

07.02.2021



Dear friends

Well done

Many of you might know the story of Dunkirk during the Second World War. Around 380,000 Allied soldiers, mostly British, were trapped on the beach of Dunkirk as the relentless Nazi forces advanced to annihilate them. Around 340,000 of them would be miraculously rescued and be brought back home thanks to the Navy and the 850 little ships who came to their aid. 40,000 were sadly left behind.

This dramatic event has been an inspiration for many films. The latest film based on this is the film Dunkirk (2017) by Christopher Nolan. I was struck by this one scene of the film. It's the scene that shows the soldiers who just have been brought back to Britain after being rescued from Dunkirk.

They are walking on empty railway tracks as they make their way to their shelters. Their faces are grim and in deep despair. Their uniforms are torn and soaked. Their feet are moving heavily as if they are in shackles. Their heads are so down as if their helmets are crushing them down. No one speaks. The horror of relentless bombings they experienced on the beach; the guilt of having to leave their friends behind; the shame of being part of the worst kind of defeat; all weighing down on their shoulders. Then the camera shows a man standing at a table on the side of the railway. A blind man. He is giving out blankets from the table to the soldiers to warm them up. As he gives out the blanket to each soldier, he says to them.

"Well done."

He says this to every single soldier who takes the blanket from him; who looks at him with puzzled eyes. 'What do you mean 'well done'? We have just come out of the worst defeat of generation. We have lost so many of our friends.' You can read their thoughts on their faces even though no one speaks. Perhaps it doesn't matter what they think of themselves to this blind man. He just keeps on giving out the blanket and says 'Well done' to each soldier.

One soldier finally breaks the silence as he takes the blanket from the blind man. As the blind

man says 'Well done' to him, the soldier replies back to the blind man.

"All we did is survive."

The blind man pauses. All the eyes of the soldiers around him turn toward him. The blind man slowly reaches out his hands and touch the face of the soldier as if he is blessing the young soldier in front of him. And he says,

"That is enough."

The soldier slowly turns around and joins the line. The blind man keeps giving out the blankets, saying the same thing to each soldier.

"Well done."

Friends, over the last few weeks, as we go through the worst of this pandemic, there were moments when I felt like those soldiers who were evacuated from Dunkirk. Moments of when I struggled with this feeling of not being able to do much. While my friends were suffering and dying, I felt like 'all I am doing is survive'. Perhaps you can relate. But then I remembered that blind man from the film Dunkirk. Could it be that God is saying the same to you and me right now just like the blind man did to those soldiers?

When you are feeling sad and perhaps even helpless; when you are feeling that 'All I am doing is survive right now.' God says to you. 'That is enough.' He says to you, 'Well done.' Why? Because you matter to Him; because he loves you.

Those 340,000 soldiers who survived from Dunkirk eventually were one of the key reasons how the Great Britain could rise again and win the war. In the same way, we will have to build our community and our society again in the way that honours the sacrifices of our friends; in the way that reflects those priceless lessons that we learnt through this pandemic. But first, we have to survive. And at this moment, that is enough. May we hear his comforting and affirming voice who says to us all today 'That is enough. Well done.'

Prester's lockdown musings: Meant for Good?

Prester continues to share with us his reflections on lockdown which I am sharing with you below.

I wrote previously of how Old Testament figure Joseph knew all about having his hopes of release dashed, but how after two years all came good. This time I'm looking at what came after his release, and how he came to the conclusion that God had used his difficult experiences for good.

Joseph's obvious abilities and astute advice prompted Pharaoh to make him second in charge of all Egypt. With famine threatened, Joseph directed that a proportion of the crops be stored away, ready for the bad times. When those bad times come they also affected the surrounding areas. Joseph's birth family, who in due course were to become the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, were at risk of starvation.

Reluctantly, their father Jacob was persuaded to allow most of them to go to Egypt to buy supplies. He insisted Benjamin stay behind. (Benjamin was, like Joseph, a child of Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife.) When they arrived, Joseph recognised his brothers, but not they him. When they left, Joseph insisted on one of their number remaining behind in Egypt while the others went ahead to get the missing son. He also put silver in their sacks of supplies.

When Benjamin and the rest of the brothers came back, Joseph could contain himself no longer. Tearfully he disclosed his true identity. Ultimately, Jacob joined the rest of the family in Egypt, where Pharaoh gave them good grazing land for their flocks.

You might think that Joseph would have had ample cause to seek revenge on his brothers. They had originally planned to kill him, before switching to a more "compassionate" plan. They sold him into slavery instead, and covered his precious coat with animal blood so Jacob their father would think he had been killed by wild animals.

Instead, Joseph's reaction was one of forgiveness. The rise in his fortunes since release from prison had helped him to realise that God can use even difficult experiences for good. He told his brothers that when they sold him, "it was not you who sent me here but God." (Genesis 45:8.) God had sent him ahead of them to save lives (Genesis 45:7.) Later on, after their father Israel (Jacob) was dead, the brothers still feared Joseph might bear a grudge. Joseph speaks kindly: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20.)

These verses highlight the issue of God's sovereignty. This theme emerges clearly from the Bible, and is the foundation of intercessory prayer. But we should not interpret this in such a way as to make God the cause of evil. God in his goodness works against and despite evil. This is, of course, especially seen in the cross of Jesus.

We are still in the grip of the pandemic. I write this soon after the awful figure of 100,000 deaths in the UK has been announced. Many are grieving loved ones who they could not hold, kiss or even visit in the last stages of their illness. The livelihoods of many adults have been affected, along with children's education. Sadly, there is more to come. All this is still raw. I could understand if people find it hard to think that any good could come out of the pandemic. And

yet I believe we may dare to hope it can.

Already we have seen how people are more willing to help their neighbours with things like shopping or lifts to medical appointments. There is no reason why this should not continue. The use of telephone and video calls will continue for some medical appointments, helping the NHS treat more people in the time available. There are fewer vehicles on the roads, because schools are closed and more people are working from home. Less traffic means less air pollution. Although children will go back to school, the likelihood is we will see more home working. Less pollution will mean better health for those living near busy streets, and a slower rate of climate change. Over time, this will reduce the mortality rate.

The intense effort which has gone into making viable vaccines in record time shows what the scientific community can achieve. This bodes well in the event of any future medical calamity. Once we are able to look back and analyse just why it is that some countries have been more successful than others in managing the virus, governments will be able to decide how to better respond to similar situations in future. This has the potential for saving many thousands of lives at that stage.

I realise these things may be difficult to quantify. But if we cannot rule out the possibility of future pandemics, then neither should we rule out the possibility that recent experiences can make us better prepared, with hopes of a better outcome. In the same way that the Second World War gave rise to the United Nations, it may even be possible that countries may learn to cooperate better in dealing with such issues.

For the moment, it is too early to make definitive judgments. But I suggest it's better to live in hope, than merely exist in despair.

Prester, 21 January 2021

Zoom coffee and catch-up: every Sunday after the morning service

We had our first Zoom coffee and catch-up session which was a success after our Online Candlemas Service. The coffee and catch-up will be offered every Sunday after the morning service on Zoom. This is offered so that if there is anyone who just wants to have a chat with someone or just wants to say hello, they can come to this space. There will be always someone who will be there to welcome you and have a chat with you. But please don't feel that you have to come. We understand that life under lockdown can be still very busy and often demanding

with things need to be done. But if you would like to just say hello, you will be very warmly welcomed. You are also welcome to invite your friends. So please do feel free to share the meeting ID and the passcode.

Please note that the Meeting ID (which is 863 7839 1972) and the Passcode (which is 355688) will always remain the same every week. So you do not need to try to find the link every week. Even if you do not have the internet, you can still join via your landline or mobile phone by dialing the number provided below. If you have any questions or need any help then please do feel free to give Bob, our Lay-Chair, a ring 785836 or email him at purser.bob@btinternet.com. He will be happy to take you through the process.

Topic: St Peter and St Paul, Abington: Coffee and Catch-up

Time: This is a recurring meeting on every Sunday from 10.50 am

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86378391972?pwd=MllwWVh6WFFFCUFJEMFo1TEl0RERHZz09>

Meeting ID: 863 7839 1972

Passcode: 355688

One tap mobile

+442034815240,,86378391972#,,,,*355688# United Kingdom

+442039017895,,86378391972#,,,,*355688# United Kingdom

Dial by your location

+44 203 481 5240 United Kingdom

+44 203 901 7895 United Kingdom

+44 131 460 1196 United Kingdom

+44 203 051 2874 United Kingdom

+44 203 481 5237 United Kingdom

Meeting ID: 863 7839 1972

Passcode: 355688

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcYkiPeUNF>

Zoom prayer group

Zoom Prayer group meets every Thursday at 10 am. If you are interested, then please do contact Liz Kelly, our Lay Pastoral Minister on lizmk@outlook.com or 07745 604591 or 01604 636947.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81580208528?pwd=Z3dSWlIcEFEd0ljTFZ6OThKY0drZz09>

Meeting ID: 815 8020 8528

Passcode: 409450

Zoom Lent Groups

Bob Purser will offer a group on Mondays at 7.30pm starting 22 Feb

Alison Barnes will offer a group on Tuesdays at 7.30pm starting 23 Feb

Liz Kelly will offer a group on Wednesdays at 10.00am starting 24 Feb

Please let us know if you wish to take part by emailing Liz Kelly at lizmk@outlook.com or telephoning Dianne Ward on 01604 281264 and telling us which group you want to join.

Please pray for Baby Basics, Northampton

Below is the letter from Lisa who is one of the trustees of the Charity, Baby Basics. Please contact at babybasicsnorthampton.comms@gmail.com if you wish to find out more or to offer support.

Dear church friends,

I am reaching out to you on behalf of Baby Basics Northampton because we URGENTLY need help. This wonderful charity, which was founded in Grange Park Church in 2013, celebrated its eighth birthday on Thursday 14 Jan, and gave out its 1400th Moses basket starter-pack. The baskets are filled with essential items for vulnerable and disadvantaged mums and their new-borns, and are distributed across the county by partner agencies, including the NHS, domestic abuse charities and foodbanks. That means that 1400 babies have been given a safe place to sleep, families have been kept together and vulnerable mums have been given the choice to stay away from violent, dangerous situations.

This year, these vital services have been needed more than ever, due to the effects of the pandemic. The team started the year with 25 referrals and have seen on average 2-3 come in each day since. However, COVID has hit the charity hard. Whilst demand has increased, the lockdowns have meant that donation points have been closed, so basket contents have had to be purchased out of limited funds. Also, with so many charities struggling at this time, competition for grant-funding is very high, so it has been really difficult to get income, and now the financial situation has become desperate. We want to be here for another eight years, for another 1400 babies, but our future is uncertain.

What can you do to help?

We are reaching out to our church friends to ask if you would join us in prayer for this vital work please. Also, if anyone would like to help in additional ways, there are a few ideas below:

1) PLEASE PRAY. This is the best way you can help. Baby Basics is God's work, and we know He can move mountains, so please join us in:

- Thanking Him for His provision over the last 8 years*
- Praying His protection over the families in need*
- Praying for His provision of the much-needed funds to keep Baby Basics Northampton going*

2) Please spread the word. For example, if you have personal contacts with businesses who might be able to support us at this time, we would really value their help.

3) If you have any creative ideas for how we might be able to raise funds virtually during this difficult time, please email them to babybasicsnorthampton.comms@gmail.com

4) If your church would like to donate financially, or if any members of your congregation feel called to give personally, any donations would be gratefully received. We can't collect basket contents at the moment, but financial donations can be made via this link. <https://localgiving.org/donation/babybasicsnorthampton>.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this and for joining us in prayer.

Every blessing,

Lisa Smith

Baby Basics Northampton Trustee & Grange Park Church member

Bishop's Charity

The Bishop wrote about the charity that he has nominated for this year. The below is what he wrote. I have attached the details of the charity to this letter.

I nominate a charity each year to receive any donations or gifts I receive, and confirmation collections (traditionally at the bishop's disposal). Since 2018 my charity has been the Leprosy Mission, but for this year (and I expect next year) I have chosen Embrace the Middle East. You can find details on the flier which appears at the end of this bulletin. Once we get back to doing confirmations, certainly not before the summer, that will be sent to parishes and schools in advance, so they can include it in the order of service.

Bishop Donald

Keep safe everyone. God bless you all and all those whom you love. We will make it through. For God is on our side.

With love in Christ

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