

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

Education Sunday

Words adapted from those written by Barbara Easton (Head of Service | Methodist Academies and Schools Trust)

Today (Monday) the eldest of my children returned to school, meaning that all four of my children are now at school or preschool full time again (for the first time since lockdown in March!) I must confess that we also rose a cheer in a dinnertime the night before the younger children's return to school - it's been a long time coming and we've all missed it!

There's always a lot of anxieties around the first day back at school after a long break and these are compounded this year by the heightened mood, stoked by the pandemic, a story-hungry media and late-notice missives from the DfE. I have never known schools so much in the news – and quite a lot of it unhelpful! On top of this, they are managing the very real complexities of running a school and the justifiable concerns of families, children and staff. And, alongside all of that, all the other 'stuff' that just happens in running a school which is, actually, a full-time job in itself. We almost forget that in the Covid world! But they have come back fighting, and ready for the challenge of whatever these next few weeks brings. I hope that they have been able to have a decent break over the summer and a chance to recharge the batteries for the next instalment.

This Sunday is education Sunday, a churches together focus on education that comes on the second Sunday in September every year. Did you know that there are 90 Methodist schools across the country including two in our Methodist Circuit? (Lowe's Wong Anglican Methodist Junior School, Southwell, and All-Saints Anglican Methodist Primary School, Elston.) It's our chance to stand shoulder to shoulder in prayer and appreciation for our education establishments.

The passage that many churches will focus on for Education Sunday is from the story of Exodus, when God's people leave a life which is familiar (but unsatisfactory) and embark on a journey to something better. It turns out to be quite a winding journey, with plenty of wrong turns and the unexpected. Through it all, God promises to be with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Throughout the long, winding story of the Bible God continually promises to be there whatever happens and wherever the journey takes us. 'Whether you turn to the right of the left, I will go before you' (Isaiah 30) and, again, in the Psalms, 'you are already there'. Whatever the days bring, we pray that our schools will know that God is with them, already there. 'God of my present, my past and future too', as the hymn says. I'd also appreciate your prayers as we endeavour to serve our schools in new ways. Visits to the churches for harvest and Christmas seem unlikely and at present the children cannot gather in assemblies (instead collective worship is share in class groups) and cannot sing in groups of larger than 15 (we know what it feels like to not be permitted to sing together!) Please pray as we seek to do the best we can with YouTube and other electronic means to ensure that the staff and children are not forgotten by the churches in this Covid-19 world!

If you'd like to see more of what is happening in our schools, why not watch the 'Doing All the Good We Can' video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utzOW6fLRQQ>) which explains something about the schools that we have and features lots of the children.

At the very least, spend some of your prayer time praying for our pupils, support staff, teachers and school leaders at what is one of the most difficult times for schools in living memory. Better still, why not get in touch with them and tell them how much you value them!



1. Online Services

A variety of worship opportunities are being hosted on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) Tune in today!

2. The Gathering

Every week over thirty people share an on-line 'Zoom' which allows us to see one another and catch up on how everyone is. If you have a smartphone or tablet or a computer, you are able to access it from your home or from wherever you are. We pray, worship and support each other in a very simple yet God-centred way.

The Gathering meets at 9.45 each Sunday and lasts for about 45 minutes. Many then join with services on Facebook and YouTube across the internet.

If you would like to learn more, please contact either Philip Holmes (philipholmes8100@gmail.com) or Colin Beckett (colin1244@gmail.com).

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am - 13th September 2020

400th Anniversary of the Mayflower

Radio 4's Sunday morning service with the Right Reverend Nick McKinnel, Bishop of Plymouth.

4. Radio Nottingham

Listen every Sunday, at 8am, to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. (Online or on 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.)

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

The Church Unleashed in Power

Reflections on Acts 3:1-16 and 'Church' by Beki Rogers

Have you ever witnessed a miracle? We read about many miracles in the gospel, which I believe is historically accurate and not always but often literally intended; Jesus really did make the lame walk, the blind see and the dead rise! Of course if what I say is true then either times have changed or we, the church, have lost something of the Kingdom of God compared to what the disciples and the early church experienced.

In this week's passage we see just such a miracle - a man who was 'lame from birth' walks and indeed jumps! What would happen if we saw this in one of our churches? (Aside from there still wouldn't be a congregation in most of our churches to witness it!) I think we'd react a little like the bystanders of Peter's time did, "all the people were astonished and came running"!

Beki Rogers calls this 'a sign of heaven breaking through and changing life on earth.' She goes on to challenge the church to be a place where the church is unleashed to be a 'place where God's Spirit of power can work through the people to impact the world'. It may surprise you to hear me say that I am not interesting in building up the church as an end in itself, growing numbers of folk attending church, singing songs, even praying together. I'm certainly not interested in these practices as a church culture - a way of doing life that comes from having always done it that way. I am, however, interested in creating a place (which may not be geographical) 'where God's Spirit of power can work through the people to impact the world'. Wow, that sounds like a place that I want to be part of! If you had to characterise your experience of church - pre-Covid-19 would it be described like that?

It's an interesting phrase, 'breaking through'. I have, on several occasions needed to drill a hole through an external wall. It's not easy. It requires a very long drill bit, a decent drill, and some elbow grease. You can always tell the point when you break through! It suddenly feels freer, easier and suddenly the daylight streams in through the hole! I wonder what heaven has to break through in our church at present. What barriers have we put up that prevent God's Holy Spirit from moving?

In a recent post, online, by Revd. Shane Bishop, an American church pastor, we were asked if COVID-19 might Save the Church. Shane says *"The Western church has been in decline for decades and with a few notable exceptions, has addressed the collective decline by doing more of what it was doing previously. What was it doing? Good deeds to the exclusion of evangelism. Juxtapose this with the stated mission of Jesus to "seek and save the lost," Jesus' imperative of the church to "take the message of repentance to all nations (Luke 24: 47)" and the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20). This all sounds like evangelism to me. Is it possible that we have vastly under-spiritualized the mission of the church? Could it be that we are first and foremost called to "proclaim the forgiveness of sins for all who will turn to Jesus?" I want to suggest that the purpose of the church is not to do good deeds; it is to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ until his return. The reality is that a lot of churches are literally doing good deeds to death. Obviously, as we*

pursue our spiritual mission, we are doing to do lots of good deeds but doing good deeds to the exclusion of Gospel proclamation and evangelism misses the mission of the church. It is an incomplete Gospel. It is a sterile Gospel. Many churches are really good at keeping their most committed Christians really busy (usually exhausted) in the pursuit of good deeds but the question I am asking is, "Are we busy doing the unique work of the Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ?" There is an opportunity before us. The pandemic will no doubt claim many churches; but most had serious preexisting conditions. Others will manage to reopen but do so doing the same things, the same way they have always done them. If the COVID-19 pandemic forces "at risk" churches to ask some hard questions toward the recovery their spiritual mission, perhaps what was meant for harm will work for good."

I think Shane is right in stating that the church is here 'to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ until his return' and if that's true, our church life should look like Jesus' ministry and the ministry of the Early Church in Acts. When Jesus approached that man he was on the way to pray in the temple - if you like, he was on his way to church. I can just imagine this happening on our way to pre-Covid-19 church and us politely pointing out that we couldn't really stop now as the service was about to start and we needed to get to our seat in time. Perhaps we'd never get back to returning to the man. Peter stops everything, in fact he never makes it to the temple, what happens instead is heaven breaks through, all plans stop and Peter preaches the Gospel. We don't hear the whole message but it's not a sanitised gospel - it's one of truth and of power! It's one that clearly witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and a need for all to have faith in Jesus. This is *our* gospel.

I think we should be doing church powerfully. Let me qualify this with two small phrases that crop up in our passage (and were helpful highlighted in the study notes I've borrowed!) Firstly, this power is not ours. Peter makes it clear when he asks, 'why do you stare at us as if by our own power of godliness we had made this man walk?' Folks, no-one is staring at us, as a church, at present because the church structures we have build have been built in our own power and somewhere we have gone wrong by missing out the power of God. (I personally repent of my part in this.) Instead Peter points to a different power - by which, 'this man who [they saw] and [knew] was made strong.' The power of faith! Folks this God is our God, this power is our power as long as this faith is our faith.

In a recent prayer meeting we were given the picture of hard ground. It conjured a vision in my mind of unforgiving farmland in a developing country. The ground was dry and solid, a difficult place to plant and grow. I was drawn to reflect on the unforgiving structures and culture we have cast in our church and how there is little room in them for our God to move, for heaven to break through. I wonder, no - I hope, that as Covid-19 breaks our structures down, heaven will find cracks that it can shine through and we won't be too quick to paper over those cracks but instead will pick at them, further break the ground and see the power of

God break through in our lives and in our churches - for the glory of God and the healing of our nation.

Prayer Space

Prayers for education:

Lord God, we thank you for the many people who enable schools to run smoothly and who provide a nurturing environment for our children. Help them to know their value and to enjoy the work that they do. Fill them afresh with your Spirit.

Lord God, we thank you for all those in our church who nurture our faith and enable us to learn more about you. Help them to draw close to you as they study and prepare, and to be nourished themselves as they lead us. Fill them afresh with your Spirit.

Lord God, we thank you for our children and young people at nursery, school, academy and college, especially in these strange times. Help them to make the most of the opportunities that they have - to be diligent students, to play creatively and to know that you delight in them as they seek to follow you. Fill them afresh with your Spirit.

The Breakthrough Prayer

From: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/year-of-prayer/praying-the-breakthrough-prayer/>

A prayer for God to break through in the life of our churches:

God of love, God for all,

your purposes are more beautiful than we can possibly imagine.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit.

Help us let go of all that holds us back.

Open our lives and our churches to new seasons of humility and faith, of change and growth.

If you have specific prayer requests, do get in touch with me and if you would like requests to be shared around the SMC prayer chain contact

Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

Zoom Home Groups

Tuesday Zoom Groups are back! Continuing on 15th September 2pm and 8pm (next Tuesday) we'll be going deeper into Acts and exploring what the early church can tell us about being church in the 21st Century. Get in touch to obtain the Zoom details and join a group

ALL WELCOME - from any church or none.

A series of online services and follow up small groups based on the Beki Rogers Spring Harvest Bible Studies. Join us as we explore what the church in Acts can teach us about church today.

The Acts... **Church** ...unleashed

Sundays 30/8; 6/9; 13/9; 20/9; 27/9 - available from 9:45am, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>
Zoom groups Tuesdays 2pm and 8pm in September - 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th
(Zoom details available on request)

Minister: Rev Peter Roberts peter.roberts@methodist.org.uk @southwellmethodist <https://www.facebook.com/southwellmethodist> southwellmethodist.org.uk 01636 812166

Reflective songs...

Strength will rise (StF 89) [LINK](#)

The splendour of the king (StF15) [LINK](#)

Down the mountain the river flows (StF 377) [LINK](#)

Come down, O Love divine (StF 372) [LINK](#)

Hear the call of the kingdom (StF407) [LINK](#)

Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Church re-opening!

Whilst we know that not everyone is ready to meet again, face to face, we also realise that many are desperate to find the encouragement of face to face fellowship and so we are delighted to launch our Bubble Church!



These Covid-Safe small groups will meet, in church, and are an opportunity for fellowship, breaking bread, prayer and teaching. Restrictions still apply but do get in touch to find out more!

Frequently asked questions:

Why Bubble Church?

Well, hopefully it communicates a vision of a safe, controlled and risk assessed environment in which to meet face to face. A Bubble would be 10-15 people who meet regularly (weekly or fortnightly) in one of our church buildings (possibly not your usual church as not all buildings will be able to open initially) but not in the home as social distancing is very difficult in the average home. As a small group they would most likely meet in a hall rather than the main church, though where the chairs can easily be moved around (many folk during this time have commented on how the electronic forms of face-to-face church have allowed them to see each other's faces and interact intimately with each other rather than all facing the same way), though the main church may be the best place for the bubble.

What might a Bubble look like?

The easy answer to this is, exactly like the bubble wants it to! Each bubble will differ based on the needs of the group. When it meets will depend on their availability but they cannot possibly all meet on a Sunday, indeed they could meet any day of the week at any time of the day!

What will happen in a bubble?

In keeping with our desire to take the opportunity to rediscover something of the early church or early Methodism, it is envisaged that the focus of the bubbles will be fellowship, prayer and teaching. The hope is also that ministers and supernumerary ministers will also be able to visit a bubble and bring a Covid-Safe communion (breaking bread).

For more information checkout the Bubble Church guide with risk assessment on the Circuit Website: <https://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk/newsroom/bubble-church.html>

9-9-20

Families: by Katie Hibberts
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.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES!

Many of our families have children who have gone back to school last week or this and we want you to know that we're praying for all those in education - including your children! We also thought that this might be a useful activity for you to do with your children as they return to school in very unusual times!

Going back to school

With some children returning to their schools under very unusual conditions here are some simple discussion and prayer activities to help talk through the return to school.

Ask: What are your worries or fears about going back to school?

Remember: 1 Peter 5 v 7
Give all your worries to him because he cares about you.

Cast away your worries
Write or draw your worries or fears on a piece of paper then fold it into a paper aeroplane and throw it as far away as you can. Remember that wherever we are we can give our worries and fears straight to God.

Ask: What is going to be different to normal when you are at school? How do you feel about these changes?

Recognise the good and the bad
Try to find the positives in the midst of the change - talk about the many ways you have already adapted to learning at home during lockdown - why not write your own positive attitude mantra to use throughout the day!

Remember! Hebrews 13 v 8
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Ask: What are you most looking forward to about going back to school?

Remember! Jeremiah 29 v 11
I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.

Pray for your bubble!
Draw a picture of all those who are in your bubble at school. Ask God to protect them and to help them all to be good friends to one another and to make sure nobody feels left out.

Why not commit to praying for one person from your bubble every day, that they would be brave, feel safe and know God's love.

Re-imagining Church - Time to Share

We have one more dates for the Re-imagining church prayer and share and would love you to join us at the earlier than previously advertised time of 2-3pm on Sunday 13th September to Share together.

This is an informal time to share as we seek God's will for the church post restrictions. Come and seek God with us...

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

Re-imagining Church

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

PRAYER ...and to... **SHARE**

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

Prayer 'Gathering' 3i
Sunday 6th September, 2-3pm - Zoom
Meeting ID: 842 4011 0921
Password: Imagine

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

Share 'Gathering' 3i
Sunday 13th September, 2-3pm - Zoom
Meeting ID: 842 4011 0921
Password: Imagine

A recording of the first 'SHARE' session is available on request (for those who missed it).

Ministers: Rev Nathan Falla, Rev Peter Bates and Rev Peter Hibberts
www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk