

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

What are our statues?

Reflections on post-lockdown church 4 - black lives matters, statues and Paul in Athens (Acts 17).

I continue to reflect on church post-lockdown and in the last few weeks I've also been reflecting on the Black Lives Matters agenda. Much has been made of statues and their links to the past (some calling for statues with links to slavery to be removed and others worrying that this is somehow erasing or failing to learn from history). It's a difficult and highly charged debate and it drew my mind to Acts 17 where Paul is in Athens and is surrounded by statues. He walks around and, as any good contextual theologian would, tries to work out some of the values of their culture and society. Interestingly enough he was *distressed* by the amount of 'idols' and this is the beginning of great discussions (arguments?) in the synagogue and the marketplace - they even lead to Paul sharing his faith. Of course these statues were idols, they were the objects of worship, whereas I hope no-one worships our statues (though I do wonder - some folk seemed quicker to protect our statues than to protect the rights of ethnic minorities - to place an object as more important than a human is, I think, a form of idolatry).

It did also get me to asking the questions about what are our statues and what do they mean to an 'outsider'? What would folk make of our objects and fixtures and how do they communicate our values and story?

I can't recall any statues in the churches under my pastoral care, we're not an ornate church and don't value physical representations like some of our ecumenical sisters and brothers, however, I do think we have metaphorical statues. We too have sacred things that have risen out of our story and that we wouldn't want removed. For Methodists it could be our music, our organs, our hymns (ancient and modern) the ability to sing together. It could be the 'Lord's Supper' - breaking bread and sharing wine (non-alcoholic of course). It could be the local preaching system - those called to preach and the need for the word of God to be proclaimed from a pulpit (just look at how much emphasis, historically was placed on the pulpit); I am still called to 'Word and Sacrament' (ministry of Bible preaching and presiding over the Lord's Supper) as a 'presbyter' (Methodist Minister). These are certainly things that can be found in every 'normal' act of Methodist worship.

The #BlackLivesMatters protests, and particularly the threat to/removal of statues, has forced us to re-examine our story as Britons and also to place our values under a microscope. It has exposed both the ugliness of our past and in some cases the ugliness of our present. I wonder if Covid-19 is doing the same for our church. Of the statues I've set up in the previous paragraph both singing (together in one place) and the Lord's Supper are impossible at present and a return to worship in the short term might not include them, they've been removed (or at least boarded up). What other things have been boarded up as we meet apart (if we can meet at all). What do we miss most about meeting together and what is a statue of the past that needs to be consigned to a museum, loved once but now not core to who we are any more.

We are being called to examine our hearts and ensure that the statues we erect tell the story of our journey and of our present values. I would like to see our churches re-open only when we have our fundamentals front and centre rather than our past. I would like to see a church that welcomes every visitor with an experience of who we are. As Methodists we could turn to the Methodist way of life to see what these fundamentals are: **Worship; Learning and Caring; Service; and Evangelism.** What would a reimagined church look like if these were our statues? We have only so much room for 'plinths' in our lives - let's fill them wisely.



Worship Opportunities

1. Circuit Services

A variety of worship opportunities will be hosted on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF-CBiFzWL81CUJrKjC1Psw>) Tune in today!

2. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)

A service from South Wales Baptist College led by Rev Dr Craig Gardiner, with a reflection on the parable of the sower from College co-principal Rev Dr Rosa Hunt.

3. TV Services

Unfortunately the BBC have decided to stop broadcasting Sunday services on TV. If this changes, I will endeavour to report when and where they are broadcast, until then, unfortunately, radio is the only non-internet sources (aside from our Dial-a-sermon (see details on page 4).

4. Online Holiday Club!

Southwell Methodist Church will be running (in collaboration with three other churches in Southwell) an online Holiday Club, for reception aged to year 6, 3rd-7th August 2020. If you know of anyone who would benefit or can offer to carry this yolk with them, please get in touch! families4SMC@gmail.com



If all this this baffles you - call me or email: peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk.

Heavy Laden?

Reflections from Matthew Chapter 11:28-30

I've had the opportunity, over the last few weeks, to be quite open and honest about my own journey through lockdown. For a minister called to incarnational (present in the flesh) ministry to be locked down and unable to leave my home is somewhat emptying. It's difficult to feel useful or even have a purpose when a huge part of your calling is removed. Maybe you can relate to that? Maybe something of what made you, you is not possible at the moment.

I have to say, being able to write these newsletters (which I hope you have found helpful) have been immensely helpful to me, as have the opportunities to preach over the internet. I've been please to see more views on YouTube services than any of my congregations and been grateful of the feedback received - it's helped with the isolation. I suppose I've been able to continue to share and the points where I've been low, I've appreciated being able to share my feelings with some of you - either by writing or talking on the telephone.

In this week's passage Jesus uses the image of a yoke. It's easy for the yolk to be seen as an oppressive thing - a yoke of slavery perhaps. But for an animal whose purpose was to pull the plough, the yolk was a friend. You see it's by being tethered to other animals through a yoke that the burden is shared and, if fitted correctly, shared evenly.

Who are you sharing with at present? Who are you able to be open and honest with, about how you are feeling? Perhaps you feel low because you are pulling your plough alone, or perhaps because you've been pulling it alone, you've given up and taken it off. If we're not yolked *with* someone then the yoke doesn't work.

I think many folk, during lockdown, have realised how hard they've been finding church - meetings, rotas, to do lists. Those who've been fortunate enough to be able to stop have talked of how refreshing it's been - I've heard some wonderful testimonies about restful and spiritually rewarding times - it's great to hear. But why then, if taking the yolk off is so rewarding and refreshing does Jesus talk about a yoke, rather than a nice patch of grass to sit on and feel the sun and the gentle breeze - surely that's easy, that's where we find rest!

Interestingly enough, this passage is framed, in Matthew's gospel, between a very busy time of ministry (earlier in chapter 11) and even 'working' on the Sabbath (chapter 12) hardly restful! You see, Jesus didn't come to Earth to rest, he came to plough, to plant and to harvest. We too, as the church are not called to rest, we're called to plough, plant and harvest. The 'work' is essential - just look what the result is for the cities that fail to repent in chapter 11, it is worse for them than the worse cities the Bible can come up with. So what if folk don't hear the gospel, don't hear of God's love, don't experience the Holy Spirit? What if that's because we don't reach out? We need to find ways of continuing to serve God without reaching the point where the yolk is too heavy and we have to put it down. Easier said than done! Perhaps the yoke image has more to offer us?

I'm no farmer (and to be honest I suspect in, the age of tractors, there are few yokes these days) but with a little digging I've found some interesting things about the yoke. Firstly, you may be interested in the etymology of yoke (the origins of the word) The word yoke means comes from the Proto-Indo-European 'yugóm' (yoke) from the verb 'yeug' meaning to join or unite. It's all about being together and pulling together! I did find a single yolk, for one animal, but nowhere near the areas Jesus would have known. They are used with water buffalo who are very large and powerful. Let's be honest here, I'm not large and powerful (spiritually or physically), I can't work alone - I need to be yoked with others and it's my main role as a minister to *draw others into ministry* with me. Remind, me if I forget that - but expect me to remind you of that too.

Secondly there are many types of yoke: 'Neck' or 'bow' yoke, 'Head' yoke, 'Withers' yoke. They vary and are suited to different animals. One type, a single beam, has the benefit of keeping the animals apart, helping them to stand quietly without fighting (this did make me chuckle as I applied this to ministry!)

The common factor is that they're all designed to distribute the load evenly and they rely on one very important thing - the animals must pull in the same direction. If one animal stops moving, the other animal(s) can't move either. If one animal decides to pull in another direction, then either the yoked animal is pulled away too, or neither can get to where they want to go. This require collaboration on the part of the animals which I suppose is only achieved by the farmer doing the steering.

What does it mean, then, to take Jesus' yoke? I suppose we could see it as being yoked to Jesus but, for me, it seems to point to the yoke belonging to Jesus that he fits to us as we place ourselves in his service and under his authority. The ploughing will be easier and much more effective if we submit to Jesus and we follow him. It's not easy to know God's will for us as individuals and possibly even harder in the direction we take as a church but if we're pulling in different directions we can be sure that something is wrong and it will seem both harder and more fruitless.

Let me encourage you, as the yolk may be laid aside for some of us for a time, in these times of pandemic, that it's important to pick it back up again - there is much to plough, plant and harvest (possibly more so in ministries that have been fallow). The church needs you and is going to need you more than ever as restrictions are lifted. Not to return to normal - I reiterate that ineffective and shrinking churches shouldn't be in a rush to return to how they were doing things before - but to seek direction from the farmer, from Jesus.

Let me encourage you, if you feel like the yoke is hard, if you're not lucky enough to have been able to put it down for a time, that you are not alone. Ask yourself, are you pulling in the right direction or is it time to reassess, and who are you yoked with, share - share the burden. Share it first with Jesus - take it to the Lord in prayer - and share it with others - you are not alone.

Prayer Space

Please continue to pray for the Methodist Church as Methodist Conference continues (online).

Please also pray for many churches who are conducting risk assessments, putting in place control measures and considering the reopening of their buildings.

Please also pray for congregations, for patience, as they wait for it to be safe to open and particularly those who will not yet be able to rejoin their congregations when they do open (shielders and the vulnerable).

Please also keep your eyes open for opportunities to pray together for the way we **Re-imagine Church** post lockdown - we are planning Zoom sessions for prayer and to share so watch this space!

In these unprecedented times we believe we're invited by God to be...



...let's join together in this important process with opportunities for...

PRAYER
A series of 'gatherings' for prayer and to seek God's will for our changing church.

SHARE
A series of 'gatherings' to share informally and imagine what the church could be.

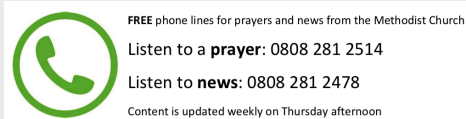
Ministers: Rev Nathan Falls, Rev Peter Bates and Rev Peter Hibberts | @newarkandsouthwellmethodist | newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk

If you have specific prayer requests, do get in touch with me.

If you would like requests to be shared around the SMC prayer chain contact Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

For more prayers visit the [Methodist Church Website prayers for the Pandemic Page](#).

The Methodist Church, nationally, has also set up a prayer and news line...



Zoom Home Groups

We're planning on continuing the popular Zoom Home Groups on Tuesdays from July 21st and we'd love you to join us!

The groups normally last just over an hour and include a Bible focus (usually the lectionary reading) discussion and prayer time.

ALL WELCOME - FROM ANY CHURCH OR NONE!



Reflective songs...

Your hand, O God, has guided (StF 692) [LINK](#)
In Christ there is no East or West (StF 685) [LINK](#)
What a friend we have in Jesus (StF 531) [LINK](#)
Jesus, Lord, we look to thee (StF 686) [LINK](#)
Summoned by the God who made us (StF 689) [LINK](#)
Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Help for the isolated

Elston residents, if you need support during the lockdown please contact the Good Neighbourhood Group through Sandra Wright on 07773 689736 or Linda Fitzgerald on 0798937115.

The Sutton-on-Trent Buddies Corona Virus Helpline is up and running - for help of any kind the number to ring is 01636 351615. or email suttonbuddy@outlook.com

Southwell Town Council can provide support by calling 07874780931, 07874780932 or 01636816103.

North Muskham's Buddy Scheme can be reached by contacting Andy Willey on 07967138724 or muskhambuddyscheme@yahoo.com.

If you would like to volunteer you should also make contact using the above details.

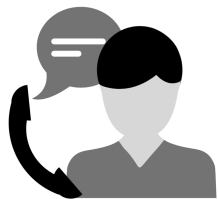
Dial-a-sermon service now live!

Dial a Sermon

To listen to this week's sermon from Revd. Peter Hibberts please call this number. (Calls cost the same as a local call.)

01636 558871

Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit
helping you stay connected whilst we're apart.



Thanks to the work of David Watson and Steve Fowles, we now have a telephone sermon service. If you have no access to the internet but would like to hear the reading and sermon from the previous Sunday, you can dial up the number above and hear it from the minister's voice! Calls cost the same as a local call and recordings should be around 15 minutes each - you can access them at any time of the day or night! We endeavour to upload the new sermon each weekend so it may be a few days behind this newsletter - don't worry, that's normal!

Do get in touch if you need to on (01636) 812166 or peter.hibberts@methodistorg.uk.

1-7-20

Families:

families4SMC@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S CHURCH AT HOME!

We are providing a full children's church session for our younger church family members each week. You will be able to download the plan every week here: <https://www.southwellmethodist.org.uk/childrenschurchathome.htm> so that you can do it at home as a family to help your children explore the theme that Rev. Peter preaches on in his service.



Heavy Laden

For this activity, you will need a willing parent!!! Your challenge is to load your parent up with as many boxes and bags as they can carry and then see how far they can get across the room before they drop something. How easy it is to carry so many things? Can you rest while doing this? Can you sit down – or lie down - and then stand up without dropping anything?

Sometimes in life we can feel as if we are carrying a lot of things in our minds – the things we need to do, the things we know we should be doing, the things we are worried about, the things we are excited about, the things we feel guilty about... Sometimes we feel that we can't fit another thing into our minds – and we can't rest because of it! Can you think of any examples?

What do you think Jesus says to us when we feel like that? Read Matthew 11:28-30. What did Jesus mean?

Why do we need rest and how can Jesus help us to find it? For instance, we can trust God to look after us which means we don't have to carry our worries around anymore.

If you like, you could write some of your ideas on the boxes and bags (or stick post-its on them if you need to reuse the bags!). Then you could load up your parent again and act out how we can give each one to Jesus.

If you'd like an extra challenge, why not find out what a 'yoke' is and try making one from junk modelling... we'd love to see it in action!

Keep in Touch

There will be lots of opportunities to keep in touch during this time, not least by picking up the phone, to each other, or giving me a call (Rev Peter: 01636812166) or sending an email (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk). Can I recommend the Newark and Southwell Methodist Church FaceBook page to you in particular. It's an open page so it's available to all and you needn't be on FaceBook to view it. You can access it at facebook.com/NewarkandSouthwellMethodist/. Don't worry if you're not a member of Southwell Methodist Church, we're all in this together!

Also, spread the word to anyone you think would appreciate receiving this newsletter. Let them know of our FaceBook pages and if you come across someone who might benefit from receiving it please get in touch.