

St Mary's News

July 2020

(as Coronavirus lockdown eases)



'All forms of prejudice have to be challenged'

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All forms of prejudice have to be challenged

“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a



prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

(Matthew 10:40-42)

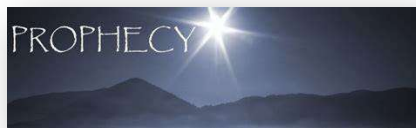
This short passage from St. Matthew's Gospel formed the basis of our evening service on Sunday, 28th June 2020. I would say that it was one of our best livestream services to date and can still be accessed via the St. Mary's Website <https://www.stmaryswatford.org/livestream-services>. I think what made the service so exceptional was the variety of people who took part in the service, and revealed what is so special about St. Mary's; a richly diverse congregation which is able to come together and worship God in such a wonderful way. In the service both Josh and I were able to share something of our family histories and in doing so shared something about how the welcome and inclusion of all people is fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be church.

Both Josh and I are proud to have a mixed heritage, and although our family histories are very different, both our families have known what it is like to suffer prejudice. In my case my father was a child refugee who fled to this country in 1939. Sadly, his parents and other members of the family perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. As I continue to process what that means for me, I have come to recognise that all forms of prejudice have to be challenged. One of the uncomfortable truths about the history of the Holocaust is far too many good people stood by and let it happen and did not seek to

challenge what was going on around them. It is a lesson from history which we cannot afford to ignore. I think it is vitally important that we understand that prejudice in any form cannot have a place within the Christian church. If the Gospel is good news for some at the exclusion of others, then the Gospel is simply not good news at all. As the retiring Archbishop of York once said the Gospel is all about justice. It has to be good news for everyone regardless of their background, for we are all equally loved by God.

In the service I focussed very much on the welcome we give to others in our church. I spoke of the moment I met a young Iranian couple in church for the first time. They had only recently arrived in the UK and indeed were still very much traumatised by their experiences of having to leave their home country for fear of persecution and the very real danger of torture and even death, because they had recently converted to Christianity. That couple continue to worship with us at St. Mary's and I know we have been rewarded many times over as a result. Their friendship and their insights into Persian heritage and Middle Eastern culture has been a blessing to us all. Furthermore, their faith and their willingness to leave everything in order to follow Jesus is a lesson to us all who so often become complacent in our normal, very comfortable approach to Christianity.

Perhaps that leads neatly to another element to what Jesus is saying in Matthew 10 and that is to welcome the prophets and the righteous. I wonder how much thought we give to the importance of prophecy in our churches today. I guess we all carry that image of an Old Testament prophet in our heads. Someone who is slightly eccentric, dressed in sack cloth and has long unkempt hair and wild eyes. I am not sure how willing we would be to let them anywhere near a microphone. Yet how can we truly welcome the prophet if we are not prepared to listen to what they say? Prophets have always



accompanied the work of God, why should it be any different today? Prophecy is listed as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and like all the gifts of the Holy Spirit it is there to encourage and build up the people of God.

Whilst the gift of prophecy is primarily given for encouragement and building up the Christian community, historically is also serves as a voice of warning, speaking out on Of course, that can be the listener feeling natural reaction is to prophetic voice and extreme cases the and subject to we too easily disregard welcome the prophet into our midst.

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and especially matters of injustice. unsettling and leave uncomfortable. The then ignore the refuse to listen. In prophet is silenced reprisals. I wonder if the words of Jesus to

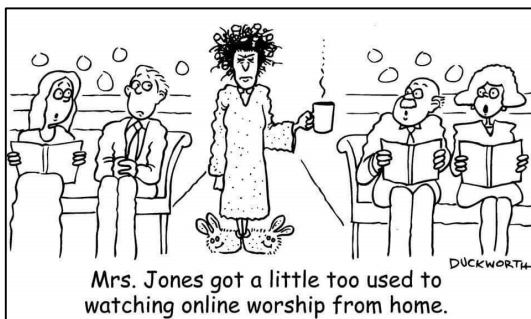
Some would say the Church has lost its prophetic voice and so often remains silent in the face of injustice and other matters of social concern. I remember one well known Christian leader saying several years ago that the silence of the church is deafening. I am not sure today that the silence is any less deafening. It is true that organisations such as Christian Aid and Tearfund speak out on matters such as climate change, extreme poverty and other forms of injustice. Yet with a few notable exceptions the Church remains largely silent in regard to many of the world's most pressing issues. I can only assume it is in fear of reprisals or a wish to avoid conflict at all cost. Some may wish to argue that our primary concern is in worship and the sharing of the Gospel. The only thing is proclamation of the Gospel and the fight for justice and social reform go hand in hand.

I am pleased that St. Mary's doesn't ignore the importance of speaking out on many of the pressing issues of the day. Within this edition of St. Mary's News I commend to you reports from Roger and Marcus which not only inform on some of the more complex issues of the day, but possibly contain within something of the prophetic voice

of God. The current affairs group is not in itself meant to be a prophetic voice, but I do believe it creates a culture by which the voice of the prophet is welcome in our community.

Finally, we must remember that Jesus not only encourages us to welcome the prophet but also the righteous person. I am not sure how you would define a righteous person, but I think it would be one who hears the (prophetic) voice of God and acts. Actions speak louder than words. It is one thing to say we are a welcoming church it is another to live that out in practice. I have said previously that Black Lives Matters is about addressing a particular issue, and a particular form of prejudice. Truth be told there is no room for any form of prejudice or inequality or injustice in our church. They are all contrary to the Gospel. So let us become a church where no form of prejudice is tolerated. Let us accept none of us are perfect and we can all have a blind side but let us have the conversations and learn from one another. In the telling of each other's story we break down the barriers and we welcome not only the prophet and the righteous but also all who seek to be Christ's disciples.

The Revd Tony Rindl



Love thy neighbour...

I don't know about you, but my personal experience of this time of COVID-19 has, if nothing else, been a time of irony. One of the greatest is that during this time of lockdown when we have been isolating and we have not been able to meet up as we use to with friends and extended family, it has been a time of strengthening some relationship bonds.

For example I have spent more time with my daughters, who as teenagers have recently preferred meeting up with their friends, and we have had a renewed time of enjoying time together doing crafts, watching movies and going on walks and adventures as we use to when they were small. While we have had to find new, creative ways to meet up with friends and extended family, we have possibly spent more quality time together because it has taken effort and we have found



more innovate ways to do this such as reading bedtime stories over Zoom and playing online games. But one of the greatest positives of the lockdown has been getting to know our neighbours better.

It is an often-cited topic of discussion that in our modern society we have lost the sense of community that comes from knowing our neighbours and along with this a source of friendship, safety and support. Many reasons have been given for this not least that more of us tend to commute further for work and entertainment and therefore these relationships on our doorstep have been neglected. It has left us relying more on friends and family who live further away and has made us more reserved in starting chats over the fence. I feel ashamed to say that I have lived in my close for over 13 years and yet I only know a few of my neighbours to wave at. The lockdown has changed this – out of necessity we have found ourselves turning to our neighbours in case we need people on call in an emergency, we have opened ourselves to near strangers for

the dropping off of shopping and in return we have felt the urge to reach out in support. The weekly 'Clap for the NHS' helped in this matter offering opportunities to introduce ourselves and catch up with how people are and often these have developed into WhatsApp chat groups and other forms of communication. Lots of people I have spoken to have experienced this and some amazing opportunities have resulted with socially distanced VE Day street parties, evenings sitting at the end of gardens chatting over evening drinks and finding safe ways for children to play outside together.

God created us as social creatures and to live together in community. Josh spoke powerfully on Trinity Sunday of how this need to join and live together comes from our being made in the image of the triune God – a God so great that He reveals Himself in three persons, but three persons so intimately and personally intertwined that they are combined powerfully through love into one being. While we do need to take care and precautions to keep ourselves physically healthy, it is equally important that we ensure we communicate and interact with each other for our mental health. It has been so lovely to watch the people at St Mary's reach out and look after each other, being there to support and trying to combat a little of the loneliness people have been feeling. Together we have maintained a strong sense of community, belonging and the sharing of God's love.

Over the page is a lovely resource developed by Marna Esterhuysen, Children's Pastor at The Vineyard Church St Albans, which you may like to use with your children to think about your neighbourhood from a God perspective. Having learnt so much about getting to know our neighbours and what community means during this time, it would be sad to lose this sense as we start coming out of lockdown.





It is almost the Summer Holidays and while sadly we cannot put into place all the plans we had previously made, this doesn't mean we can't be just as creative in what we offer this summer as we have been with everything else!

We are therefore planning *a Daily Dose of Holiday Fun* for the week **20th - 24th July**:

Virtual Holiday Club Week each morning 10am - 12midday
(for primary school aged children)

Daily Virtual Toddler Story and Rhyme Time (for
toddlers and younger children)

Virtual Bravers Coffee Hangout each evening from 5 to 6pm
(for those in upper KS2 and secondary school).

Please contact me for more information, to register your child or to offer help.

God Bless

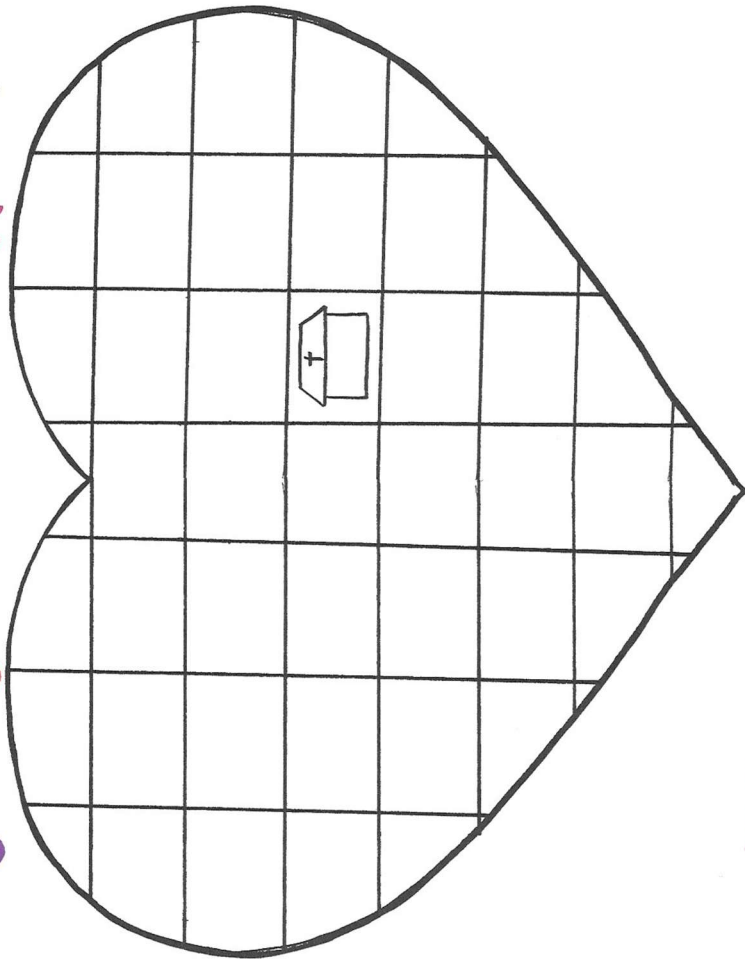


Cath

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My Neighbourhood Heart



Activity

- ★ Write the names of your neighbours in the squares with their house number
- ★ Colour the squares as follows:
 - people from my church
 - people from another church
 - elderly person
 - disabled person
 - person on their own
 - single parent
 - all other people

What God says about My neighbours

- ★ Love God and love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:30 - 31)
- ★ People will know you are God's child by the way you love each other (John 13:35)
- ★ God wants me to share His love with my neighbours (Matthew 28:18-20)

Prayer Thank you God for my house and for my neighbours.
Help me and my family to share your Love with our neighbours. Amen.

The Current Affairs Connect Group

Learning from Coronavirus

The coronavirus pandemic has killed nearly half a million people worldwide and changed our way of life as the world has experienced unprecedented restrictions. Does the Bible have anything to tell us in this situation? Is there hope? Are there lessons to be learned?

In June, the Current Affairs Connect Group discussed Coronavirus: What, if anything, does God want us to learn?

Background

According to reports in the South China Morning Post, the first case of coronavirus was diagnosed on 17 November 2019 in a man in Wuhan Province, China. Since then, the WHO has announced a global pandemic. At the time of writing it has reported nearly 9 million cases and over 468,000 deaths worldwide. Certain groups are especially susceptible: those over 60, those with certain underlying conditions, and BAME people.

Countries in the Far East have generally handled the virus better than in Europe where Italy, Spain, France and the UK have been badly hit. The world's worst outbreaks are currently in the USA and Brazil largely due to their Presidents' failures, disinformation and denials.

The UK has reported 305,289 cases and 42,647 deaths. However, the Office for National Statistics reported that up to 5 June excess deaths were over 64,000.

The UK government can be credited for its massive financial package to support businesses and their employees through lockdown; and also its success in keeping the NHS under its full

capacity. On the other hand, it has received criticism for aspects of its handling including:

- the UK's lack of capacity to track and trace both before lockdown and currently as restrictions are eased;
- the delay in the decision to lockdown the country;
- the failure to provide sufficient PPE for front line workers;
- the failure to adequately protect care homes; and
- the Cummings affair.

As a result, the UK death toll is likely to be among the world's highest. And while trust in most European governments has fallen since March, Johnson's approval rating is the worst, slumping from 65% to 30%. A mere quarter of voters support his easing of the lockdown.

While there is hope that a vaccine might be developed it is not known how or when the present crisis will end.

The responses of faith communities have varied from suggesting that the virus is a judgement to being at the forefront of care and support.

What the Bible says

The Bible's view of disasters and disease is complex. On the one hand, there are numerous examples of God bringing judgment on humanity in various forms. These include the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the ten plagues of Egypt, in particular the disease that struck down the Egyptian firstborn. Job is tested with disaster, the death of family members and sores. But on the other hand, God is in charge and can protect us from pestilence and deliver us from disaster (e.g. Psalm 91). Importantly, the Messiah heals our diseases (Isaiah 53.5) and in fulfilment of that Jesus is the great healer (e.g. Matthew 4.23-24; 8.16-17). Specifically, Jesus denies that people die in disasters because they are more sinful than others (Luke 13.1-5) although he warns that everyone must change their behaviour. He also denies that disabilities are caused by a

person's sin and states that in the specific case of the blind man it was to show God working in him through healing (John 9.1-3). More widely, God brings us hope in Jesus. Thus, all things work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8.29) and nothing separates us from his love (Romans 8. 31-39). Thanks to Jesus there is a way through death to eternal life.

Indeed, one way to view God's "judgments" in the Old Testament is to understand how past events have ended - in re-creation and renewal. After Noah his family were locked down in the protection of the Ark, God renewed the world and his covenant with humanity (Genesis 6.1-9.17). During the first Passover, the Hebrews were briefly locked down in the protection of their homes while the plague struck down the Egyptians after which Pharaoh released them into the liberty of the Exodus (Exodus 11-12). And when, after Jesus's crucifixion, the disciples lock themselves down in the Upper Room for fear of the authorities, they encountered the risen Jesus with joy and the receiving of Holy Spirit (John 20.19-23).

Finally, we are promised that in the new heaven and earth there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (Revelation 21.4).

Reflections

God has allowed the pandemic to happen even if he has not actually sent it. He is a God of love and therefore he gives us freedom. That includes the freedom to make mistakes. The virus occurred because it jumped from animals (possibly bats or pangolins) to humans, as had other recent viruses. The cause of this is human behaviour in getting close to wild animals and their habitats, eating "bushmeat" and selling it in unhygienic markets. We felt that God wants humanity to learn from these mistakes and to change our behaviour.

(i) **We have undervalued many in the workforce**

We considered that the lockdown has challenged the way society values its workforce. Well paid CEOs of big business have been rendered largely powerless and unimportant.

Others - those who make deliveries; nurses, paramedics and care home workers; cleaners and refuse collectors; and fruit pickers classed as low skilled and on low pay and zero-hour contracts - have become essential and deserve their reward.

(ii) **We need to “bring back better”**

We observed how large scale events such as the 1348 plague and World War 2 had changed society in radical ways and we felt this was likely to be the case with the pandemic. Most of us considered recent governments had not regulated the economy well, especially on environmental issues, and that there should not be a return to the way things were. Rather, the government needs to invest in education and apprenticeships especially in poorer areas, and to tackle those problems that contributed to people from BAME backgrounds being more susceptible to the virus. The pandemic has seen the return of ‘big government’ and there are great opportunities here to decide which sectors of the economy (e.g. green) the UK might focus upon so as to level up and produce better jobs. Indeed, we understood that across Whitehall, government departments are considering how “to bring back better”.

A dissenting view was that the government had severely compromised our traditional freedoms, closed down the churches and restricted democracy, an approach considered wrong. There was a risk of simply repeating the same political/economic views we held before the crisis rather than learning anything new from God. The Church of England’s leadership had said little and failed to respond adequately to the fear felt by so many.

(iii) **The Church needs to address the nation’s fears**

In response, we all agreed that many people in the UK are fearful and worried about what could happen over the next few years (e.g. unemployment) and they need to hear a message of

hope. The UK Church is best placed to deliver this and perhaps St Mary's could redraft its website message accordingly

(iv) **What we feel St Mary's has learned and what we might do**

We noted the irony that just as we were starting to use the refurbished St Mary's, it had been closed. Yet we have continued without our building, demonstrating anew that the church is the people. Was this a sign that the building should be used for a purpose we have not yet fully discerned, perhaps more for Watford than for us?

We felt St Mary's is doing an excellent job in keeping our members together via Zoom and Facebook and hope we can continue to use these imaginatively when the church is re-opened. We asked ourselves whether there is a way we can do more to shift our focus, even during lockdown, from catering for our own to helping people in Watford encounter Jesus, who alone can heal from fear and bring hope? We can each undertake to keep in contact with two or three non-Christian friends to offer assurance and bring hope.

We felt younger people and those in the service sector will most likely bear the fallout from the present crisis and will need the most support. In particular, there was a danger that fear could result in anger and we needed to be prepared for this.

We discussed the possibility, when the church re-opens, of some kind of civic service bringing together the local hospital, dignitaries etc, having an All Souls' service to remember those who have died of the virus, and a memorial book or plaque to them. Indeed, the Vicar and wardens have already begun considering some of these.

Finally, on a personal level, several of us commented that God has taught us new things such as learning to use Zoom which we have used to keep in touch with non-Christian friends. And we have learned a new appreciation during lockdown for things such as our gardens and our families.

Recommended reading

'Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?' - John C Lennox

'God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath' - Tom Wright

The Current Affairs Connect Group



God and the coronavirus

Covid-19 has, sadly, claimed many lives in the UK and other countries not only directly but through its impact on health services. Its effect on the health of many who have not died has been severe, with unknown long-term consequences. The economic cost has been huge, with many businesses still unable to forecast when they might trade again and, across the world, millions likely to be made unemployed. This will in turn impact on physical and mental health, as well as constraining the resources available for health and other public services.

It is inevitable, and reasonable, that at a time such as this many will ask why, if there is a God, he should allow such tragedies to occur – particularly pointing at the ‘good’ God whom Christians worship. Indeed, is this ‘crisis’ a demonstration that there is no God – that all that happens is purely the result of physical occurrences and the pandemic is further evidence that belief in divine intervention in human affairs is illusory?

To these questions there are no simple answers. We live in a world of dangers. Covid-19 is merely the latest example of a widespread threat

to human life - plagues, famines and natural disasters in the form of floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions etc have occurred throughout recorded history and for millennia before that. In the UK, we are largely insulated from such events, in contrast to the inhabitants of Bangladesh, Indonesia, East Africa or even the southern states of the USA.

Is this turbulent world consistent with the Christian belief that the world (and the universe) was created by a loving God? Many would say that it was not but it is then reasonable to ask those who deny any role for a Creator to suggest an alternative mechanism – put simply, by what process is there ‘something’ rather than ‘nothing’? So far, no convincing response has been forthcoming.

It is now possible to trace the history of the universe from an infinitesimal time after the ‘Big Bang’ down to the present, through the remarkable fact that the ‘laws’ of physics as we now understand them are unchanged since that time and further that the constituents of matter that we have discovered since 1900 are the same as those that are seen in the earliest stars. However, science has no explanation of why those laws are as they are, although they are critical to the composition of the elements as we know them and to the physical, chemical and biological processes that have led to the emergence of life. While we can now construct an account of what took place after the moment of creation, there is no scientific account of creation itself. There is no alternative based on science to the concept of a Creator.

So is the world – and the universe – ‘good’ (Gen 1:31)? Some biblical scholars consider that a better translation of the original Hebrew would be ‘fine,’ rather than ‘good’ with its moral implications. But leaving that aside, we can see that the way that creation has been ordered -the physical and chemical processes that science has illuminated - has led on our planet to the development of life in all its variety and in particular to a life-form, homo sapiens, with a highly developed capability for self-consciousness and reflection about its

place in the universe, and Christians would claim that this capability allows and underpins a relationship with the Creator.

These processes, though, do not proceed smoothly - they involve violent natural events and the emergence and subsequent extinction of life-forms, whose remains we find in fossil strata. Darwin commented on the 'waste' that accompanied evolution. But they appear to be the processes that were laid down at the moment of creation to govern the subsequent development of the universe - they cause and facilitate change, and the achievement of ever more complex forms of life. They give rise, ultimately, to our species. Christians would assert that they were determined and are sustained by God. Despite the obvious downsides, how can we humans as their beneficiaries say that they are not 'good'?

We now know also that one of the features of the physical world, at both the most microscopic level and in the evolution of life, is uncertainty, or chance - the 'uncertainty principle' of quantum mechanics is well established and 'random' differences within species lead to the development of life-forms better suited to their environments. To some, this presents a problem - why should chance have such a role in a universe that they would like to think is controlled by God? For others, though, this is exactly the feature of creation through which God works in the world, without conflict with any of the scientific principles that govern the behaviour of matter. What appears to the human investigator as chance may be anything but when seen from the perspective of God. The human brain, with its 90 billion or so neurons, is an incredibly complex system. Who can say what influences it might respond to?

So let us return to Covid-19. At one level, it is an example of the hazards that inevitably stem from the processes through which the universe operates. Life-forms are challenged by changes in their circumstances and evolve accordingly - and viruses, it must be remembered, are arguably the most successful life-form on earth because of their ability to adapt quickly to changes in their external conditions. At another level, however it might have originated, the

release of Covid-19 into our environment is a consequence of human mistakes and inadequacies and so is not an entirely natural phenomenon. It is similar in that respect to the explosion at Chernobyl which caused great loss of life and suffering. Such failures are inherent in human processes and have their parallels in other forms of life – birds who make nests which can be accessed by predators, for example.

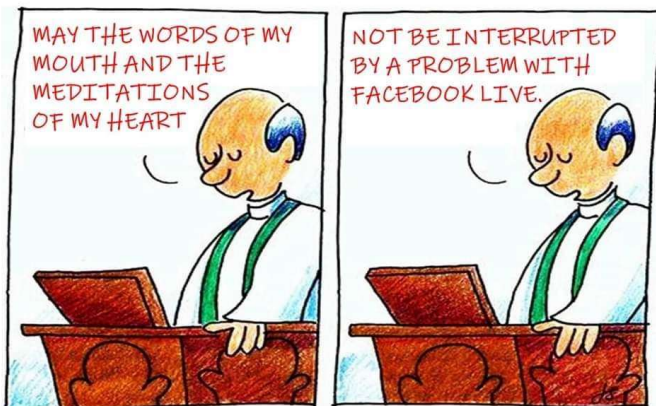
There is thus no case for arguing that Covid-19 was sent by God – the pandemic has a combination of natural and human causes. But could he have prevented it? Since God has the power to control everything in the universe that he created, the answer must be that in principle he could have done. However, it is clear from Scripture that God seeks a loving relationship with his creation. We are not able to say how this works for other forms of life but for humans this requires that our response to him must be the outcome of a free decision - a decision to love that is compelled by God is not love. And so we have to be able to make the wrong decisions, without control. While the Bible records examples of spectacular interventions by God in human lives – in Mary's life, to take the most significant example – these appear to be the exception rather than the rule. They occur at specific times for very specific purposes. God self-limits his power over the world and preventing, as opposed to influencing, human choice is not part of his relationship with his creation.

That said, it is incumbent on us to reflect on what we might learn from the experience of the virus and to seek God's wisdom, i.e. his influence on our thoughts, as we do this. Just as through time organisms have learnt and responded to changes in their environment, and emerged better fitted to survive, so we need to learn from this change in ours. And Christians who regularly pray 'thy kingdom come..... on earth' must have as their key question 'In which ways should we as individuals, our society, and the world, change in order more nearly to match the ideals of God's kingdom?' How do we move towards a society and a world which is marked by love, justice and equity? Does this experience, for example, lead us to replace GDP as a

measure of wealth creation with an index that reflects social and environmental development also? Can we develop different patterns of work and leisure so that we better protect the global environment and improve urban air quality? Should we aim for greater self-sufficiency in manufactures, again reducing transport requirements but also in order to reduce regional income inequalities? How can we sustain and enhance the spirit of community that has developed in our towns and villages? What are the future implications for countries with grossly inadequate health systems and for our relationship with them? And as we think about our mission, what have we learned about outreach - once we can again meet to worship God how should our on-line presence complement the 'gathered' church? These and many other questions now need to be addressed.

This process of reflection and subsequent action may be the guide to how God's purposes are being worked out through our current situation. No comfort to those who have lost loved ones, probably, but consistent with how the 'good' God whose mode of creation caused us to exist will lead us towards his kingdom.

Roger Courtney



THE STATUES CONTROVERSY: A CHRISTIAN REFLECTION

Editor's Note: *In this article the term BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) is used to describe the group of people most involved in the Black Lives Matter campaign and impacted by issues of slavery, Empire and the statues controversy.*

BAME people are a diverse group. Individuals may or may not identify with this term and may or may not share some or all of the concerns around this campaign.

In St Mary's we value the diversity God gives to the world and welcome everyone regardless of their status, wealth, gender, race, sexuality or religion.

How dare they? Is that your reaction to the debate on statues currently raging here in the UK? Outrage that others are meddling with your history, your heroes! Or outrage that modern society can permit the statues of slavers and racists to stand!

It's very easy for Christians to react like the rest of society and to divide in the same way over this issue. It's emotive because it is yet another identity issue. It's about who I am and about the values I hold dear: on one side, the story of my country and, on the other, my desire to obtain justice and equality *now*. But is there a Biblical aspect to these issues? I set out my reflections below.

Listening to our brothers and sisters

We all agree that God desires justice and equality (Micah 6.8, Galatians 3.28). So if our neighbour, whom we are to love (Matthew 22.37-40), tells us that they are not receiving justice or equal treatment, we have a duty to listen and put things right (Nehemiah 5.1-13, Acts 6.1-4). Many BAME people notice the statues we have in

public places, the people Britain has honoured in the past and placed on pedestals. They cannot understand why slavers and racists continue to stand among them. They conclude that society still lauds these people and their values. And so they feel surrounded and even oppressed by these statues when they walk in towns and cities. Yet to many other people, these same statues are simply “there”. They pass by them and may not even know who they are or what they represent¹. But many BAME people remember what others have forgotten.

Learning to see empire as God sees it

Polls consistently show that the British are at best ambivalent about the Empire and at worst think it was a good thing.² But the Bible takes a different view of those who conquer and subjugate countries and plunder their resources. Empires are denounced unequivocally as monsters (Daniel 7, Revelation 13). Christians worship Jesus as the Truth. Consistent Christianity surely means seeking truth in all things and being prepared to accept even unpalatable truths about Britain. We need to reconcile ourselves to the bad as well as the good in our country’s history and avoid any “my country right or wrong” nationalism that perpetuates injustice and inequality. This can happen only if we teach our children the unvarnished truth about the past. Good and bad, the British story is my story, your story, our story. It’s therefore essential to review England’s national curriculum, introduced in 2015 by Michael Gove and Dominic Cummings, which celebrated the achievements of the Empire while downplaying the often oppressive manner in which it was run.

Learning to judge correctly

Christians are aware that human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1.27) and therefore capable of great good, and also that “all

¹ Listed at <https://www.toppletheracists.org/>

² For example <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/uk-more-nostalgic-for-empire-than-other-ex-colonial-powers>

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23) and therefore simultaneously capable of great evil.

This makes history complex and means people judged “good” in one era may be seen as “bad” in another since human values change. How do we deal with Nelson who was both a supporter of slavery and the deliverer of this nation from French invasion? How do we deal with a legacy which put Britain in charge of the oceans for a century and enabled it both to prevent international slavery (following its abolition throughout Britain and the Empire) and to expand empire? How do we view Trafalgar Square when it celebrates Nelson, Empire, national deliverance, and the contribution of BAME people in the battle?³

It is certainly right that society continually re-evaluates its past. However, today there is a tendency of both the Left and Right to denounce and paint as wholly bad any person who crosses their particular red lines and to refuse to see any good in them⁴. As Jesus warns us that we will be judged with the kind of judgement we pronounce on others (Matthew 7.2), perhaps we should take greater care!

God does not judge as we judge. He does so perfectly because he is without evil. When we attempt to judge, our own imperfections mean we are trying to reach a view with a splinter or a plank in our eye (Matthew 7.5). And God judges a person according to their whole life and not any one aspect of it.

Nevertheless, we are called to judge rightly (e.g. John 7.24). Few would disagree that slavery and racism are evil, which means we need

³ The base of the column has four reliefs which show scenes from Nelson’s victories. In Nelson’s death scene at Trafalgar, a figure of a black sailor in the left foreground is holding a musket. This strong, positive image represents the hundreds of BAME sailors who fought in the British fleet, including the nine black (Caribbean and African) and two Asian seaman who served aboard the Victory.

⁴ The Right has called for the removal of the Nelson Mandela’s statue on the basis he was a communist and a terrorist; and the Left for the removal of Mahatma Ghandi’s statue because of his statements about Africans. While far from perfect, these men are nevertheless regarded as towering figures of the 20th Century in their fight for freedom.

to form a collective judgement about what values we want to project from our public monuments. Statues exalt a person, usually without any historical context, as many academics have observed.

Perhaps the worst, such as Coulston, the Bristol slaver, will be consigned to museums. I doubt they will be missed. Perhaps most will stay in place with plaques added to contextualise them as Sir Godfrey (Geoff) Palmer OBE, who was born in Jamaica, has suggested. He and others are concerned that to take down these controversial figures would be to hide the evils they have done so that Britain would no longer have to confront them.

In exercising such decisions, the focus on statues should not distract from the substantial issue of the very real inequalities suffered in society by BAME people as outlined in various reports⁵. *Black Lives Matter* is surely not about the wholesale re-engineering of public spaces. The removal of certain statues will have little practical impact on people's lives unless accompanied by more radical changes that ensure equal treatment for the BAME community.

The wisdom of the Commandments

Finally, I wonder if the statues controversy is a reminder of the ancient wisdom of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.1-17):

“You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make for yourself an idol...You shall not bow down and worship them.”

When we allow our nationalism to dictate our values rather than the words of God, when we refuse to acknowledge that some of our greatest Britons also did some pretty evil things, when we literally make images of them and put them on pedestals to look up to as symbols of what we hold dear, are we not worshipping other gods? Surely it would be better if we made no statues of individuals at all?

⁵ See for example the Lammy review of the treatment of, and outcomes for BAME individuals in the Criminal Justice System, the Angiolini review into deaths into police custody, the Home Office review into the Windrush scandal and the McGregor-Smith review into workplace discrimination.

Only Jesus is the true, unblemished hero and only he deserves to be exalted.

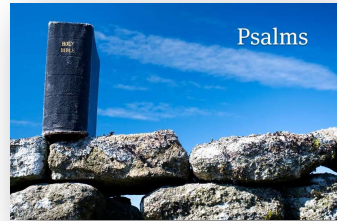
On 10 July at 8pm the Current Affairs Connect Group will discuss *Black Lives Matter: What does this mean for Britain and its churches?* with Olusegun (Segun) Akande as guest speaker. All are welcome. For details, contact Marcus Jones by email: ttekcos@aol.com.

Marcus Jones

A Psalm for Lockdown

(by Professor Catherine Clarke in the Church Times)

- 1 I have dwelt long in the house of lockdown: I have enclosed myself in the habitation of Netflix and groaning.
- 2 They have set me my bounds which I shall not pass: I keep the statutes and observe the laws.
- 3 I entered into the supermarket, but it was barren: its plenty was turned into empty shelves, and there was no toilet paper in it.
- 4 Neither were there delivery slots by day nor by night: verily, not even from Ocado.
- 5 Deliver us from the wilderness of delivery: and deliver our deliveries unto us.



- 6 I am become a stranger unto the pub, and unto the office:
even an alien unto Pizza Express.
 - 7 The sun ariseth, and I go forth to work and to my labour: even
in my pyjamas until the evening.
 - 8 I am weary of Zoom, my throat is dry: it melteth away like
wax as my broadband vanisheth.
 - 9 Yet they gape upon me with their mouths and say: thy toddler
sitteth lurking in the corner of the screen, and lo he imagineth
mischief.
 - 10 And thou, oh daughter of lockdown: thou shalt do thy phonics
in exile.
 - 11 Also thy literacy and numeracy work, and thy comprehension:
yea verily, even thy fronted adverbials.
 - 12 They have sprayed markers for my feet: they have set a place
for me on the pavement outside Tesco Metro.
 - 13 The unrighteous forget their social distancing: I swerve from
their transgressions.
 - 14 The people rebuke each other: and bear in their bosoms the
rebukes of many people.
 - 15 A mask hath covered my face and I wash my hands: neither
have I found any hand sanitiser to comfort me.
 - 16 The pestilence layeth siege against me: according to the
cleanness of my hands shall I be recompensed.
-

Events

St Mary's Virtual Garden Party

Saturday 18th July at 3.00pm

via Zoom

Members of St Marys' showing photos and videos
of their gardens and talking about them
while you enjoy a cream tea

(sorry, you will have to provide your own!)

Any questions and Zoom details from

Roger Courtney rogerg.courtney@btinternet.com

A Very Different Bike 'n Hike

12th September 2020

You will know that the Beds & Herts Historic Churches' Trust
Bike 'n Hike is the most important fundraiser for the Trust
and key to enabling it to continue to give grants for the care
and repair of churches and chapels. Half of the sponsorship money
goes to churches with participants and, this year, with the churches
closed for so long, it is even more important.

Churches have lost income from services and other fundraising events
and buildings deteriorate when not in use.

So we are going ahead with the Bike 'n Hike this year
BUT IT WILL BE DIFFERENT to keep everyone safe.

CAN YOU HELP RAISE FUNDS?

The Bike 'n Hike is open to everyone, whether church-goer or not,
bikers, hikers and other visitors, whether by car,
mobility scooter or horse.

More details from Pam Email pam.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Services

We are sorry that due to the Government restrictions the church building will remain closed for most of the week but it will be open for

Private Prayer

Wednesdays and Saturdays
12.00noon to 2.00pm
(but times may change)

We will continue to pray, worship and care for each other from our homes during this difficult time.

Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service via Zoom
4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook Live!

Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection via Facebook Live!

Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer via our Facebook page or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who:

(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)

Vicar:

The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480
tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Curate:

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596
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Churchwardens:

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

Children & Families Worker:

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