

Newcomen and Zetland Park Methodist Churches, Redcar

Staying connected during the lock-down

I am writing this at the end of the first week of the UK being in "lock down" so as to help stem the spread of coronavirus. Life seems so strange with meetings cancelled, services of worship stopped and a huge part of society being in isolation. By the time you read this much more may well have developed - who knows? Understandably, many people are very concerned, concerned for themselves and those they love and care for. News from other countries and the amount of media coverage are certainly enough to worry almost anyone.

I am also aware that by the time you read this we will not be far from the end of Lent, with Holy Week and Easter following. For the first time in my life-time there will be no Holy Week and Easter services - that is going to be so strange.

Two things, however, strike me about the Holy Week and Easter story. Firstly, God did not stop his son, Jesus, from dying the most horrific death on the cross, but nor did Jesus walk away from such suffering. God never said that there would be no difficulties or suffering in the world; all that we are promised is that God would always be with us. Psalm 23 is a wonderful example of that promise, as are many of the words of Jesus. This promise has helped many followers of Jesus as they have walked through natural and human-caused suffering over the years.

But the second thing which strikes me is that Jesus's friends, his disciples or followers, supported one another through the terrible events that unfolded in what we know as Holy Week. Even in the account of the period following the resurrection of Jesus, when we find the disciples locked in their homes in fear, they are still encouraging and supporting one another as they became more aware of the incredible truth that Jesus was, in some very special way, still with them.

Though I cannot read the future, I suspect that the next few weeks are not going to be easy for any of us, and possibly very difficult for some. In these times we need to remember that God has not forsaken us but he still loves us, and that we will get through this time so much more easily if we support and encourage one another. I am always so hurt when I see examples of bad human behaviour such as unnecessary panic buying of essential items which are needed by all of us. The Christian way is to show God's love by looking out for the needs of others around us, our neighbours, family and friends, but especially for those who are most isolated and vulnerable, and there is clear evidence of that going on already amongst those who can still get out to do necessary tasks.. And even if we cannot get out we can still keep in touch with one another by telephone and, as importantly, to pray for one another.

God bless and take care

Arthur

Being Church while we can't be in church

Worship

For the duration of the lockdown it is quite clear that the BBC will be broadcasting a Sunday morning service which I am sure many of you will find beneficial. This will be in addition to the on-going "Thought for the day" slots on various programmes.

However, the Methodist Church already has 'worship from home' options available including the live streaming on the internet of four different Sunday services! Obviously you need a computer and the internet to find these but links to them can be found on the "Worship during the pandemic" page of the Methodist website www.methodist.org.uk. Also there are now three different worship sheets for each Sunday, the one of the Methodist website, together with

Worship at Home from The Vine and the Darlington District sheet which has been distributed to those whose email address we have. A number of kind folks are dropping one or other of the sheets off to members without email during their daily exercise.

Pastoral Care

Throughout the coming weeks it is essential we keep in touch with each other while we can't actually be together. Pastoral Visitors are an important element in this but others too, we know, have risen to the task of keeping in touch especially with those living on their own. Clearly, any one of us can pick up a phone and call a friend - so please do.

If anyone is feeling in need of someone praying with them on the phone, a number of people have offered to do this. Just get in touch with Arthur (01287 651340) and we will arrange this.

Support during self-isolation

We are aware that many of our members who are within the most 'vulnerable' groups do have family and close friends to support them. But our concern is to ensure that everyone who need support does still have the help they need, especially if they have isolated themselves. If you find yourself in this position please call Arthur and we will see what we can do to find someone local to help, be it fetching food or medicines.

A word of warning

We have already seen some people using this situation to take advantage of others, from reselling things like hand-gel at exorbitant cost on the internet, to taking money off people to buy food but not turning up with it. We must all be extra vigilant at this time.

Keeping in touch

Emails are the easiest way for us to keep in touch with you. If you have received this as a paper copy then it is because we have no email address for you. If you have an email address and would be willing to receive further copies by email that would be very much easier for us. If this is so please let Arthur (01287 651340 or arthur.harbottle@methodist.org.uk) know and he will add you to the email list - but be assured that is shared with no one else, not even in church unless you request it.

And finally please keep giving to the church if you can

You may have seen appeals from various charities which expect to suffer financial losses during the current crisis. While the Government has offered help to some businesses and individuals, charities are not included in this. Our churches do have a financial reserve (as is required by the Charity Commission) but most of our income abruptly ceased as room lettings and church services finished. Yet, we still have most of our normal expenses to pay, like the Circuit assessment, insurance, utilities etc.

A small number of members already contribute to church funds by Standing Order (ie an instruction to your Bank to make contributions directly into the Church Bank account) and it has been suggested that those who still have a stable income might look to contributing to the church by this method so as to keep some cash flowing into the Church Bank accounts. Unless you do internet banking this would most likely need setting up by sending a written instruction to your Bank with the relevant details. A quick telephone call to your church treasurer would give you the information you would need to do this - but please don't do this unless you are confident and happy about it.

Otherwise we would ask those of you who make use of weekly offering envelopes keep putting your offerings aside, in so far as you can, ready for when worship services resume.