

EYNESHAM BAPTIST CHURCH

Newsletter - 4th April 2020

Keeping us connected while staying apart



“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.
Zechariah 9:9

ON PALM SUNDAY at 10.30 a.m.

let us share these thoughts from Maureen Thompson

Thoughts for EBC Corona newsletter 30.03 20

During Lent I have been reading In Love with the Life of Life, a collection of reflections published by Wild Goose. Today the reflection is about some verses in Psalm 143, by Allan Gordon who is a retired doctor. These words seem very apt in these days.

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning
For in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go
For to you I lift up my soul....

Teach me to do your will,
For you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me
On a level path.

And the accompanying prayer...
Lord, like the Psalmist, help me to be aware of your steadfast love.
Help me in my search to know your will.
If it be your will, use me to be your eyes, your ears, your mouth,
Your hands, your feet, and your heart.
Let your loving spirit surround, infuse and lead me
This Lent and forevermore.

Amen

CONNECTING WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS

SUNDAYS - BBC1 at 11.00 a.m. Sunday Worship
BBC1 at 1.15 p.m. Songs of Praise

KIDLINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH at 10.30 a.m. livestream
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTELwMgnV32L3Uf6jTXnOog>

NORTHWEST BAPTIST ASSOCIATION at 10.30 a.m.
www.nwba.org.uk link to the service on its home screen

VLOGS IN THE TIME OF CORONA

Stephen Gaukroger is sharing daily encouragements online which can be found on www.clariontrust.org.uk/our-thinking

DAILY SERVICE - BBC RADIO 4 LW at 9.45 a.m. Monday - Friday

BIRTHDAYS IN APRIL

Kay J. (9th), Grace G. and Norma (10th), Marcus (13th), Audrey A. (14th), Grace H. (16th), Chris T. 21st), Anna Mae 24th), Ryan (26th), Angie C. (29th).

Dear all,

Some of you may have noticed that our family went into self-isolation nearly two weeks ago. This was prompted by Zoltan developing a fever which persisted for 7 days, headache, cough and muscle pain followed and kept him in bed for over a week. Meanwhile, Marta also became symptomatic (fever and cough). Anna and Philip tried to take up the mantle but by the beginning of this last week, they also started to show signs of the virus. Thankfully, from Monday onwards Zoltan's symptoms started to improve. He still gets tired quickly but he managed to produce a series of **daily reflections for Holy Week** (*attached at the end of the newsletter*). Marta's improvement is more fluctuating, but she hopes she will soon shake this virus off.

We would like to thank all of you: those of you who helped us in practical ways, those of you who called us and made sure that we don't go insane, and those of you who prayed for us - we needed all of these things to get through the past couple of weeks. Hopefully, by Easter, we will all feel anew.

Stay safe and God bless you all,

The Biro family

Other Updates

Several of our fellowship have been/are poorly and we send them our good wishes for a speedy recovery. Jane McHarg is now feeling much better and she sends her thanks for everyone's prayers and good wishes while she was ill. Margaret Hedges is making progress in hospital and we pray for her continued recovery. We particularly remember those who are in enforced isolation and especially those recently bereaved: the difficulties around holding funerals at the moment making this a specially sad time.

FOOD BANK - Please drop off donations at the Co-op.

ASYLUM WELCOME - Please speak to Marcus Thompson on 01865 881808.

I love this poem as it reminds me that no-one is too insignificant to be used by God. He uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (*1 Corinthians 1:27*).

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

G.K.Chesterton

from David

I had this e-mail from Liu, a Chinese Christian, who came to EBC 7 years ago ...

Dear David

How are you? Do you need some breathing mask? Now in China, easy to get such things. God blessing! Warm Regards!

Liu

Kindness can cross continents!

from Chris Ward

Because we are thinking about our doctors, nurses and all the volunteers who are helping us to stay alive, please do as I'm going to do and light a small string of coloured lights, battery operated, every night in my porch between 8 - 9 p.m. to show we are thinking of them.

shared by June

*I think that when the
dust settles, we will
realize how little we
need, how very much
we actually have,
and the true value of
human connection.*

And a final thought – you might be surprised to see when this advice was written!

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, He will surely find me and I have done what He has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.”

Written by Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) during the bubonic plague.

Thank you to everyone for your contributions: if they haven't appeared yet they will in due course. **PLEASE SEND THOUGHTS, POEMS, DRAWINGS, REFLECTIONS, OR SOMETHING TO RAISE A SMILE** to Lin on linmiller25@gmail.com or telephone on 881780 (subject to the usual editorial discretion and space constraints).

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PLEASE MAKE ZOLTAN OR DEACONS AWARE OF ANY PASTORAL NEEDS.

GOD IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Daily Reflections for Holy Week (5 – 12 April 2020)

Palm Sunday: Recognising God at work (Luke 19: 28-40)

5th April

As Jesus approached the city, the whole crowd of his disciples shouted praises to God for all the marvellous things that they had seen him do. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" they cried. (J.B. Phillips)

Jesus' "triumphant entry" on Palm Sunday is a good reminder that the Good News he preached did not turn the world upside down – not immediately anyway. A relatively small band of rogue Galileans chaperoning a strange rabbi on a donkey looks more like the parody of a victory march than the actual thing. Yet, Luke captures the moment perfectly explaining that the disciples were praising God, not because they became financially fortuitous, nor because their social status has risen through the ranks, but because they recognised God at work through Jesus.

Palm Sunday is not about the Arc de Triomphe, or white stallions, and golden thrones, but it is about perceiving the world in a different light – in the light of God's active presence. Maybe celebrating Palm Sunday during the current crisis requires the same attitude – rather than expecting the wondrous and miraculous we should start appreciating and praising God for all the marvellous things that already surround us such as fellowship, kindness and phones.

Prayer: *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

May our eyes be open to see Him, may our hearts be ready to be seen by Him, and may we be transformed so that we see the world through His eyes. Amen

Awestruck by the King! (Luke 19:41-48)

6th

April

Then day after day he was teaching inside the Temple. The chief priests, the scribes and the national leaders were all the time trying to get rid of him, but they could not find any way to do it since all the people hung upon his words. (J.B. Phillips)

Undoubtedly, Jesus had to face the greatest crisis of his earthly ministry during Holy Week, and just as in the current crisis ignoring the situation was not an option, so he faced it head on. When he entered the Temple and drove away the moneychangers, he took over the place and reclaimed it to be a house of prayer. Thereafter, he used the Temple as a teaching centre, where people gather to either *hang upon his words* or else plot against his existence. It seems that being indifferent towards Jesus on Holy Week is not an option.

What Luke tried to capture is the fact that the Temple acknowledged him, the leaders rejected him, and the people were awestruck by his words, but nobody stayed indifferent. Where do we stand? Are we stricken by our concerns or awestruck by the King?

Prayer: *O, Lord, we are happy to join the crowd, waving branches, but not so sure we want to follow you into the temple courts, into the upper room, into the Garden of Gethsemane, or to the foot of the cross. Forgive our false assumptions and let us relax into the foolishness of your love & grace. Amen*

Who is sitting on the fence? (Luke 20:1-19)

7th April

“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” So, they answered that they did not know where he was from. (MEV)

According to an online dictionary “sitting on the fence is straddling the position between two ideas without committing to either of them”. I am sure the exact same phrase did not exist in Jesus’ time, but the attitude certainly did. While Jesus is facing the greatest crisis of his life the teachers of the law clearly make themselves comfortable on the fence. Hopping down one side of that fence would have taken them down in one direction, hopping down the other side would have taken them in the opposite direction, but sitting there got them nowhere at all.

In life and death situations – like the one presented here by Luke (the parable of the tenants) – none of us should have the luxury of sitting on the fence. Jesus was annoyed by this attitude, because he understood that in such situations the only inadequate position is to do nothing. The director of Suceava Hospital (Romania) did something similar recently. He was so infuriatingly laid back, that ignored all the relevant health legislation and allowed 200 hospital staff to be infected by corona virus in a matter of days. His attitude pleased no one.

Prayer: *O Living God, we who are partially living, scarcely hoping and fitfully caring, pray to you to make us fully alive. Give us the vitality, awareness and commitment that we see in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen*

Time to re-evaluate! (Luke 20:41 – 21:4)

8th April

Beware of the teachers of the law [...] They love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and places of honour at feasts. They devour widows’ houses and make long prayers as a show. These men will receive greater condemnation!” (TLV)

How people respond in a crisis speaks volumes about their character and core values. Sitting on the fence is one thing but ignoring the existence of a crisis or profiteering from human misery is a whole different level of irresponsibility. Jesus warns his disciples against this attitude – the teachers of the law are mere examples.

Today we witness the same attitude as the one which devoured the widows’ houses and then said a long emotional prayer for them. Using the opportunity to sell substandard and faulty medical equipment to the most desperate parts of the world or using political power and money to hijack critical supplies are just few examples of major character flaws and dishonest value systems brought. Yet despite this, we also see communities coming together to help the most vulnerable, crowdfunding critical projects, many putting all they have to help others.

Yes, crisis can bring out both the best (the widow’s mite) and the worst (devouring widow’s houses) from people, but only if these characteristics were already there in the first place. So, what does this crisis bring out of us selfishness or selflessness?

Prayer: *Forgiving God, people give for so many reasons – guilt, joy, obligation, gratitude, obedience, hope, control, thankfulness. Remind us that all our possessions are really gifts from you. And you call us to use them wisely and to share them openly. Amen.*

Maundy Thursday: The Table of service! (Luke 22: 7-46)

9th April

“Who would you rather be: the one who eats the dinner or the one who serves the dinner? You’d rather eat and be served, right? But I’ve taken my place among you as the one who serves. And you’ve stuck with me through thick and thin. (The Message)

One of the major impacts of the current crisis on church life is the lack of communal activities, including communion. We can replace many aspects of this ritual. The physicality can be reproduced by praying when first opening a bag of bread or bottle of wine – or pouring any liquid into a cup – after all Jesus said *whenever* we do these things, we keep his memory alive. The soteriological characteristic (the forgiveness of sins among other things) can be exchanged to confessional prayers. Even the fellowship element can be substituted by conversations over the phone.

However, there is the mutual service aspect of communion which is a lot harder to execute without physically being close to others. Yes, I can think of Jesus, confess my sins and call you regularly, but I can’t share the same bread (and soup) with you, and I can’t wash your feet (or coffee cup), or shake your hand and give you an occasional hug. In other words, I miss the intimate vulnerability of Christian service. Maybe on this Maundy Thursday, is time to open up honestly to God about what we truly miss, as Jesus did in the Garden of sorrows.

Prayer: *Holy God, we are caught in the tension of light and shadow, death and resurrection. We look to you in the space between the world and the Kingdom, longing for the fulfilment of your word our Creator and King. Amen.*

Good Friday: Not my finest hour! (Luke 22:47 – 23:25)

10th April

The Lord turned his head and looked straight at Peter, and into his mind flashed the words that the Lord had said to him ... “You will disown me three times before the cock crows today.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. (J.B. Phillips)

Weeks before it actually happens Jesus starts preparing his disciples about the details of his capture, death and even resurrection. Initially, they try to ignore the Master’s words, but then they toughen up and arm themselves with swords. In every single gospel (not just in Luke) Peter is the voice of this *I-am-ready-for-anything* attitude.

Like a superhero he tries to stop the cosmic forces which were building up to this moment since the Fall of humanity and fails again and again. His swordsmanship disappoints (only injures the ears of someone), his bravery melts and he even rejects his Lord. Finally, when the rooster crows, he breaks down and accepts (with bitterness and some self-loathing) that his human strength was never enough to prevent this cataclysmic outcome.

What Peter’s reaction on *Good Friday* teaches us is that in times of crisis neither self-bravado nor self-loathing can save the day, because when we are in a crisis, we have to acknowledge that we are not in control, but God is.

Prayer: *Stop worrying. Whatever you must do to follow the path that God has shown, do to the best of your ability. And when you finished move on to the next thing. Simply. Calmly. Peacefully. Follow the path. If you do fail, don’t let anxiety overcome you, but admit it, quietly, humbly, and in God’s presence. - St. Francis de Sales*

Now there was a man called Joseph [...] He came from the Jewish city of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He took it down and wrapped it in linen and placed it in a rock-hewn tomb which had not been used before. (J.B. Phillips)

Joseph of Arimathea is one of the most obscure characters of the Easter story. Luke tells us that he was part of the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of Judea in domestic matters. He was a good and righteous man, who was waiting for the Kingdom of God. By all means he was a believer who had not been swayed or manipulated by the politics or by the corrupt leaders. Luke clearly states that he neither agreed with their plan to execute Jesus nor voted in the matter (he probably was not even invited to their secret meetings and mock trials). He might not have followed Jesus publicly, but heard Jesus' teachings and believed in them. Just like Nikodemus, Joseph was a secret follower of Christ.

However, the events following on *Good Friday* made him tear away the secrecy and to come out as a follower. Since he had access to a brand-new stone grave, he openly approached Pilate and asked for the body. This crisis brought him to a point where he did not care about losing his prestigious position, because he just could not remain a bystander anymore. That is what often happens in crisis, certain people step up to the challenge. Will we?

Prayer: *God stir the soil, run the ploughshare deep, cut the furrows round and round, Overturn the hard, dry ground, spare no strength nor toil, even though I weep. In the loose, fresh mangled earth sow new seed, free of withered vine and weed, and bring fair flowers to birth! Amen.*

Easter Sunday: Are we looking for the living or the dead? (Luke 24:1-12) **12th April**

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here: he has risen! Remember what he said to you [...] – that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, and must be crucified, and must rise again on the third day."– Then they did remember. (J.B. Phillips)

Shock, despair, suspicion, grief, anxiety and the occasional elation are all natural elements of dealing with a crisis, and the women experienced it all at once when they met the two strangers in the tomb. Yet the strange question these two angels ask them seems that it snaps them out of their distress. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?"

This is an important question in a crisis: do we want to reminisce about the good-old-days (the dead) or are we ready to move forward and face a brave-new-world (the living)? Often a crisis fundamentally changes the way of life as we remembered it, and things may never go back to how they were. So, this Easter, more than ever we may have to start looking for the risen Christ in the more unusual places, after all he is not among the dead!

Prayer: *God of Creation, with the women in the garden we catch our breath, wipe our tears and try to articulate our experience with you. Our knees are weak from running; our voices tremble on the edge of fearful joy. Our eyes have seen the glory of the Lord loosed upon the world! May every breath we take, every word we utter, everything we do, witness to the truth of Christ's resurrection. Amen*

Stay safe and God bless you all.

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