Junior Church: Young Peoples’ Group

**Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 31st May 2020**

Hello Everyone,

I hope you have all had a lovely half term. After 11 weeks of lockdown, as we enter the month of June, we are on the threshold of greater freedom, always mindful that if the infection rate rises again then all this could be reversed. Nevertheless, we move gradually from the period of lockdown to the era of social distancing. This will bring its own challenges and I sense amongst many of there is a bit of unease and uncertainty.

It occurred to me this week that the period of lockdown, when our lives were turned upside down almost overnight, has coincided with perhaps the most important period of the Christian calendar beginning with the end of Lent, through Easter and now Pentecost. Are there parallels to be made between our challenging times and the turmoil of Easter and Pentecost? Perhaps that is over-egging it a bit, but some people may have found the circumstances of lockdown: its relative isolation and more time for reflection, an opportunity to grapple more intensively with the events Easter.

Others will have found themselves in a different frame of mind, busier than ever juggling family and working responsibilities under the same roof. Or grief and financial worries may have made it impossible to find the frame of mind that would enable them to grapple with anything other than their immediate worries.

I was interested in an article in the newspaper last weekend entitled: [‘Record number google ‘prayer’ in search of spiritual comfort’](https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/google-searches-for-prayer-skyrocket-as-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold). Google searches for ‘prayer’ have increased 50% during the pandemic. The increase has not been confined to areas of deeply religious populations. The demand for prayer has surpassed that at Christmas, Easter and Ramadan, according to the article. One Christian leader explained: ‘…People are asking fundamental questions about life and death’.

Our Easter readings focused on some of the conversations that Jesus had with his closest friends. They also grappled with huge questions of faith on the eve of great turmoil when they were to see Jesus crucified and their lives changed forever. Jesus tried to explain the events to come and why they needed to happen. He tried to comfort and offer guidance, but this was not easy for the disciples to understand, just as it is difficult for us too.

I had a videoconference last week with several colleagues, one of whom is based in France. It happened to be [Ascension Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_the_Ascension) and Claire explained that in France it is a public holiday. Someone else asked what Ascension Day was all about and another colleague, a member of Leatherhead Methodist Church, after a moment’s thought said, ‘it marks the moment when Jesus started working from home’.

I thought that this was an explanation of which Jesus would have approved. He himself used everyday language and circumstances to explain complicated concepts of theology and faith.

Something else that He would have welcomed was the item of news I spotted this week that told of a Christian church in Kreuzberg, Germany that offered prayer space to a group of Muslims. For reasons of social distancing they could not worship in their mosque. One Muslim worshipper admitted it was strange but said ‘when you forget the small details, this is the House of God in the end’. The Imam said: ‘this pandemic has made us a community. Crisis brings people together.’ I could have seen this forming the basis of one of Jesus’ parables setting out to demonstrate that God’s love embraces all people and all creation. It is not bounded by religion, race or language. In this story was a little glimpse of heaven.

I was reminded of a visit I made about a year ago to see the Shan Johan Mosque in Woking, the first purpose built mosque in Britain. We received a warm welcome. The history of the building is fascinating. It was built by Gottlieb Wilhem Leitner. He was a Hungarian Jew who spoke eight languages fluently. He converted to Christianity and built a mosque. Quite a guy and what a complex world we live in where boundaries are blurred, new connections made and fresh opportunities created.

This Pentecost Sunday our Bible reading [Acts Chapter 2 verses 1-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A1-21&version=CEV). It tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit. What a momentous event that was, involving wind and fire. Gottlieb Leitner would have loved the fact that people were speaking in different languages that were not their own and that out of the confusion new connections were made and a momentum created that was to have a worldwide impact.

Enjoy the week ahead and the opportunities it presents to you to make a difference.

Rodney