

milk! A silly ritual instigated by Elsie when we were children.

Thank you to all of you who joined in and for all the support you have given both Elsie and the rest of the family. God Bless. Gail xxx"

Ann Collins

Woodingdean News

Pam Finch who died on the 9th April 2020

She was a Steward, Safeguarding Officer, Magazine Editor and many other for Woodingdean Methodist Church. She was one of the secretaries for Monday Club but mostly a loved friend to many people within Woodingdean, Ovingdean and the Methodist Circuit, also to her student Community here and abroad

She had many interests; music, literature. poetry and drama. She was greatly loved and will be sadly missed by all her friends

Rest in Eternal Peace



Please send all copy, comments or questions to Andy and Elin at the Circuit Office at office@hovemethodistchurch.co.uk.



Finally, here are another couple of memes courtesy of the U3A newsletter team.



Focus



Issue 84

Brighton & Hove Methodist Circuit: Summer

Andy's Letter

Dear friends,

I have just read my last Focus letter. It was written at the end of January and centred on the news of Deeptima and Jonathan's progress as Local Preachers and looking forward to their Accreditation services.

Well we managed to have Deeptima's service and that was a joyous circuit occasion at Dorset Gardens with birthday cake as it was Deeptima's birthday (and also Steve Preston's). We also had Jonathan's interview with the Local Preacher's meeting and that went very well with a report to go to the Circuit Meeting to formally recommend him for acceptance as a fully Accredited Local Preacher.

Do you remember those days? My letter finished: 'Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank you all for all you do in your churches and community. At Easter we celebrate that life and love are greater than despair and death. So live in hope and peace and share God's love in all you do and with all you meet.'

Well we live in a very different world and seemingly a different time zone now, I am forever having to remind myself what day it is and I can't work out whether the weeks are longer now or shorter but it certainly doesn't feel that they are the same length as before, or is that just me?

Routines have changed and silent spaced out queuing is the norm and it doesn't seem quite right. There is both disconnection and new connections happening at the same time. Meetings are like a version of that TV programme 'Through the Keyhole' as we hold meetings where we are sat in our studies, our lounges, our bedrooms and our kitchens or perhaps a gardening show for those

who are in their gardens.

It is strange, it is different, and it is unsettling. And all our experiences of this time will be different but for me I find that there are days or times when I cope with it and other days and times when I don't, and I am still searching for a balanced approach to it all.

Each day brings news, sometimes hopeful, sometimes worrying, different experts and pundits exaggerate either the good or the bad and it feels difficult to know the truth of it all and therefore whether to feel optimistic or not. Decisions become difficult to make because they depend on whether this happens or that happens. I'd like to think that the easing of lockdown is because things are under control but I am nervous that it might allow things to spiral out of control for a while and cause more suffering and pain. 'Do we or don't we' seems to be the question now rather than the old 'To be or not to be'.

And in all of this I am lucky and privileged. Affected? Yes, but lucky and privileged. And as I was writing this, I received an email with a Newsletter with an article entitled 'Aaaargh!' which echoes some of what I feel so it is printed elsewhere in this magazine but you may choose to read it now before continuing to read this as it parts of it have relevance as I continue.

In the midst of ongoing uncertainty and anxiety we still have a mission to fulfil. We still have that call to love God and to love others. It seems strange to us that loving others means keeping our distance and not meeting together face to face but at the moment that is what it means and we would be being irresponsible and uncaring of others to do so.

But we can still worship God together via our computers and by phone. We can still worship God by watching the services on our televisions. We can still show our love for one another through phone calls and online gatherings. We can still love others over our fences or through supporting charities who are able to help others in great need. Some of you will have seen the work being carried out through the partnership of Hove Methodist Church and the charity 'Food for Friendship' which is taking out around 80 hot meals twice a week as well as many food parcels. As Caroline, the organiser, describes it 'giving a hug through food'. And in all things, keep others safe, as that is a way to show your love for them.

It is with that in mind that I have taken the difficult decision that we will not open our churches for corporate wor-

At Stanford Avenue, and for many others around the Circuit, we were very sad to lose our Elsie at Easter. Having lived in her family home at Queens Park for her entire life, in her 80s her health was failing and she reluctantly had to move into the wonderful Sycamore Lodge a couple of years ago. And she loved it! Along with her family of Teddy Bears she revelled in the company and attention.

The family lived near Queens Park Church for many years. When that closed they transferred to London Road and were very involved with the worship and activities there until that too closed. Elsie then became a stalwart of The Avenue. Many of us teased her about her record of closed churches that seemed to follow her, which she took in her usual good humour! She was a faithful servant of her Lord and Master, and was 'always there' no matter what the occasion. And at so many Circuit events too; I'm sure she knew where the teapots etc were kept in all of them! Small in stature though she was, she had a great heart and ways of cajoling, wheedling, even bullying if necessary, others to give of themselves. And it was no surprise that Andy Lowe quickly became accustomed to greeting her with 'hallo Trouble' (which she treasured).

Elsie's cremation service on Tuesday May 5th was of course a 'non-attended' one. Her niece Gail suggested that we light a candle at the time of the funeral and say a prayer. A lovely idea, a number of us did so. We will certainly have a great celebration of her life and service as soon as we can, and will make sure her friends round Circuit know about it in good time. There is a thought that it could well become a *teddy bear's picnic*! given her love of her teddies.

Gail put this message in the Avenue *Weekly Notices* after the funeral:

"We had a phone call from the funeral director just before 10am to say that Elsie had been taken to the crematorium, and to pay his respects, knowing what the family down in Hereford were planning. Elsie had chosen *Father into your hands* for her funeral and our minister used it in his Zoom service on the Sunday. Neil (my husband) and I sang it along with the virtual choir. We also read from Elsie's bible, John 14 1-6 which was chosen for a dedication in the book by her best friend Evelyn Billingsley, who gave her the bible. Major Connie Croly `phoned and said a prayer with us. How thoughtful, it really meant a lot and brought our time to a fitting close.

Around the country family also lit candles, prayed, read a poem and my niece Phillippa had an honorary spoonful of evaporated

ferent charities each year, and we have been pleased to support them.

Due to the Coronavirus, our last meeting was held on 16th March when the church art group came along, having previously put up a display of their paintings, they proceeded to tell us how they came to do those particular paintings, and then we had a quiz which consisted of trying to identify certain classic pictures painted by J.W. Turner, Van Gogh, Toulouse Lautrec etc. There were no prizes on offer but we have an extremely enjoyable evening sharing some fun with them. Three members of the Art Group prepared this talk.

Kay Harward

Stanford Ave News

Honour in the Community Kushma, Deeptima's mum, has been honoured along with more than a hundred community champions for going above and beyond the call of duty during the coronavirus crisis.

Kushma, who is 86, made 25 'thank you' cards for care workers despite having limited vision. The stories brought a tear to the Brighton Mayor's eye. Councillor Phillips said: "I am so proud that these are the types of kind-hearted caring people we have in our city." Its great to hear a story like this so close to home and thank you Pam for spotting it.

Mackenzie

Alan MacKenzie has been doing a magnificent job in compiling and distributing Weekly Notices for The Avenue, keeping everyone in the loop and connected. And the content is a wonderful ministry. The distribution list has grown and grown. Principally published by email, we also have a small group of wonderful volunteers who each week print the notices off at home and use their Daily Exercise Walk to deliver to those nearby who are not on email.

I just want to say a big big thank you to Alan, and the walkers, for helping to keep us in touch. Near and far. Because of course by email they are going out round the country, and overseas, to friends who no longer live in the area but are still part of the Family. **Ann Collins**



Alan

Elsie Smith Obituary

ship till at least the beginning of September.

This is not a decision I have taken lightly as I know how important gathering together is for so many of us. I am desperate for that face to face contact myself but rather than living with the uncertainty from week to week and the pressure that brings it is, I believe, better to have some clarity.

This decision has come following a meeting earlier this week of the Superintendent Ministers of the South East District of the Methodist Church where a number of them said that they have already made that decision and some were anticipating that being even longer. I then consulted with my colleagues Deborah and Dan and reluctantly we came to the same conclusion.

Some of the reasoning is that the earliest we could open our doors is July (but that still depends on the Government advice at that time) and even then we will have to observe all the social distancing protocols that exist now. Because of the limits on numbers we would be in a position where we might have to stop people coming in through our doors (if only that was a problem on our usual Sundays!) and of course that would be a temptation we would find hard to resist. At that stage we would not be allowing over 70's and people with underlying health issues into our worship spaces and that includes the majority of our Sunday worshippers and Local Preachers. We would not be singing, hugging, drinking tea or coffee and all those things that are part of our worship experience when we are together. And finally there are preparations we would need to make in all our buildings to make them ready to allow anyone in in the first place.

In the meantime we will continue to meet virtually for worship each Sunday morning and for that we are immensely grateful to Alex Harrington, Natalie Steele, Russell Taylor and others who have helped set up and continue to enable our services to run with all the technology needed.

It is great that so many people join week by week and be reminded that we are all part of one circuit family. It is great that we have an international congregation as well being joined by people from around the UK on top of those of us who are local. It is great that some people have been able to join us when previously they had been unable to join us in our buildings because of health or other issues.

We are learning to have meetings online and learning what it means to be well mannered in them and different churches are

widening their activities in new ways and that is great to see.

What this all means for us and for the future we will have to see but it has sparked many conversations about church and how we do it and who we are and what is our place and calling in this changed world. I sincerely hope that these conversations will continue and develop so that when we emerge from lockdown we will be a vibrant living force in the world, proof of the resurrection and filled, inspired, guided and empowered by God's spirit to be sharers of God's love, in all its forms, to each other and all who we serve in our communities and beyond.

In the fearful days following the crucifixion and even after the resurrection there was the sense and the promise that something new was going to happen and the day of Pentecost spoke a new story to those in Jerusalem and was the beginning of that story being spread 'throughout all Judaea and Samaria, and even in the farthest corners of the earth (and that includes Hove actually and all of Brighton and Woodingdean).'

We still have that story to tell and a new opportunity to tell it and we are finding new ways to tell it so let us take up this challenge and answer the call. In the words of Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998):

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place –
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

So may the God of love,
take us, shake us and remake us,
that we might be a blessing to all creation. **Andy**

Aaaargh!

When will this end? I've had enough of this. I want to be able to talk to someone without having to guess how far 2 metres is, or worry about what observers are thinking. I want to go and visit my family. Go away for a few days. Have a meal in a restaurant. Not have to queue to get into a supermarket. Just do a million and one things I'd taken for granted. Aaaargh!

But, I can't. I shouldn't. And being inconvenienced now is a lot better than risking my own, my family's, and other people's



Andrew and Mary Beasley-Murray have been cooking birthday cakes and delivered them (to Bill Pickup, 74 and Neil, 80) and sang happy birthday to them observing social distancing. They also regularly cook meals and deliver them locally for a small fee this helps many people in the local area.

Bob Hinton has been writing a 'Keep Smiling' letter for us to go out with Newsnotes, and the kind people at the U3A (University of the Third Age) who use our building in normal times kindly allow us to send out their excellent special newsletter for lockdown, edited by Rob Doe, full of tips and useful information, and jokes.

Patcham News

Monday Circle group

I thought I would take advantage of the very nice invitation to write something for the scratch edition of FOCUS. We are living in strange times and the more we can communicate with each other, the better I think we will feel!

The Monday Circle group consists of ladies of a 'certain age' but with plenty of spirit and enthusiasm. We are about 27 in number and we meet weekly at the church, in the Fellowship Room, and usually listen to a speaker- and the topics really vary – such things as "the history of fishing in Brighton", "Murders and Misdemeanours", "Christmas cards in all their guises", a collection of short films made by the South Downs Film Makers, "Hearing dogs for deaf people", a celebration of Burn's Night with Scottish food to follow. We had a concert on December 9th with some excellent singing provided by the "Women of Note" group who I'm sure many of you will know. This versatile choir raises funds for dif-

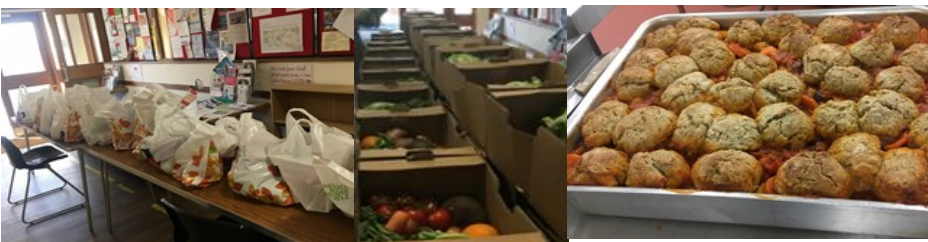
Church in Great Britain as well her Gold Covid-19 Community Champion award from the Mayor of B&H. Christ is risen! He is shared good news stories from some of our user groups. The Lunch Positive team continue to use the Dorset Gardens kitchens to prepare meals which are distributed to homes and they have seen a substantial increase in referrals, particularly following a feature on BBC South East news. Meanwhile one of our twelve-step group organisers reports how he is learning how to use technology to keep the group together and grow its outreach .

These IT tools (sadly for some!) have also enabled some meetings and church business to continue: stewards, finance and property, user group updates to name a few. Whilst we have yet to hold our Annual Church Meeting, we are looking at church leadership roles and acknowledging our concern around financial matters. We are receiving no income from lettings, neither are we receiving weekly contributions from Sunday collections or monies from any fund-raising activities. We are heartened by those switching from weekly envelopes to setting up standing orders but know that church finance will remain an ongoing and serious matter to address.

Looking ahead what has God got in store for the Church during these changing times? What will the postCovid19 church look like? There are some interesting and exciting days ahead for us as we actively join discussions across this circuit and prayerfully think about worship, mission and pastoral care within the current constraints and in the future. **Steve Preston**

Hove News

Food & Friendship at HMC are now distributing 80 hot lunches



and food parcels twice a week from the church kitchen. Volunteer cooks and distributors have got it down to a fine art, while keeping health protocols and social distancing in place.

health because I'm fed up with being kept mainly between these four walls. It is also inappropriate as there are many who wish they were in my position. Within our society there are many struggling to keep afloat or wearing themselves out caring for others. And when we look to other places in the world that were fragile even before this, it truly highlights the privileged position many of us find ourselves in.

But knowing that doesn't stop me being fed up. And whatever feelings we have, bottling them up doesn't help. Our families might not appreciate us letting loose, as they have their own challenges, but God is willing and able to listen to what is on our hearts.

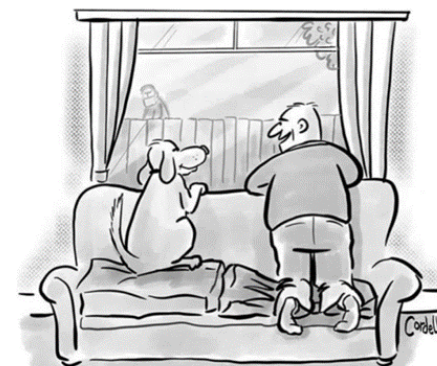
Too often we only think we can bring before God what we are thankful for, and our concerns for others. And too often what we do bring is a shopping list of our own desires and wants. But you only have to look to the Psalms to hear anguished cries to God, and we have Paul's words to the church in Rome:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27 (NRSV)

So as we continue to stay home and stay safe, let us remember that God is still there. This isn't great, but it could be much worse. And that however we are feeling, God is there beside, around and beyond us. God is already listening, knows how you are feeling, and the Spirit is willing to stir, move and embrace you.

With every blessing,
Rev'd David R. Coaker, PCN Trustee & Progressive Voices Ed

This is Wilson. He is now working from home



"Until now, I never understood why you got so excited when someone walked past the house."

Daily Devotions

Andy Lowe

I receive daily devotional/reflective material from a number of different sources including Fr Richard Rohr, Simon Cross and Rev Cameron Trimble. I have found this one from Cameron has stayed in my mind and so with her permission I share it with you:

A Word for the Day

The amazing part of the transformation from the caterpillar to the butterfly is that you have this middle space, the cocooning season, where your body literally becomes mush. You disintegrate. You lose shape. You lose everything that defined you as a caterpillar. You become goo. In meaningful ways, you die to what you were.

But here is the miracle: inside that deathly mush are **imaginal cells**.

These cells hold a vision of the future within them. When all seems lost and nothing that was known can be known as it *was*, *the imaginal cells give us the vision for moving forward*. They know that with the right conditions and a little time, a butterfly waits to be born.

We are messy, fragile, unprotected, insecure, unrecognizable, disoriented, developing, transforming, imaginal beings.

We are in that liminal space between what was and what can be. Our becoming something better on the other side of this is not guaranteed. But with the right conditions, with the awakening of people to the beauty of our planet and the intimacy of our connection to everyone and everything, we have the chance to become something new.

Don't dismiss this as flowery language or overly optimistic dreaming. If ever there was a moment for you to become who God has dreamed you to be, it's now. Don't miss the chance. Everything is being made new, especially you.

Rev. Cameron Trimble, author of [60 Days of Faith: Devotional](#)

We are intending to spend some time at our virtual Circuit



View from Dorset Gardens

Steve Preston

A long time ago, well 22nd March, we were looking forward to welcoming Deborah back to lead our early morning communion followed by an all-age Mothering Sunday service, joined by our Scout troop. As we heard more about Covid-19, and particularly advice to safe guard those aged over 70 and those with underlying health conditions, the flowers & plants were cancelled and we scaled down to just opening the Prayer Chapel for private devotions. Whilst adhering to new hygiene and social distancing rules, a few brave souls popped in and we provided our usual hospitality. Little did we know as we locked up that morning that we would close for physical worship and remain so as we write.

As we adjusted to the new normal Deborah reassured us that "the church is alive and well – we the people are the church. There have been generations of Christians before us, who have learnt how to support one another in trying times and we will have to do the same now." We had to learn and continue to learn new ways of being a church. So how are we doing?

Deborah has been pivotal in communicating via weekly bulletins (email & postal), providing details of various live-streamed services, sharing a Methodist Worship at Home service sheet, highlighting news of members, and individually contacting folk at risk, particularly those who find themselves socially isolated. The team of pastoral visitors ably assist and are vigilant and keep in regular touch with our church community, offering practical help where possible. Our ongoing care of one another is much appreciated.

For those technologically minded we became much more familiar with video conferencing platforms such as Zoom & Google Meet and are able to join the circuit services, admire domestic interiors and see faces of friends, including those living elsewhere in the country and overseas. Others join via their phone and just hearing familiar voices helps the feeling of being connected to one another. Many have been encouraged by the informality and accessibility of this on-line worship. Our thanks to our circuit worship leaders for quickly adjusting to this new medium and those supporting with their IT skills.

Whilst Easter was perhaps the strangest in our living memory, we gave thanks for our Easter card (thank you Deborah), shared news of how people were occupying their time, had fun with Rosemary's Easter quiz and enjoyed seeing a photo of a beautiful Easter display put together by Deeptima and her mum Kushma. We also celebrate Kushma becoming a member of the Methodist

lains are available even if not in person.

Brighton is very similar in that we are not permitted access to any sites and I am maintaining our presence on social media, in particular we are posting twice-daily throughout Mental Health Awareness Week with positive images and messages on the subject of Kindness, this year's theme. Plus I've been attending quite a few online meetings via Zoom and other meeting apps.

So to relax I enjoy a little TV of an evening and imagine my surprise and delight when watching Keith Lemon's 'The Fantastical Factory of Curious Craft' as who should be on it but one of last year's prize-winners from Brighton University, Annie Lumby, with her remaking waste plastics into - a puppet in this instance! I've dropped her a message of congratulations (she didn't win, but was in the final).

Sue Harrington

Easter Bonnets



We had a wonderful service online at Easter; for those of you who missed it, here are our Ministers, suitably arrayed:

meeting on 17 June dreaming about who and how we are meant to be, to be God's people in this ever-changing world. **Andy**

The Future We Choose

As lockdown is starting to loosen, and we start thinking seriously about where we take from here, we are faced with decisions not only about how we safely open schools and churches, but how we tackle wider issues. We are all aware that some of the recent alterations to human activity have been beneficial to the health of our planet. Measures that were seen as impossible to take in the light of possible future extinction through climate change have been adopted overnight in the face of this global pandemic.



On 26 April Rev Cynthia Park gave us a sermon on being Resurrection people. She said "the thought that we will *have* to come up with a new way of living is quite exciting, not least because we in the church, have something important to offer to this. What Holy Week and Easter teach us above all is that out of the deepest and most terrible suffering, God can bring new life.

So maybe this awful coronavirus is giving us the opportunity we have been longing for – a chance to re-start the whole human enterprise – a chance to build the kingdom of God."

Cynthia is not alone in thinking this. Our Brighton Pavilion MP, Caroline Lucas, has just published a 'Green Steps to Better' report, saying "the actions that we take now must be based on conscious choices about the kind of future we want to create, laying the foundations for us to build something better than before." She lists nine preliminary steps including a transformation of government spending and taxation, and the UK food supply system.

You don't have to be a radical thinker to see that although the impact of the coronavirus has been devastating, it has also shown how creative and strong we can be in a crisis if we all pull together. It has shown us that change is possible if we have the belief and will to bring it about.

I'm starting with prayer and some lifestyle changes... **Elin Star**

How a changing world impacts preaching and worship

Jonathan Gravestock

Theodore Roosevelt was probably not the first person to say that two things are certain in life, death and taxes. But I would add a third thing, change. The world constantly changes, and we must adapt to change or die; that is the nature of evolution. So it is with the church too, if it fails to adapt to its changing environment, it will die. Mick Hickman's book, 'A story to tell', recounting the history of Methodism in the Brighton area, gives graphic evidence of that fact, with many churches coming and going over the past century and a half.

Just in my lifetime, of three score years and ten, the world has changed enormously. The National Health Service has enabled people to live longer, shifting the demography of our congregations towards the elderly. The advent of mechanisation has brought more leisure time and, with it, more leisure pursuits to compete with Sunday worship. Relaxation of Sunday trading laws, competition with sport fixtures and increased demand for children to see estranged parents at weekends have meant both that young people are scarce in many congregations and that few adults attend worship regularly, let alone twice, on Sundays. Among those children who do join congregations, scriptural knowledge can no longer be taken for granted as religious education is not compulsory in schools and nor are their assemblies religious.

Technology has changed beyond recognition over the past half century. Televisions hadn't even been mass-produced when I was born, but now children are exposed to adult storylines and films that rob them of innocence, not just on TV but via the Internet. Social media have meant that Methodist Youth Clubs have been replaced by social 'chat-rooms'. Consequently, we have become accustomed to sound bites and video clips, rather than sermons and reasoned arguments. Our ability to travel has become so easy and cheap that it's assumed as a right. People's experience of global places and events has broadened and deepened greatly, while secular charities and government initiatives have taken over much of the care that churches formerly provided.

Though their source is sometimes masked.
We're not sure where it comes from
This wonderful thing called love,
Could it come I wonder
From the power up above?

Linda Lawrence May 2000

2020 vision – we need it!

Sue Harrington



Annie Lumby and judges from the Fantastical Factory of Curious Craft

Just a few words about the Student work in lockdown. It sounds like time off, but let me reassure you; if anything I'm spending more time working than usual as we navigate new ways to connect and offer support to students in Brighton and Hove (or West Brighton as I understand it was recently referred to as in a council newsletter!)

Sussex University is offering all sorts of online meditations and reflections along with advice on best practice for working from home. Additionally the #MeatUpProject (food provision) is continuing and the Administrator, Janine is going in twice a week under very strict working protocols to receive and distribute food so I have been supporting Janine, from a safe distance. We are also applying for a Green award at the Meeting House and so I've been finding some of the information and documentation required for the award. I am also keeping up the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts to reinforce the message that the Chap-

World War III

We're at war again
We've been invaded
This time by an unseen foe.
All and sundry have no escape
A serious matter if we don't comply.
We're on alert, we must avoid contact
Keep our distance from strangers alike
Family units stay close by
The elderly, vulnerable must be shy
Of contact, physical – keep apart.
Keep washing your hands
It's vital, important
Find your own space, six feet apart
No large gatherings or meetings allowed
This Chinese borne virus has taken hold
The world has succumbed, we cannot ignore
Stay home, stay local, travels exempt.
Dear Lord, we love you and your people too
With appropriate care and planning sought
This Corona virus will be fought.
We praise the medics and volunteers too
The public services and vital works
With hearts on fire, we'll see this through
Thank you Lord, God Bless us All!

Mavis Gurr April 2020

Love's Origin

For those who don't believe in God,
All is never lost.
For if They can believe in love,
And never count the cost,
Their lives will fill with happiness
If they spread it all around.
This thing called love can save and heal
And in its depths be found,
Answers to all the questions
Man has ever asked.
Solutions to all the problems

Add to those changes the advances in science that have sent men into space (where they didn't 'find God'), have dated the Earth's formation to 4 billion years ago and have analysed the laws of nature to a degree that leaves little 'room for God'. So it's unsurprising that modern people neither readily accept scripture nor identify with worship, especially sermons. Much of our worship has changed little since the Wesley's 'conversion' about 280 years ago. Our hymns and liturgy still include words they wrote, while our creeds date from half a millennium earlier. Not that age - in itself - is a reason to reject the sacred, for truly wise words have a timeless quality and the wisdom of Christ's teaching is still apparent when applied to our lives today. But while God may be the same 'yesterday, today and forever', our awareness of God is not. Both our approach to God and our representation of God must move with the times, lest we make the gospel so 'heavenly-minded that it's no earthly use.' The Kingdom of Heaven is for here and now and, if we are to present it faithfully, we must be open to God's changing world in both our worship and our preaching.

Jonathan Gravestock

Life in lockdown ...

Apart from being busier than ever with the student work, I am finding myself doing things that wouldn't probably have even crossed my mind just a few short months ago.

Partly driven by the lack of stock, and having no desire to go to the shops, and partly because of the good weather I actively want to get out in the garden, plant up vegetable seeds or, indoors, bake bread. Also I've been sewing – hand made masks. All in all I feel I'm becoming my Granny. That's not a bad thing either. She made many outfits for me, indeed I remember her teaching me how to sew a teddy bear (still got it) and a denim jacket – I really thought I'd arrived with that one!

I recently dug out her pastry bowl, whizzed up some oats to make flour as I hadn't got enough ordinary flour (and nowhere had any



Sue Harrington

then) found I had some yeast and I baked some oat bread. It was delicious and I really felt connected in many ways, not least, I suppose, as I am now a Granny myself!

She was an excellent housekeeper (doubt I'd come up to her standards, but I have invested in a 'green cleaning kit' which comes with a book of 'how to' hints and tips). I'm trying to be greener as well, putting as few nasties into the environment as possible. Many of the cleaning recipes are taken from the 'old ways' and in some instances are improved. I'll let you know how it goes!

Stay safe everyone.

Granny Sue

And here are a couple of photos of Sue's brand-new grandson, the lovely Hugo. He'll have to wait a while longer for his Christening.

Congratulations to Granny Sue and family.



People and Groups in New Testament times:

2. The Hasmoneans/Maccabees

Mick Hickman

This series of articles will look at matters relating to peoples and groups in the Mediterranean world in the period c. 150 B.C. to 96 A.D.

In the mid 2nd century B.C. most of what is now Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Jordan were ruled by the Greek-speaking kings of Syria. They tried to make all their people follow Greek culture and part of this was an attempt to destroy the Jewish religion and



As church leaders from across the many and varied churches of these Islands we urge all people to join us in prayer this Holy Week and Easter; to pray for those who suffer, those who face untimely death and all those who care for them; to celebrate our common faith at a difficult time; to help and support our neighbours in need; and to observe all the safeguards in place to slow the spread of disease.

Our Prayer: Loving God, in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for our salvation, cast out the darkness of our anxiety, fear and mourning, enfold us in your love and give us joy and hope this Easter. Amen.

The statement is supported by churches in membership of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, along with Churches Together in England, Cytun, ACTS and the Irish Council of Churches.

President and Vice-President call for a global ceasefire

A statement from the Revd Dr Barbara Glasson and Prof Clive Marsh, President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference:

"The Covid19 pandemic brings home to us our common humanity. While in the UK we have struggled with being locked down, we are thankful that we have an excellent health service with tremendous staff. Our thoughts also go out to those living in war zones where health systems are unreliable and intensive treatments are often unavailable. Those whose lives have been disrupted by war now have to protect themselves from this new deadly threat. That is why we are supporting the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire.

"A global ceasefire will enable medics and nurses to access conflict areas and concentrate on the battle against Coronavirus. We urge that all parties to conflict give immediate priority to life and health and respond to the Secretary General's call for a ceasefire. We ask our own government to work urgently, including within the UN Security Council, to make this call a reality."

Methodist Media team



such as a standing order or sending your contributions directly to your Church Treasurer then that would be gratefully appreciated. If you are a Tax payer, it might be an opportunity for some to also begin to Gift Aid your contribution to the church whereby your gift is worth 25% more to the church. Please do speak to your local church treasurer about this if you are able to help in any way.

Andy

British and Irish Church leaders united in response to pandemic

Terry Pomfrey

The Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, together with Church leaders from denominations across Britain and Ireland, issued the following statement:

God's world is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. In the nations that make up Britain and Ireland the Covid-19 virus continues to affect people at an alarming rate, health services along with many of our institutions and organisations, both local and national, are under extreme pressure and people are getting used to living in a very different way, many in extreme isolation. As with all such crises, there is a danger that the most vulnerable in society will be most badly affected.

Christians the world over are entering an important time in the church year as we look to the events of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. At the centre of our common faith are both the depths of despair and the heights of joy. In the Bible and in the songs and liturgies of the Church, we see Jesus entering fully into human suffering. In His rising again, that suffering is redeemed and transformed into hope and joy. After Jesus' death his disciples were afraid and all seemed lost and hopeless, but the risen Christ met them in their despair and restored hope through his victory over death. We pray that the world today might know this hope in place of despair.

In the Book of Daniel we read about God's people being taken into exile in Babylon. Daniel could not pray in the Temple in Jerusalem, but he continued to pray in exile – opening his window to face Jerusalem. Though he was on his own he joined with the prayers of the people wherever they were. Now we too are separated from each other physically, but when we pray in our homes we join in with this ancient tradition of our home as a place of prayer. Wherever we are, whenever we pray, when we speak and think of Christ, there he is in the midst of us. We join our prayers with all those who pray in our own churches and communities and around the world.

way of life. This included taking over the Temple. The policy backfired dramatically. Led by a priest, Mattathias, and his sons, e.g. Judas the Maccabee, there was a revolt and in 164 B.C. this group took back the Temple and re-dedicated it. Each year Jews commemorate this event with the festival of Hanukkah on the 25th day of Kislev, in December.

Expectation was huge: a small group of devout rebels had defeated a mighty kingdom. The re-taking of Jerusalem did not end the war which lasted for another 20 years. Although Judas the Maccabee was killed, eventually Maccabean rule was recognized internationally and internally by a national assembly. In 140 B.C. the last of the brothers, Simon, occupied the vacant role of High Priest, and effectively became king, although he had no claim at all to Davidic descent. His family, called Hasmonean after a distant ancestor, ruled Judah for almost the next one hundred years.

For the first time in four centuries there was a free and independent Jewish state created by their own power with what they believed to be God's help, and with a purified temple. The military success of the Hasmoneans undoubtedly had an impact on messianic thinking. Groups known as Essenes, Pharisees and Sadducees all had their origins in this turbulent period and it had an enormous impact on Jesus and the early disciples. Indeed without the Maccabean revolt and its repercussions history would have been completely different.

The reason is simple. In 160 B.C. Galilee was a pagan area, there were no or very few Jews there. It was conquered by one of Simon's sons who encouraged Jews in Judea to move north and settle there. Joseph's father or grandfather must have been one of these settlers, as were the forebears of all the disciples [N.B. The story of Joseph going to his hometown of Bethlehem made sense to its first hearers as virtually all Galilean Jewish families had roots in Judea]. Galilee became, as is often the case with settler communities, a centre of militancy. Jesus and the apostles could not have lived in, or travelled around, Galilee in the stories recounted in the Gospels had it not been for the Jewish re-settlement of the province a hundred years earlier by a Hasmonean king.

Onomastics, the study of personal names, is too often overlooked. Over the past 20 years there has been a detailed study of all known Jewish names in the ancient world. In 2002 a database was published of the names of 2826 Palestinian Jews (2509 male, 317 female) with 831 different names (721 male, 110 female) from 330 B.C. to 200 A.D. It so happens, and it probably not accidental, that the names of the five sons of Joseph and

Mary: Jesus, James (Jacob), Joseph, Judah, and Simon: were amongst the most popular of names given to Jewish boys at this time and two of them: Judah and Simon: were named after the most famous and popular of the Hasmoneans.

The names of the twelve apostles are interesting. Two are called Judas (Judah) and two called Simon. John was another common Hebrew name. The only surprise might be that there was no apostle called Joseph or Lazarus – two very common names. Others of the apostles had Greek names: Andrew, Philip, Thomas: and Jesus gave one of the Simon's a Greek nickname, Peter. To be expected in a such a varied culture. This all shows the crucial impact of the Maccabean revolt on the very existence of Jesus and the apostles in Galilee. Without that revolt and the conquest of Galilee by a Hasmonean king there would have been no Jesus of Nazareth.

Mick Hickman

God In Love Unites Us

Due to the response to the meeting to discuss this important report we decided to cancel the meeting.

We feel that the low response was because of the time and energy we spent as a circuit a couple of years ago on the subject which overwhelmingly was supportive of the view that the Methodist Church needed to look at its definition of Marriage and find a way forward so that marriage services of all varieties could be conducted and celebrated in the life of our churches but with the option for churches and individuals to opt out if their conscience wouldn't allow it.

There were 16 responses to the repeated requests that asked people to register with me if they wished to attend.

Of those 10 said they would attend although 2 of them said that their position was known and they had nothing new to say and that their reason for attending would be to make sure there was no change from the position the Circuit took when similar matters were widely discussed in the circuit just over 2 years ago.

Of the other 8 we know that 6 of them are broadly supportive of the conclusion of the report and the proposed amendments to Standing Orders that will be before the Conference of 2021 for



Andy Lowe

decisions to be taken including that regarding allowing marriages of all varieties to be celebrated and conducted in our church premises with the caveat of a conscience clause for individual churches and Ministers.

Of the other six people, four did not wish to attend but also expressed their broad support for the report and proposals, one did not wish to do it via the internet and one was unable to attend.

If you add in the four Ministers who were going to share the leading of the morning who are all broadly supportive of the report then that gives us 16 out of 20 who responded who are in broad support of the report and four people whose views we are not 100% sure of.

As such it will be reported to our Circuit Meeting that our response that will go to Synod is that as a Circuit we are in support of the report and the proposed amendments to Standing Orders that Conference will vote on when it meets in 2021.

We are mindful however that the four whose views we are unsure of might wish to discuss these matters or express their views. So we would like to invite any of you to ring or email myself or any of our Circuit Ministers if you so wish and in the meantime we will endeavour to have conversations with those whose views we are uncertain of.

Many thanks for showing interest in this important report for the future of the Methodist Church and its work. Best wishes, **Andy**

Church finances

Andy Lowe

In these days when we gather online for worship it is easy to forget that all our churches continue to have financial obligations in terms of ongoing bills to maintain and keep our buildings and our assessments to the Circuit. At the same time, we, like many charities and businesses, face a loss of income. For us there is a loss both of income through our collection plates and also through the loss of income that would normally come in through the letting of our property to different groups.

If you are able to support your local church through this difficult time either through increased giving or possibly moving your giving through the collection plate (or bag) to a different method