

Issue 19

26th July 2020

Together as One

Newsletter of the Methodist Churches in Hungerford, Lambourn,
Newbury and Thatcham during Coronavirus Pandemic

Verse for the week

'Now he had to go through Samaria. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to collect water, Jesus said to her (John 4: 4 and 6-7a)

A chance meeting?

One of the many things I have missed during recent months is those serendipitous encounters with strangers – people you may meet only once in life. Such meetings used to happen in the street, in the park, at the gathering after a funeral and all of these have stopped as we have had to avoid being too close to one another and for too long. I have a good sense of whether people want to talk and seem to know how to draw them out – how to move the conversation from the mundane and trivial to touch upon things I think really matter and which seem so often unexplored and unadmitted. I confess to not being a great lover of small talk. Don't misunderstand me I know it is necessary and I can manage it, but I feel it should be a step towards something fuller and deeper, even in short and never to be repeated meetings.



While out walking in the countryside on two different occasions this week, I met two people both alone walking their dogs. Both dogs were safely confined to the lead and seemed placid and quiet as I passed. Something about the person, the situation and the manner of their greeting caused me to stop, sensing they wanted to talk. After the necessary conversation about the place, the weather and above all details of their much loved and needed pets, I took the opportunity to ask open and deeper questions. It is surprising what people will tell a complete stranger on first acquaintance. One of the people I spoke to was troubled by the death of a friend who had fallen ill during the pandemic. She had been given the opportunity to visit her friend in hospital but had not taken it because, she freely admitted, she was afraid. This decision was clearly a source of regret after her friend's death. I offered what I hope was a sympathetic response and, I hope, some reassurance together with a later prayer that she may have been helped by sharing her concern with this random stranger.

Jesus was a master at drawing people out. He had a series of apparently random meetings 'on the way' to somewhere and by his insightful questions and perceptive responses, caused people to reveal their needs and to find healing and wholeness. He had compassion on the crowd but he also met people one on one. May God give us grace, time and his guidance and care to become a little more like Jesus in this.

With love and prayers, Peter.

Christian Summer Festivals

The regular summer festivals Keswick and New Wine were both due to take place in July and early August. However both have now gone online as Spring Harvest did around Easter. This means you can join in from home. Although you won't be able to enjoy the lakes and mountains of Keswick you will avoid the need to camp on a damp and draughty showground near Peterborough (New Wine). The Keswick Convention began in 1875 and is perhaps more suited to those who prefer things a little more traditional. Virtually Keswick runs from 27 to 31 July. New Wine begins on the evening of 30 July and concludes at midday on 3 August. Both include a full programme of inspirational speakers, topical seminars and worship. Details of how to watch and take part are, for Keswick [Click Here](#) and for New Wine [Click Here](#)

“Explore – for your daily walk with God” (by The Good Book Company)

I wonder whether you take special time out each day to spend with God, and if so, how you use that time. Maybe you read the Bible, pray, sing, listen to or play music, enjoy creation, journal, do something creative...or simply be still in God's presence. One of the most valuable resources I've used in my quiet times with God over the past 10 years or so has been Explore Bible notes. Explore booklets are issued 4 times a year and contain about 90 daily readings, plus comments, questions, prayer topics and ideas for applying God's word to our daily lives. They cost about £5 per copy. The flap inside the back cover gives space for our own personal prayer list and can be torn off to use as a bookmark. I like Explore notes for several reasons:

- They cover the whole Bible in about 5 years – including the difficult parts.
- Cross references help me to get a better grasp of the whole Bible and see the bigger picture.
- There are a variety of contributors.
- Most importantly, they are helping me to develop a deeper relationship with God.

Explore is also available online via an App and there is a Facebook group you could join. Please [Click Here](#) for more details. Chris Bennett.

Prayers for friends at Thatcham Methodist Church

Please remember friends in Thatcham - part of the ceiling in the church collapsed on Sunday morning. We thank God no one was in the building at the time. Understandably this will delay reopening until the safety of the structure can be assessed and repairs made, which will take some time to arrange. Please pray for the Church Council and the Property Stewards as they decide the best course of action.

Questions to ask ourselves individually and as churches

Ask yourself these questions and then ask them for your church. During the last few months What have you found that you want to keep? What have you found that you want to lose? What have you lost that you want to find? What have you lost that you are happy to bury?

They remind me of Henry Ford's quip: *'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got.'* Here is an opportunity to identify what God had been working in and through you, and make notes to self before we lapse back into outdated patterns and priorities.

And finally

I rang my friend and asked him what he was doing. He told me he was working on "aquathermal treatment of ceramics, aluminium, and steel under a constrained environment."

I was impressed. In further conversation, I learned he was "washing dishes with hot water under his wife's supervision."