

Keeping in Touch.....Easter 7

Thank you again to all those who have sent contributions. . Please keep the articles coming about anything you wish. Send anything to c.a.curtis@ntlworld.com by lunchtime on a Wednesday. Please note the change of deadline to a Wednesday. This is so we can try and distribute to those without email. Thanks, Chris.

Firstly an article from David, our Church Secretary.....

I am starting to write this on the day when we would normally have our bi-monthly Church Meeting. We considered trying to hold it remotely, but decided that right now it was a challenge too far with technology. We will keep this under review, and in the meantime many thanks to all of you who have been writing and publishing material to share with each other via newsletters, “Keeping in Touch” publications, and the website – particular thanks to Chris & Alan Curtis and Pete Davies for collating all these.

We are continuing to hold our Elders’ meetings remotely – all of us are now on Zoom. Those of us on the “Coronavirus Taskforce” have started to look ahead at how various aspects of our church and community activities in the building might start again in the future. It is an opportunity to take stock, review principles, and consider how we can benefit by doing some things differently. We intend to set up small groups to look more closely at different aspects of our church life, and to report back with practical ideas to help lead our discussions within Elders and the church community in the weeks and months ahead.

All the time, we are very conscious that national and URC guidelines are subject to change and that individuals or groups may want to move at different speeds. I know that some of you are finding this time of lockdown more difficult than others. For some of us, it can be difficult not being able to physically meet with family, particularly around birthdays and anniversaries. However, inevitable use of technology can produce some amusing moments. I had a video call with my mother in which she managed to touch the screen and give herself the face of a space monster, until I called the care home office to ask someone to go into her room and reset the iPad! Our youngest grandchild is just starting to wave but is so familiar with screens that his first unprompted wave was to a politician delivering a statement on TV. I hesitate to say which party they represented!

With best wishes to you all and your families.

David

Some photos from Char.....



Buttercup meadows and snail races!

Our church has a rich heritage as do many of its members who come from a variety of Christian traditions. The article below comes courtesy of the Denhams and the Curtis's.

Recently Alan Curtis shared with us poetry written by his father, a Methodist Local Preacher for over 60 years and this has prompted us (Liz and Stewart; and Alan) to recall our own childhoods and youth growing up as Methodists and to ponder on the journey which led us eventually to become members of The Free Church. This seems an appropriate time to reminisce because Sunday 24th May is known to Methodists as 'Wesley Day' - when on that date in 1738, John Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed' whilst visiting a house that evening in Aldersgate Street, London. Despite being accused of 'heresy and dissent', it was from that deeply spiritual moment that Wesley went on to establish the 'Methodist Societies' which were to grow into the Methodist Church we know today..

LIZ: I was born into a Methodist family, with both parents playing leading roles in the running of Zion Methodist Church in Boston, Lincs, where my father was treasurer and my mother ran the Junior Sunday School. So childhood was church three times on a Sunday - and later Youth Club as I became a teenager.

STEWART: My parents were 'Chapel' rather than 'Church' but not regular worshippers. However, they did think that I should go to Sunday School and so every [Sunday afternoon](#) was sent off to Sunday School at the same Zion Methodist Church.

LIZ: By the age 14 (1950's), we had both progressed to become Sunday School teachers and most importantly were able to join the church's very thriving MAYC Youth Club - which had its very own lawn tennis court!

STEWART: So weekends then usually meant Sundays in church for morning and evening services with Sunday School in the afternoons - and then Youth Club on Saturdays centred largely around the tennis court.

LIZ: Small groups from the Youth Club would venture out on Sundays to outlying village chapels to lead worship - mostly to small but very appreciative congregations. I was often called upon to play an old harmonium - or 'old Joanna' as we used to call it. What the small congregations thought of us I can't imagine - but we were very dedicated and always did our best.

STEWART: By 1959 University beckoned us both - me to Liverpool and Liz to Reading. With Liverpool University Methsoc, I continued to enjoy Methodist fellowship and worship at Aigburth Vale Methodist Church.

LIZ: At Reading it was Methsoc and SCM, so Church life continued at full throttle! In 1965, Stewart and I married, and we lived in Allerton, Liverpool, attending a large Church in the famous Penny Lane, where both our babies were christened. In [1970 we moved to St Ives](#), and the day we moved in we found the local Methodist minister, Eric Roe on our doorstep!

Alan I lived on the family farm in a small village 7 miles north of Salisbury. My family had always been Methodist and very definitely 'chapel' - 'Church' meant the parish church adjacent to our farmyard. The local Methodist church was just across the road, but the family worshipped about a mile down the road 'to help them out'.

As mentioned in an earlier edition, my father was a local preacher who continued preaching for over 60 years. The Salisbury circuit was huge and Dad would often make a round trip of over 40 miles to take a service. The circuit consisted of 60 churches and 8 ministers, so most pulpits were filled by local preachers, and Dad would be out most Sundays, twice on some. That was before the days of the Common Lectionary and so the same sermon could be used several times in different places!

There were no other young people in the local congregation, so I would go into the main Methodist church in Salisbury for the afternoon Youth Group and then stay on for tea at my best friend's house for the evening service (congregation about 400) and then discussion group. The leader of the youth groups was my best friend's father, and was a major influence on my life. I followed in my father's footsteps and took up preaching, although never fully qualified, and continued until we'd lived in this area for some time. University days saw me in 'Methsoc'.. Methsoc tea was a regular Sunday afternoon activity - from which I developed a distaste for peanut butter sandwiches!

During this time, I met Chris, a congregationalist, over a committee table. I continued preaching in small Devon churches and Chris would usually come with me, sometimes playing the old Joanna like Liz..



STEWART: So we soon met up with lots of young families and Jackie Ballard was one of the first neighbours to knock on our door to welcome us! And with Chris and Alan Curtis we shared a very lively discussion/prayer group, as well as more informal get togethers.

LIZ: However, after working hard at the Methodist church, and after a chance meeting with Chris and Alan Curtis in town one day, we finally made the difficult decision to leave Methodism, and attend the Free becoming members on the same Sunday (Pentecost) 1977 as Chris and Alan - and where we have been ever since, with no regrets!!

Sometimes too we'd go out as a Methsoc group to take services. I recall wonderful hospitality for Sunday lunches and teas. Happy Memories.

Graduation, marriage, and a move to Fenstanton followed. We worshipped at the Methodist church in St Ives where the minister, Eric Roe, introduced us to several other young families (including the Denhams) and we formed a very close ecumenical group with some from other churches.

The pressure of a young family and increased involvement in village life saw us transfer our worshipping to the parish church in Fenstanton for several years, Then, that chance meeting with Stewart and Elizabeth outside Bryants (now Townrows) which led us to say to each other ' Let's try the Free Church'.

And the rest, as they say, is History.....!

A Footnote from Chris.....

People often assume I too was a Methodist but I never really was. I went with Alan to preach in remote Dartmoor Chapels having spent the morning running the Sunday School at Southernhay Congregational Church. And then for a short time as mentioned when we first moved to St Ives. I first met Alan when he was Methsoc Chair at Exeter and I was Chair of the Christian Fellowship (the ecumenical umbrella Group). I believe when he first told his parents that he was going out with me he apologised that I was a Congregationalist! He needn't have worried as his own Great-great-grandfather was a Congregational Minister In Dorset in the 1800s! The Reverend Absalom Curtis!



A precious photo of our Fellowship Group in the Denham's garden featuring Lucy and James Denham and Helen Curtis—Helen in tears because Alan has just hit her on the head with his camera!!

From Mary Cox who has just embarked on this on-line course...

From Green Christian's Radical Presence Course

Jordan: threshold of freedom

Things will never be the same again. We stand on the threshold. Like the [householder in Jesus' parable](#), we have a premonition that a thief is about to break through the wall of our house – and, implausible as it may seem, we are trying to stay awake in anticipation it will come to pass. But it's not our staying awake that matters: what really matters is what happens when the moment finally comes.

In this pandemic, boundaries once thought impassable are being overrun. The responses of politicians and of citizens show that far-reaching collective resolve is possible, if we have the will. We can tame the ecological and social crises of our times if, as we did with the Coronavirus, we acknowledge them as the existential threat they are.

This is a time of consequences. We cannot yet know whether those consequences will be for better or worse, or a troubling mix of both. In fact better and worse may be distinguishable only with distant hindsight. But the choices we make now as a human race will seal our future, and that of life on Earth.

The Franciscan writer Richard Rohr explores the significance of this threshold or 'liminal' moment in [a daily meditation](#) from the Centre for Action and Contemplation:

Liminal space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. It is where we are betwixt and between, having left one room or stage of life but not yet entered the next. We usually enter liminal space when our former way of being is challenged or changed... This global pandemic we now face is an example of an immense, collective liminal space.

Writing in the [Financial Times on 3 April 2020](#), Arundhati Roy makes a similar point:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

The gift of this liminal moment is nothing unusual. It is given in every moment by God who makes all things new, but we seldom care to notice. For Christians, it is to be noticed most, and treasured, in the word of God, the Bible, and most especially in the medium of water: the Great Flood, the Red Sea, and the Jordan, by which the people of Israel crossed into the Promised Land. The Jordan was the same crossing-place to which John the Baptist returned, and Jesus, and all subsequent generations of Christians, in the waters of baptism.

We can consider the event of Coronavirus as a 'threshold moment', in our own life experience and in our nation's history. It stands with those other threshold moments in salvation history, with the near-submersions, at once miraculous and traumatic, that have been the making of the people of God.

It is becoming a truism to say that 'nothing will be the same again'. It takes more courage to say that nothing *should* be the same again, especially when wealth and power are ranged against change. However we may be heartened that only 9 percent of people in the UK say life should return to 'normal'.

There is a risk of underestimating the interests vested in the way things were, and their determination, by 'bouncing back', to evade the challenge of change. We too may sometimes be tempted to turn back to the familiar, but in the Bible God calls us on to cross the threshold of change.

CONFUSION

We're locked - We're not?
We're in - we're out?
Confusion makes the people doubt.
Oh Boris dear,
The rules they flout!
You see, there's idiots about!

Don't use the bus,
Don't use the trains,
Unless you have to
Still remains,
now wear a mask
And distance too,
But look what happens,
Jostling queues!

Transport workers
Pull their hair,
As traffic jams
Pollute the air.

Good work done
And as we pray,
'R' is less than one
They say,
Could it be lost,
Much to our cost?
Good sense all
Thrown away?

cc IRENE CARTER

ANGLES OF COVID-19—*from John and Mavis*

Less than 100 years ago there were still people who thought disasters were produced by works of the devil. One angle of looking at the present situation could be that sort of view:-

“The devil can always find weapons with which to attack humanity. But, luckily for us Christians, we have the solid armour of faith which will rebuff his actions – faith.

So he has had to try new fiendish ways to try to break our defences. What better way for him than an unseen enemy, so small that individuals can only be detected with the strongest microscopes.

It attacks the very heart of our cells to take control over them to produce more of their own.

And what is our defence against this enemy? Relative isolation from one another physically.

However, our faith is strong and helps us to stay in our places. Modern technology helps us to stay in touch. Neighbours help one another in practical ways. Prayer helps too and keeping our worship going in any way that we can. God is always with us.

What is hopeful also is that there is always a point of weakness in all the devil's works. The virus cannot live outside of the body for very long and is destroyed by simple cleansing.

One day, scientists who are working very hard, will find a vaccine which will put an end to this disease for good. In the meantime there are many clever people finding ways to help us and with the grace of God, we will be resolute.

Battles were never won by giving in to the temptation of disobeying the rules regardless of other people. This would be letting the devil win and opening the doors to chaos.

In his first letter, Peter tells us to remain firm in the faith and resist temptation.”

Prayer: Lord help us to remain firm in the faith in our determination to overcome all difficulties at this time. Help us to know that the present small sacrifices each of us make will help us through. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Overheard in the Free Church.....

After serving a little boy and his grandad, I heard the child say, “This is the Free Church, so everything is free. We can come again and have as many cakes as we like.” Grandad tried to explain it as best as he could to a disappointed child. Mavis.

Outside Just Sharing. Elderly lady to her brother - “You are lucky to have somewhere like this to come and chat and have lunch. It says it the Free Church – what does that mean?” Brother replies “Don't know—guess a bit like a Free House pub”.

Several years ago I was in the entrance space of the church and overheard a visitor say to his friend as the observed Tookey's and the Just Sharing shop “ This was a church once..”

“ONCE??? What a cheek!!” I heard myself think. They were standing right below the board which reads “The Free Church...” in 6 inch high letters!! John W.

Some things to chuckle at forwarded by Alex Wedderburn.....

Church Ladies With Typewriters [or word processors]

They're Back! Those wonderful Church Bulletins! Thank God for the church ladies with typewriters. These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced at church services:

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

Scouts are saving aluminium cans, bottles and other items to be recycled Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water.' The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be try-outs for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

Pot-luck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.