musicians haven't been forgotten. A Government funded study has begun into just how risky singing and playing wind instruments are. Perhaps a glimmer of hope. You can read about the study from the link below. *Joyce*

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/22/sing-funnel-covid-19-lab-hoping-declare-singing-safe?fbclid=IwAR22vIvM6fkqTtPvmSsIhpw6Fc3FrTZXjuxT-DGVBqIV00ivWmf9Rsd1-kk>

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