



TOGETHER

NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk

Is the vitality *in* the church?

A response to Prof Stan Chapman of Southwell Methodist Church's article in TOGETHER 41 by Rev Peter Hibberts

I love to read a challenging article and have my thoughts challenged. It's for that reason that I'm always grateful to Stan Chapman for his Together contributions. His latest article was no exception and challenged me (particularly as I am part of the 'institutional church' that comes off badly from the picture painted - though I can't disagree with it!) I do, however, have two points in response.

Firstly to challenge the question: 'Where is the vitality in the church?' I feel convinced that any church that seeks to find vitality within itself has already lost it. I'm mindful of the sad indictment of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3. It seems by the description that this church has great vitality ('I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' Revelation 3:16) yet it is described as 'wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked,' by Christ himself. This demonstrates that the external signs can be deceptive - a church which has many members, a healthy bank balance and what might be described as 'great vitality' may actually be lukewarm and on the verge of being vomited out of God's mouth. It's a sobering message to any church and one I don't quote lightly! Contrast this with the Church in Philadelphia which has 'little strength' (Revelation 3:8) - one might say lacking in vitality! In this case the church is told that they have, 'kept [his] word and not denied [his] name.' This is rewarded with an 'open door that no-one can shut.' (Revelation 3:8) Maybe the words of the Old Testament can best sum up the lesson here, "Man looks on the outside but God looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

The response I suggest then is, in tandem with the need to 'demonstrate Christian love and commitment through concrete social action', we must constantly reexamine our heart, as a church. To conclude, a final example from Revelation 2. The church in Ephesus is hard working and also perseveres. Perhaps it has a commitment to concrete social action as part of its church mission strategy. Perhaps it demonstrates Christian love, we don't know. Yet Jesus holds this one thing against it, 'You have forsaken your first love.' (Revelation 2:4). My interpretation of this is that in all their church 'vitality', they have lost sight of Christ. It may be that they do great things but they are not a charity, or a business; they are a church - the body of Christ. I entirely agree that we must demonstrate Christ's love and social action is in our DNA but our primary focus must Christ as he is the source of all vitality - indeed, **being Christ centred is vital.**



I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Online Circuit Service Sermon | John 6 v 24 - 36 | Rev Peter Bates

We start this story with the crowds chasing after Jesus. They catch up with him on the other side of the lake. Are these people desperate to hear more of Jesus parables, or to see more miracles? Jesus doesn't think so. Jesus said to them. "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." These people had not only witnessed Jesus feeding five thousand people, they had also been part of the crowd, they had received the bread and the fish, and their hunger had been satisfied. It is a picture of our church, and our country. We are satisfied, content, we look for more of the same. Before the Pandemic congregations were comfortable.

Now eighteen months after the Pandemic, congregations are looking to the future and anxious about how they will manage. Questions arise about the Assessment, buildings and Mission. These things are important but our focus must be on mission. Jesus said to the crowd. "Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures for eternal life." Yes, it is important to maintain our buildings and make them welcoming. Yes, it would be lovely to have lively, spirit-filled worship or five Wesley hymns every Sunday. It would be great to have church buildings overflowing with people. All these things may help us to draw people to Christ but, as well as our worship of God, our love and our witness are the essential things that we need to focus on. Genuine love draws people, Christ was the perfect example of this. People crowded round him, they loved to listen to him, and they could see his love and care for others was genuine. Jesus went out to be among the people, sometimes he was in synagogues, but most of the time he was in the streets. It is great when people walk in to our church off the street, it is a real blessing from God. But more importantly we need to love people into the kingdom, into our churches. How much contact do we have with people in our community? Are we willing to go the extra mile, to start a conversation to offer help when we feel there is a need? We can only do so much, but sometimes we might end up doing nothing because we feel what we have to offer is too small or inadequate. We need to be bold.

I believe that it is a witness to the community to have a building which is well looked after but if the people in the building aren't a presence in the community how will people know that the church is open. How will they have the opportunity to be invited into the building to share in fellowship and worship. God desires that lives are changed, and people are welcomed into the kingdom. Yes, we do need a base (a building) from which we can work from. But too often our base becomes more important than the Mission that God has called us to. God will equip us and empower us for his work.

We live in a society that is comfortable, well fed and satisfied. They do not know that they lack spiritual fulfilment. They are satisfied with their lives just like the crowd that followed Jesus that day. Perhaps the crowd thought that they may get another free meal or see another miracle. Jesus challenged them to go deeper, and I believe that God is challenging us today to go deeper. To go deeper than just maintaining our buildings and putting on services. God is challenging us to ask, what does it mean to be a Christian today? What does it mean to be a group of Christians meeting today? What is our calling? And what is

1. Online Service

Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week led by Rev Peter Bates.

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email!

2. Circuit 'Zoom' Coffee Time

More and more folk are attending face-to-face services but we're also committed to those who can't yet, so we changing our Zoom coffee time. From July 4th the coffee time will be run by Richard Miller and will not just involve Sunday's but also some midweek sessions. If you'd like more details and to join the distribution list please contact Richard by email: richardjmiller17@sky.com.

There is also a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: mellwatson42@gmail.com.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am - 1st August 2021

"We cling to our faith"

On 4th August 2020, a nuclear sized explosion at Beirut port killed around 200 people, injured more than 6000 and displaced 300 000, hard by the most ancient churches of the East.

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 all this baffles you and you'd like to find new ways to engage with church in these times, please contact your minister.

essential to us and our calling?

The crowd spoke to Jesus about Moses and how wonderfully God used him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and onto the Promised Land, and the miraculous way their forefathers were fed in the wilderness. We acknowledge today, the wonderful way God has used our churches and the people who have been faithful for many decades. But God is moving on, whether we bring our church building with us is up to Him.

But first, we need to address what Jesus says to the crowd. Jesus said to them. "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir" they said. "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared. "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. I fear that as Christians, as a church, we have forgotten what it is like to be hungry for God and thirsty for his presence.

We know what it is like to be physically hungry because there is a feeling in our stomachs telling us that we need food. We know what it is like to be physically thirsty, especially when the temperature soars to thirty degrees. We are desperate to quench our thirst. In the last fifteen months we know what it is like to desperately want to see our children and grandchildren. There is a real ache in our heart, and we want to hug them because we have missed them so much. We also know what it is like not to be able to sing in church.

But Jesus is talking about something much deeper than these things. He is talking about our relationship with God, his Father. Do we hunger for God's presence in our life, for God to be real to us, not just when we are in church but also during the week? Do we thirst to praise God with all our hearts, even when it is not a Charles Wesley hymn or a vibrant new hymn? I certainly know there is a desire in people's hearts to get back to church but that's not the same. People want to get back to church for all kinds of reasons. People want to get back to the theatre, they want to go back to watching football matches in stadiums. My question is, do you want God to be real to you, in church, in the supermarket, in your own home? How much do you desire this?

If we do want God to be real to us on a Sunday, then do we set time aside to pray and prepare ourselves spiritually. Do we pray for the preacher, the organist, the congregation, the stewards, and maybe for new people to come to our church? Is meeting with God in his house the most important desire in our hearts? Or are our thoughts focused on our duties that we have to carry out, or on whether we like the hymns or the preacher. Will the Sunday Dinner be ready on time? All these thoughts and many more get in the way of meeting with God and worshipping him. Also, during the week, do we prepare ourselves each day in prayer. Do we seek God's presence in the mundane? Do we hunger and thirst for God in our everyday lives? And do we need help to find him?

We cannot be on a spiritual rollercoaster all the time but we can choose to have God at the centre of our life., and this will make a tremendous difference.

I spoke at the Circuit Meeting about what happened to me the previous week. A number of things were getting me down, and then I heard a song called 'Raise a hallelujah.' This song really spoke. It was a difficult situation I was facing but the song challenged me to lift my eyes and focus on God **Amen**

Prayer Space

When the music fades, and all is stripped away,
And I simply come, longing just to bring
Something that's of worth, that will bless your heart
I'll bring you more than a song, for a song in itself,
Is not what you have required.
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart.

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.
I'm sorry, Lord, for the things I've made it,
When it's all about you, all about you Jesus. **Amen**

Let us build a house where love can dwell,
and all can safely live
A place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hope, dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
The love of Christ shall end divisions.

All are welcome in this place

Let's build a house where prophets speak,
words strong and true.
Where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew
Here the cross shall stand as witness,
and as symbol of God's grace.
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.

All are welcome in this place

Let us build a house where love is found,
in water, wine and wheat.
A banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that feeds us.

All are welcome in this place.

Let's build a house where hands will reach
beyond wood and stone;
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face,
Let us bring an end to fear and danger.

All are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,
songs and visions heard,
And loved & treasured, taught & claimed,
as words within the Word.
Built of tears, cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.

All are welcome in this place. **Amen**

EMAIL PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like to join a prayer chain and receive prayer requests or to submit a prayer request (with permission of the recipient) please get in touch with Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

It is for those of any church or none!

Circuit Vision Team Report

Have you read the Circuit Vision Team report yet? We'll soon be looking get your responses to it. Look out for our questions coming soon - and get in touch with your Circuit Meeting Rep to have your say! The report is available to all (from the circuit website: [CLICK HERE](#)). Please pray for our circuit and if you'd like to discuss anything, do get in touch!

Peter.Hibberts@Methodist.Org.Uk

At the name of Jesus (StF 317) [LINK](#)

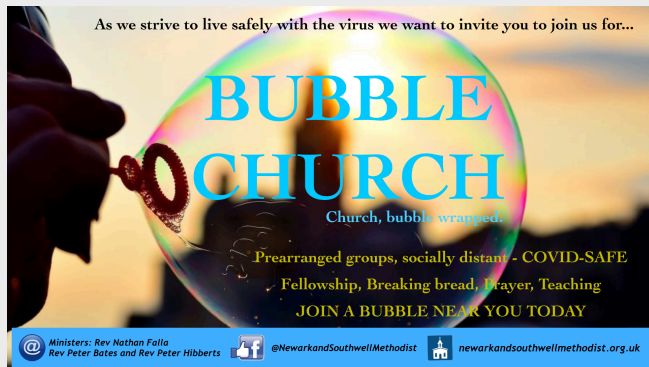
Lord your Church on earth (StF 410) [LINK](#)

I will offer up my life (StF 446) [LINK](#)

Gracefully Broken (online only) [LINK](#)

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

Bubble Church Questions



Would you like to be part of Covid-Safe face-to-face church? Join a bubble today by getting in touch with your minister.

1. What do you look for in Christ, more stories, miracles, to have your fill? Or something else?
2. Are you satisfied and content with Church or are you looking for more, something different?
3. Where do you think our focus as a church is? Where do you think it should be?
4. What does it mean to be a Christian today? What does it mean to be a group of Christians meeting today? What is our calling? And what is essential to us and our calling?
5. How do we and how should we demonstrate love to those around us?
6. How is Jesus challenging you/us to go deeper in faith, in how we are church?
7. Please pray for all our churches in these challenging times.

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

Global Hunger Appeal

More than 41 million people in 43 countries are teetering on the brink of famine. Without immediate action, women, men and children will lose their lives.

This is a global hunger emergency. The Covid-19 pandemic, violent conflict and the climate crisis have all increased global hunger. Now, people in countries including South Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Burkina Faso are facing the very real threat of starvation.

Families desperately need food and clean water to survive. If we act now, we can prevent unnecessary deaths.

[CLICK HERE TO TAKE ACTION](#) or visit ChristianAid.org.uk

Next face-to-face opportunities across the circuit...

See below for the next face-to-face opportunities in your local church or churches around the circuit - this week's service are shown in red.

Balderton: August 1st, 10:30am, Rev Peter Bates

Barnbygate: August 1st, 11am Local Arrangement

Charles Street: August 1st, 10:30am Local Arrangement

Collingham: August 1st, 10:45am Local Arrangement

Elston: August 8th, 10:45am Rev Gaynor Hall

Hawtonville: August 1st, 11am Joint service at Barnbygate

Long Bennington: August 8th, 10:30am Rev Peter Bates

North End: August 1st, 6pm Rev Peter Bates

North Muskham: August 8th, 10:30am John Hucknall (Holy Communion)

Southwell: August 1st, 10am Rev Peter Hibberts

Southwell: August 1st, 4pm, Eddie Adams

Sutton on Trent: August 8th, 10:30am - Jenny Hardy

If you would like to attend any of these services, you will be made most welcome but may need to book in advance. If you are unsure, please contact the minister:

Rev Peter Hibberts (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk) for: Barnbygate, Elston, Hawtonville, North Muskham, Southwell and Sutton on Trent

Rev Peter Bates (peter.bates857@yahoo.com) for: Balderton, Charles Street, Collingham, Long Bennington, North End

July - August 2021	4th July	11th July Action for Children	18th July	25th July	1st August	8th August	15th August	22nd August	29th August	
Balderton	10:30 am	LA	Mellor HC	Hardy	LA	Bates	Castle	Hart HC	Bates	Dalby
Barnbygate	11:00 am	Winnington	Gibson HC		LA		Joint Service at Hawtonville 3pm			
Charles Street	10:30 am	Hardy	L Blatherwick	LA	C Membery HC	LA	LA	Ceane	LA	Falla HC
	6:00 pm		Mathews				Falla HC			
Collingham	10:45 am	LA	Hucknall T / HC	Gascoyne	Winnington	LA	Ward T	Bates HC	West	Bates
Elston	10:45 am		Gascoyne		Hart HC		Hall		Hardy	
Hawtonville	11:00 am	Joint Service at Barnbygate		Joint Service at Barnbygate		Joint Service at Barnbygate		Falla Sop / 3pm Falla HC		
Long Bennington	10:30 am		Bates HC		Morley		Bates			Gascoyne
North End	6:00 pm	Beech	Bates	Hardy	LA	Bates	Hart	Bates	LA	Falla
North Muskham	10:30 am		C Membery HC		Bates		Hucknall T / HC		Winnington	
Southwell	10:00 am		Hibberts PAC				Hibberts PAC			
	4:00 pm		Ward T / Bubble Hart HC		Bates Bubble Ward T		Hibberts Bubble HC		Hart Bubble Morley HC	
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am						Hardy			

Full service details up to and including August can be found on the circuit website: newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk

The future of TOGETHER...

As we move forward to a new normal, we are taking some time to reflect on what that new normal will look like and listening to the views of folk from around the circuit.

As part of this, we are evaluating the TOGETHER newsletter from September onwards. If you have a view on the future of the newsletter, please do get in touch (email Rev Peter at peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk).

If it is to continue, we need to find a way for it to be sustainable. This may well include having a circuit editorial team who can put the newsletter together. Without this, it may not be possible to continue. If you can volunteer, please do get in touch.