

St. John's Methodist Church Whitchurch

March 2021 Newsletter

Message from the Manse

Dear Friends,



As we prepare to resume in-person services at St. Johns on 7th March, it's interesting to reflect on the experience of leading worship online, as I have been doing throughout the two most recent Lockdowns.

It has of course been very different from what any of us has been used to; but nevertheless it has had some advantages: one being the fact that people from all of my churches have engaged in these services, and in some cases that's renewed some of the connection that was maybe lost when the Whitchurch Circuit became part of Cheshire South. It's also been good to be able to allow people to chat before and after the service - something that we still have to be cautious of with in-person worship. It's also allowed us to retain a link with Jim Walwyn, following his and Sheila's move to Norfolk, at least until they find a church down there!

With multiple people in some homes, we've rarely had less than 30 people listening in, and being able to sing along as well - something that again remains impossible in person. This has, I hope, helped those joining us on the phone and via Computer or Tablet, feel that they are truly joining in an act of worship.

While we are opening up, we're also aware that for some the idea of attending worship in person may cause some nervousness; so I will be continuing to offer the Virtual Service each Sunday, albeit at a later time of the day. If you want to join in, the details will remain the same each week, and we'll be starting at 4pm each Sunday from 7th March onwards - instructions on how to join below:

By Phone: Dial 0131 4601196 (Please note this is charged as a National Rate call). When prompted, enter the Meeting Number 882 9356 4375 and Passcode: 689976

If you are using Zoom, the same Meeting Number and Passcode will allow you to join.

God Bless

Rob

For Palm Sunday

(Here GK Chesterton puts himself in the place of the humble donkey - submitted by Mike Nimmo))

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

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

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

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

Greetings from the East

Sheila & Jim wish to thank everyone for all their cards, emails and messages following our move to Outwell, near Wisbech in Norfolk. We hope you are all enjoying the weather we have sent you. The Beast from the East is still pretty bracing!

Lam enjoying the online services on Sunday mornings - I can have

I am enjoying the online services on Sunday mornings - I can have a lovely sing out loud!

To all our friends at St John's - the Spring is coming and Lockdown will end soon - we hope!

Sheila & Jim Walwyn

STEWARD'S LETTER



Dear Friends

As you read this letter I hope we are on the verge of reopening St. John's to Sunday worship albeit still under Covid restrictions (face covering, staying 2m apart & no singing) subject to a low infection rate in Whitchurch, but at least we will be able to meet up. Nearly all our members will have received or been offered their first vaccine & some shortly to receive their second, a step on the way to returning to a more normal way of life.

The last 12 months has been very painful. We all have lost someone to Covid or know someone who has. Unable to say our last goodbyes & offer condolences in person. It has been a strange time when stewarding funerals, just a few people & no hymns sung - just recorded music & for a few they were filmed to be broadcast to the family.

Unable to spend time with our children & grandchildren has been hard. The loss of education to the children will have an effect for a long time to come. We need to pray that time & effort can be put in to help them as we recover from the pandemic

As a church family we have lost a lot of members during 2020, some to Covid some to other illnesses some to new churches & 4 to new Towns. To Jim, Sheila, Rob & Sue we wish them happiness & peace in their new lives.

When we are allowed to meet up openly & sing again we will need to look how we can raise funds to ease our dept problem. Hopefully we shall return to Coffee Mornings for a good chat, and choral & band concerts which allow us to reach out to the people of Whitchurch. If you have any fund raising ideas or ideas on how we can reach out to the community please speak to the Stewards. I look forward to meeting you all face to face once more, until then stay safe.

God Bless you all

Pete

We are OPEN.

At the Church Council held via Zoom in February, it was agreed that as long as the infection level continued to fall in this area, church services in the building would resume on Sunday 7th March.

A fair percentage of our congregation will have received a vaccination three weeks prior to this date and some may even be having their second dose.

The Covid measures that were in place remain—with a one way system, Social Distancing, no singing, sanitize your hands coming in, staying two metres apart in the pews and wearing face masks. Collection can be given on arrival or departure. We remind our members not to congregate inside, don't block the aisle, brief conversations can be had outside.

The services will last no more than 40 minutes.

ZOOM.

For those who feel the time is still not right to physically attend, a Zoom service will be taking place later in the day. If you are unaware of the details, please contact one of the Church Stewards.

Attendance at church.

A recent article in the Methodist Recorder said. "Not only is going to church spiritually healthy, it is physically healthy as well. A study found that attending church can lower your blood pressure and the more often you go, the lower it becomes. What was first thought as a coincidence in US churchgoers, is now believed to have a real link".

Poll during Lockdown.

A poll conducted on behalf of Tearfund found that almost half of adults in the UK say they have prayed, a quarter say they watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown and a greater proportion of these were under 35.

The use of the radio, live streaming and TV, have enabled more people to listen and participate in a service.

At St. John's since having the Zoom services, it has enabled members to join in a service and be connected with others in the church, who wouldn't have been able to attend a service.

The challenge for the church is how we use these facts to promote prayer - and to continue to provide services, not just in our building!

Brian Faulkner

I have recently been reading a book "Soor Plooms and Sair Knees" – a light-hearted look at "growing up in Scotland after the War" – and thought you might like some extracts. You may well remember similar events.

Bob-a-Job Week (now discontinued) was for cubs and scouts. You got paid one shilling for performing a task and had your card signed. The shilling was discretionary and might be more – some people threw in a tip! Others took it to be the sum paid for a tiny churl or serf to labour on an impossible task – "That deid (dead) tree is needing to come doon!"

Perhaps he should have remembered that scouts carried sheath knives (cubs and brownies were unarmed.)

At the Beach

Clammy costumes and shivering as you enjoyed yourself. A boy in hand-knitted woollen swimming trunks; a girl in a rucked costume with a rubber cap. The water retention of the woollen costume was phenomenal. It felt like around a hogshead (12 Barrels) of clammy North Sea. As a result "slippage" could be a problem and the ability to walk comfortably when wet was severely impaired!

At School

There was always a wee teacher you were going to hate for the rest of your life. You were going to hunt him down to inflict revenge for casual skelp on the head or rattle on the lug, aka damage to the tympanic membrane as a teaching aid, although it apparently did no harm. The gratuitous violence employed by teacher could make simple facts like the capital of Scotland or two-times-two drain from the brain.

(There's lots more and it's illustrated – Let me know if you want to read it)

Mike (N)

Unexpected Salvation

Have you done something you vowed you would never consider?

By sheer chance I heard of a little dog, which was to be put into Rescue, as the owner was in poor health.

I have always resisted owning another dog, as it could prevent me from travelling. I have family in France and have often visited. Now we cannot go anywhere so I thought perhaps I could help in giving Ben a home.

It is the best thing I could have done. He is a dear little animal, providing me with enforced exercise, laughs, and company in these gloomy times.

He is a real Christian as he loves everybody - regardless!

Rosamond Rawson

Slavery was common place in the time of Christ. Many were slaves because they owed a great debt to their masters. The bible teaches we were once slaves to sin, slaves to our fallen state, sold out under Adam's disobedience.

Sin and death was our inherited debt, and we could never pay the price for freedom. But now the price has been paid by Christ our second Adam, or the Kinsman. His death and resurrection liberated us from our allegiance to sin and death. Over the last year we have all known restriction and lockdown. Likewise Christ has been our vaccine, freeing us from our old Master and translating us from darkness into light, causing us to be slaves and servants of his Righteousness.

Rob Spinks

PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for those known to us who are ill, housebound, in care, lonely, bereaved or in any other kind of need.



St John's

Give thanks for all those serving St John's in these difficult times. Pray that our church family will be guided by the Holy Spirit as we gradually emerge from lockdown.

Our Town

Give thanks for the work of the Foodbank, which has been especially challenged by the consequences of COVID-19. Also give thanks for the generosity of people who have donated to the Foodbank at this time.

Pray for the Town Council as they try to steer our town through the COVID pandemic.

Our nation

Pray for wisdom for our leaders as they make decisions on our behalf managing the current pandemic.

Give thanks for our NHS, care homes, our essential services and the dedicated staff serving in them.

Pray for all who grieve the loss of loved ones, especially through Coronavirus-related death.

Give thanks for the wonderful examples of heroism, kindness and care prompted by this crisis.

Give thanks for everyone involved in the production and the issue of the COVID19 vaccine.

Our world

Pray for those parts of our world where there is conflict and famine, and for the work of aid agencies and governments, especially in places where lack of water, soap and adequate health care make the pandemic especially difficult to deal with.

Pray for understanding and compassion amongst world lead ers and people of all nations on issues such as immigration, refugee status, political prisoners, racial inequality, unequal trade rules and other divisive issues.

Christian Aid in Lent?

How is everyone getting on? I have managed a one-meal fast during the first week of Lent and hope to carry on each Friday. Vic and Joan are not fasting but just giving the donation. Whatever you are able to do and give, will as ever be very welcomed.

Christian Aid is not doing 'Count Your Blessings' this year but they are celebrating 75 years of action with a '75 day challenge' which is now on the website. This can be done at any time of the year.

Helen Trigg

census 2021

The 2021 Census is coming soon

(received from Rev. Chris Densham - Ecumenical Mission Enabler for Telford and Shropshire through Whitchurch Churches Together)

The census is a snapshot of our country, its people and their lives that takes place every 10 years and the next one is on the 21st March. The census in England and Wales is conducted by the independent Office for National Statistics.

The census is important for Shropshire. This is a largely rural county of 1200 square miles with a widely dispersed population and a variety of industries which means there are challenges when planning services and allocating funding. The accuracy of the information that the census provides is crucial to ensuring that we all have schools of the right size, doctors surgeries in the right place and the transport infrastructure that we need to get to work.

Households will start to receive information about the census in February and in early March an access code will be received to complete the census online. The 2021 census will enable information to be accessed more quickly than before as a result of it being primarily carried out online. Anyone with a computer, tablet or smartphone will be able to complete the census. It actually is quicker to complete it online. However, some areas of the county will continue to receive a paper form due to internet provision and everyone will have the opportunity to request a paper form if preferred.

The 2021 census will include 3 new questions regarding service in the armed forces together with optional questions about sexual orientation and gender identification. The answers will help support the Armed Forces Covenant and allow people to identify as they wish.

The information that the census provides is important for national and local government as well as organisations such as charities. It is compulsory to complete the census. The ONS ensures all the data is confidential and protected. No personal information is released for 100 years.

The ONS is obviously aware of the implications of Covid and its teams will be complying with all regulations so that the public is protected. Some people ask why the census is still going to take place against the background of Covid? The answer is that it will be more important than ever to record the impact of this exceptional virus upon the population, our lifestyles and jobs.

The Shropshire team will support households, those in care and anyone that requires help to complete the census. We will have 6 Census Support Centres throughout the county and telephone helplines will also be provided. Specialist help will be available for people that have hearing loss or are partially sighted.

In the coming weeks more information about the census will be provided on television, the radio and through social media. It's a great opportunity for us all to help plan our future.

To find out more please visit our website https://census.gov.uk

"They captured in their ramble all the mysteries and magics of a March evening. Very still and mild it was, wrapped in a great, white, brooding silence -- a silence which was yet threaded through with many little silvery sounds which you could hear if you hearkened as much with your soul as your ears. The girls wandered down a long pineland aisle that seemed to lead right out into the heart of a deep-red, overflowing winter sunset."

— Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) Canadian Author

I wonder if the sap is stirring yet,
If wintry birds are dreaming of a mate,
If frozen snowdrops feel as yet the sun
And crocus fires are kindling one by one:
Sing robin, sing:
I still am sore in doubt concerning Spring."

- Christina Rossetti (1830-94) - English Poet

Climate Emergency

Please continue to join us each Monday from your home as we pray for Climate Justice until the COP 26 Climate talks in November as part of the Christian Aid prayer chain.

God of love, show us our place in this world as the channels of your love for all creatures of this earth. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. Fill us with your power and light, help us to protect your creation, and build a world of justice, peace, love and beauty. Amen.

Briony

Show the Love Prayer 2021

O God who is love Let love empower our compassion Let love embrace each and everyone Let love unite humans and non-human In restorative co-existence.

O Jesus, love come down to earth
May we honour the earth
May we honour all that dwells in the earth
May we be reconciled with the earth
Become what we are, of the earth.

O Spirit of love
Grant us a spirit of humility
Grant us a spirit of carefulness
Grant us a spirit of friendship
For the earth and all that dwells with us here.

Toni Bennett

Show the Love Blessing 2021

May our loving God,
who created the world and all that is in it,
Inspire us to delight in our beautiful home,
And to live in wonder, peace and joy.
May our living God keep our hearts turned to loving our neighbour and to respecting the creation we share.
May our merciful God help us to live this week in goodness and hope,
And fill us with God's peace. Amen

(Ash Vale Chapel Poetry Group)

So beautiful is the world You created – from soil to sea, plants and trees of every sort.

How wonderful the waters teeming with living creatures, birds flying across the skies, all creatures and beasts on the land

Oh, how we have taken for granted and so greedily from the earth – destroyed habitats, hunted to extinction, desecrated environments and species.

We are sorry for our ignorance, our selfishness, our behaviour

Turn us into agents of action -

Help us to change our ways -

Encourage us to bring others with us; families, friends, politicians and world leaders to....

Learn new fairer, greener ways to live with each other

On this beautiful blue planet, till every...

Valley and mountain top, field and forest, river and sea is restored, and we find a new balance to live as You intended, for....

Evermore

Amen

Sue Charlton

"March is a month of considerable frustration - it is so near spring and yet across a great deal of the country the weather is still so violent and changeable that outdoor activity in our yards seems light years away."

Thalassa Cruso (1909-97) English horticulturalist and archaeologist

March is the month God created to show people who don't drink what a hangover is like.

Garrison Keillor: 1942- American writer and broadcaster

"It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade."

- From Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

Indoors or out, no one relaxes in March, that month of wind and taxes, the wind will presently disappear, the taxes last us all the year.

Ogden Nash (1902-1971), American Poet

Services for March

7th Rev. Rob Weir 14th TBA 21st TBA 28th TBA



Sound System Operators for March

7th Mike Nimmo 14th Sarah Lunt 21st Andrew Fawcett 28th Brian Acty



EASTER

Palm Sunday: Palm Crosses will be available at church. Those not at church can request one from the Minister or a Church Steward.

Maundy Thursday:

7pm. Zoom Service led by Rev. Rob on behalf of Churches Together.

Good Friday:

10.30am. Zoom service for the Mission Area.

Easter Sunday:

10.30am. A shortened Easter celebration with Holy Communion.

The Cross:

A Cross will be outside the church from Good Friday onwards. We hope that at some point you will visit the Cross and place one or more flowers on it. This will then remain in place during the following week for the people of Whitchurch to be reminded about Easter.

God in Love Unites Us

Last April we were due to meet to discuss the paper 'God in Love Unites Us', sent to us from the Conference.

Rev. Rob Hilton, Superintendent, will convene a meeting via Zoom on Wednesday 10th March for all to listen and ask questions on this important paper and issue.

This was deferred from the 2020 Conference but this year a vote will be taken.

Continuing the Scottish Theme from earlier......

Irate golfer, on his way to a round of 150 yells: "You must be the worst caddie in the world"

Scottish caddie: "That would be too much of a coincidence, sir"

A teacher asked Wee Jock, "If you had a pound in your right-hand trouser pocket, and three pounds in your left-hand trouser pocket, what would you have?

Wee Jock replied, "Somebody else's trousers!"

The Scottish minister was in full flight on one of his hell-fire and brimstone sermons.

"When the Day of Judgement comes" he thundered, "there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth".

"What about me? Interrupted one of the congregation. "I've lost all my teeth."

"Teeth will be provided" roared the minister.

St. John's Mission Meeting

The meeting to discuss how St. John's plans to move forward was held on 24th February on Zoom.

11 people attended, and decided to follow the 8-point plan suggested by the Methodist Church after discussion and watching an informative video, which convinced us that this was the right way forward for us. The structure involves:

- 1. Deciding on a Process
- 2. Doing a Community Audit
- 3. Conducting a Church Review
- 4. Dreaming Together
- 5. Choosing Priorities
- 6. Identifying Actions
- 7. Considering the Fruit and
- 8. Setting a Date for a Review.

The next meeting will be held on 17th March at 7pm — all are welcome to attend and help shape the future of St. John's.

A Pandemic Poem

The choir would meet every Monday to harmonize barbershop style
But because of this global pandemic, we haven't met up for a while
Now we practice in virtual fashion, it's become our Monday night norm
Throughout these days we're all looking for ways that will help us to weather the storm
We've recorded a song to uplift you, it doesn't go on too long
So we hope you'll take time out to listen, and some of you might sing along
It's a tribute to all the key workers and the volunteers called to the task,
They keep us all fed, give the homeless a bed, doing more than we ever could ask.
This crisis won't go on forever, there are brighter days just round the bend
After the storms there are rainbows, and this storm in time, too, will end.
So no matter your creed or your colour, if you're two or a hundred and two
For music transcends every boundary and this message of hope is for you.

(Submitted by Pete Shingler - from a booklet of poems from the Veterans Orthopaedic Service)

Justice and Peace Group

'Racial Justice and the life of the churches': Speaker Anthony Reddie

Wesley Avenue Methodist Church in Sandbach invited people from around the circuit to one of their Justice and Peace group's zoom meetings online in January this year. I heard about it and as I am interested in finding out more about racial justice, signed up to join.

The speaker was Professor Anthony Reddie, who is originally from Bradford, but has lived most of his life in Birmingham. Anthony is a scholar and a Methodist Local Preacher. He has served the Methodist Church in the training of its preachers and clergy, enabling them to engage with issues of race, class, and diversity. He has been a Mission Secretary for Europe for The Council for World Mission and is committed to ecumenism. He is currently a lecturer at a Baptist Training college. Anthony is a fellow of Wesley House, Cambridge and Director for the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture within Oxford University, where he is also a fellow of Regent's Park College, Oxford.

These are some of the notes I took during his talk:

He stated at the outset that he does not condone violence but that he supports the 'Black Lives Matter' movement.

The Status Quo

The assumption that the status quo is 'necessarily a state of peace', is false. When we think about the words 'status quo' it is often associated in our minds with stability and justice. But, he said the Jesus movement was made up of people who were part of the resistance to the status quo, like the' Black Lives Matter' movement is now to our status quo.

When we listen to Jesus before Pilate we think we identify with Jesus. He represented a disenfranchised suppressed people who were being ruled by an invading Roman army.

However Starting with Constantine, over the years, when Christians read this scripture they really had more in common with Pilate and his empire, as the UK's empire spread throughout the world.

The empire became the status quo and Christians were supporting it. What happens when the rebels become the status quo?

Christianity became wittingly or unwittingly, a bedfellow with the desire for expansion and economic growth, done at the expense of others.

Black peoples' lives have not mattered since empire began and even though it has now waned there is an enduring assumption that lighter skins are superior.

This results today in black bodies being policed in a very different way to white bodies:

At the Notting Hill Carnival there is always a huge police presence, yet at Glastonbury there is a small police presence. The reason given for this is drug use but it is estimated that the drug use at each is equivalent, however one is predominantly black and the other white.

In America a white mob storms the citadel in Washington DC and police are seen helping some of the rioters out. Yet at the peaceful 'Black Lives Matter' protest there are scenes of police brutality.

Black is seen as other.

The status quo in the UK wants us to believe it is all ok and fair, yet the status quo has been built on years of exploitation.

Years of exploitation

The slave trader Edward Colston had equivalent wealth to someone like Bill Gates in our time. He made his wealth by selling 100,000 people as slaves and of these, 20,000, which is one in every five, were thrown overboard into the Atlantic because they were too old, disabled or ill as he would earn more money from the insurance he had taken out on the losses. He become a philanthropist in Bristol, and founded many institutions and so a statue of him was erected in the city. It has been there ever since. Rather like leaving a statue of a Nazi up in a place where Jews are living.

So, it was suggested a few years ago that his statue should be moved to a Bristol museum. But the Council refused. Up until 6 years ago there was a service each year in memory of Colston in a Bristol Parish church!

In 2017 activists suggested having a plaque placed on the statue saying that he was a slave trader. But the mayor wouldn't agree as he said it would impugn Colston's reputation!

The people who collude with injustice give power to the status quo. They make it seem ok.

Long before George Floyd, in 1987, when Anthony, was living as a student in Birmingham, a man called Clinton McCurbin, in Wolverhampton, was accused of having a stolen credit card and was pinned to the ground by police .Two officers sat on his neck and he died. The autopsy concluded 'death by misadventure' and Clinton was portrayed as a 'bad un' by the media!

Anthony joined the protest marches but his white Christian Union student friends would not go with him. He had been brought up by his family to believe in English fair play and his own family were horrified at him wanting confrontation with the police.

The fact is that the status quo is far more violent than the 'Black Lives Matter' movement could ever be and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement is now, a very mixed group of protestors, both black and white.

Christianity has its roots in opposition to empires:

Galatians 3 v 28: 'So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.'

Christianity is an ethic of Love.

It is human nature to be tribal, to have our prejudices reinforced. Anthony gave the example of his tribe: from Moseley, a part of Birmingham full of middle class Guardian readers, self righteous lefties! He said 'We all have our gang'!

As we become part of the status quo we become tribal. But we need to get back to seeing God in the other and to remember we are all created equal. Jesus' mandate to his disciples is equity for all humanity. All that matters Jesus said was to have faith in him, to be baptised in his name and to love each other.

If you think the status quo is too big a problem, and you are too small to make a difference, you haven't shared a bed with a mosquito!!

How do we make a difference and be agents for change?

At this point we broke into groups .Some ideas which came out were :We have to raise awareness , take responsibility by learning as much as we can, and speaking up whenever the opportunity arises , but in all of this remember the Holy Spirit enables us to disagree without being disagreeable!

History remembers the successful. Those who don't succeed are demonised.

Lastly think of Israel and Palestine: Whose voice do you hear least, who is not present – uphold that voice. (Matthew 25 : v 31-46). Be the change you want to see in the world.

Helen Trigg

April 2021 Newsletter

Please let Mike Nimmo have all your submissions for the next Newsletter by 20th March.

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Please can I thank all for their prayers and well wishes while I've been in hospital

God bless

Rob (Hewson)

SPICK & SPANNERS ROTA

March 4th Nancy Millington & Gwen Reeves

18th Elizabeth Shingler, Briony Myles-Hook & Linda Jenkins

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