

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

Inclusive church for ALL!

Reflections on hospitality in the church

We've now had 4 re-imagining church sessions (2 for prayer and 2 to share). If you're able to get onto zoom and haven't yet joined us, then you're missing out (and we're missing out on your valuable insights too) but don't worry - there'll be more opportunities at the end of August and I'd love to see you there! This week's share session was really probing (there's a recording if you'd like to hear it!) This week we looked briefly at the 'Our Calling'/Methodist Way of Life' descriptions of what the fundamentals of church may be and interestingly enough we talked at great length about hospitality. As several folk shared their journey of faith, a common pattern emerged. It seems like, for those who had not been brought up in church, the common journey involved being invited to a strange setting where they didn't really understand what was going on but they managed to stick at it and finally found something of value. It's a strange thing that folk from outside the church somehow needed to have the tenacity to endure church long enough to encounter God and then it became worth it. I'm sure there's a better way!

Imagine a high street shop: there is a stock room with, hopefully, something that is valuable enough to sell, something that folk will want. There's then the sales room, where the salespeople meet with the customers, aiming to match them up with a product they'd want to take home. Then there's the shop front (the shop window) which is designed to entice them into the shop in the first place. Now imagine a shop where the shop window, instead of enticing folk, makes them feel that have little worth, have got things wrong and need to be put right rather than served. If folk do, somehow, find themselves on the shop floor then they are met with a way of doing things that bears no resemblance to the world outside and provides little help in navigating the way round. Sometimes the salespeople see the 'customers' as interlopers who are threatening the way the shop operates and jeopardising their own ability to enjoy what's in the stockroom. Frankly, despite having the best product ever 'sold' that shop wouldn't be open for long and sadly the stock would be wasted. (Maybe you can see where I'm going with this and church decline should be no surprise to us at all.)

At the last prayer session one member of the group prayed a prayer of repentance that I felt convicted to join in with. He simply prayed to God that he was sorry that his (my) generation (and previous) had emptied the church by shaping it around themselves.

So what's the answer? Interestingly enough we, at the share session, had some great ideas for how we could make specific services appropriate for those who are not familiar with church (sometimes we call them the unchurched). We reflected briefly on the way slimming world welcome the newcomer in a very non-judgemental way, values them and supports them. We talked about what aspects of church we would need to remove to help newcomers: the formal venue, restrictive structure, threatening atmosphere, unfamiliar Christian terminology. We talked of creating a service where people felt love, acceptance, self-worth, belonging, fellowship and support. Actually that's the product in our stockroom - we are Christians because we are responding to a God who chose to die for us, whose love is unconditional, who believes in us and accepts us as we are. It was a great model of how we could welcome the newcomer however shouldn't this be our model for all church and not specialist services for the newcomer? If we removed these obstacles and fostered this atmosphere, would we not all benefit and find it easier to experience God's love?

There are challenging times ahead but we should be excited about where God is leading us!



Worship Opportunities

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. Radio Services

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

08:10am **The Cross and Black**

Liberation. Chine McDonald, Rosemarie Mallet, Augustine Tanner-Ihm and David Shosanya explore the cross through the lens of black experience, as a symbol of oppression but also one of hope.

3. Radio Nottingham

Every Sunday, at 8am, you can listen to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. Listen online to BBC Nottingham radio station 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.

4. The Gathering

If you would like to 'meet' face to face with folk on a Sunday morning, then you may be interested in the 'The Gathering' which is a Zoom based church made up of members from Southwell Methodist Church and led by one of our Local Preachers. The sessions begin socially from 9:45am and usually last an hour with a mixture of fellowship, bible focus, discussion and prayer for one another. There is also a chance to sing together!

If you are interested in joining The Gathering then do please get in touch with me and I can help you get connected.

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

Going for growth?

Reflections from Matthew 13:31-32 (NRSV)

When we knew that our garden was going to be the stage for our lockdown journey we spent significant time, as a family, investing in it. We had new furniture, cleared more space, Joseph had new football goals, we installed a 'new' (bigger) trampoline and also added a hot tub! But we didn't just make it a better habitat for the family, as part of our lockdown home-schooling we opened it up to more wildlife too! One of the things that we did was install a bird feeding area, a bug hotel and since we appear to have become part of a hedgehog highway, we've also put in a hedgehog hotel and restaurant! It's amazing the wildlife that we're now getting in our garden and Joseph, my six year old, loves sitting at the lounge window and watching through a pair of binoculars. (Not that he needs them - it's all so close!)



Mustard Seed

In Jesus' parable, the mustard seed began small. Have you ever seen a mustard seed? It's tiny - yet the mustard tree can be huge! Look at this one >>>



Mustard Tree

I think that our garden may be a wonderful modern example of the parable that we encounter today. In essence the mustard seed is a small beginning but a large welcoming ending! Our garden habitat first began with one bird feeder but we now offer nuts, mealworms, suet and mixed grains. Later it developed to include the bug hotel and finally the provision for hedgehogs.

This parable tells us a lot about the kingdom of heaven but first, have you ever wondered what is meant by the kingdom of heaven? Sometimes the Bible calls it the 'Kingdom of God' but with Matthew's largely Jewish audience heaven was a more sensitive word. In essence a kingdom is the domain (the area of rule and reign) of a king. The Kingdom of God (or heaven) is anywhere (or more likely anyone) where the rule of God is accepted. If you are a disciple of Christ you are part of the kingdom of heaven, on Earth! That's why we pray for 'Thy kingdom come, on Earth as it is in heaven' in the Lord's prayer. We are praying that God's rule on Earth will extend in our lives and the lives of others - praying that the mustard tree will grow!

In this parable it starts small and can even go unnoticed at first. There's a common theme in these parables, with seeds and yeast already and now the mustard seed in particular. The kingdom starts small and seemingly insignificant but it grows into something that can be all-encompassing. Perhaps at the beginning it can be underestimated and even underrated. People think it won't amount to much. Yet with the power of God behind it, it gets to work. It takes time - the mustard tree in the picture didn't grow over night!

Where are you in your faith? Are you a new or young believer? Do you feel small in faith? (Of course the two are necessarily linked - you may be a young believer, in time, but large in faith. Equally, you could have a

been a believer for many years but feel small in faith - any combination is okay because faith - even as small as a mustard seed is all it takes!)

What I particularly love about this parable is the unmissable focus on hospitality! The mustard tree extends, not as some impressive edifice of self-glorification, but for its branches to become the home to a wide variety of life.

It's not always appropriate to parallel the Kingdom of God with the Church (the two don't necessarily go hand in hand) but actually rather than simply building the church, as disciples of Christ, we are called to usher in the Kingdom of God and with God's help, that's what the church can be. Do you think the church resembles this mustard tree? I wonder if some of our churches have become edifices (focussing too much on the buildings and even the construction of our patterns of worship) but have somehow become less welcoming - catering for a narrower group of people. The simple tester is to look at the diversity outside our doors and then compare it with the diversity inside our doors. If we have created a church that does not reflect our community (in its demography) then can we really claim to be welcoming all?

What must we do? Well, we must first ensure that the seed of the kingdom of heaven is planted in our lives. If we are not disciples of Christ ourselves then we may be church-goers rather than church (or more importantly kingdom of heaven) builders. Have you welcomed Jesus Christ into your life and asked God's Holy Spirit to dwell in you? Or have you simply got into a routine of attending church? You can do this now. Have a look at the prayer in the prayer panel on the right.

Then what must we do? Well, I actually believe that if we've all done what's in the previous paragraph the rest will follow - if the mustard seed is planted, make no mistake, it will grow. If the yeast is worked into the whole dough - it will rise. But I think we'll know that we've got that seed planted by what we see growing. If the kingdom of heaven is growing in our lives we'll see transformation and we'll see connection - with God and with others! I know lots of people in the church who are desperate to reach out, desperate to see folk who don't know Christ and don't know the love of God come to nest in the branches of the kingdom of heaven. That heart is fruit of the seed, planted in their lives. Most of all, if we have that seed planted, the church that grows will be open and welcoming to everyone. What will it look like? Well, like the manse garden it won't just have things that welcome and cater for the family, there are elements of our garden that don't suit us (I've not tried a night in the bug hotel or the hedgehog hotel personally) but suit others. We've gone out of our way to create that, and they've come! We must as a church look beyond ourselves (the Bible calls it dying to self) and look to Christ, rise to God's calling and create a church that caters for everyone. It's

difficult, I know, because we all have differing needs. But

3 when we see the transformation, it will be worth it!

Prayer Space

My challenge this week was to honestly ask if we've got the seed of faith planted in our own hearts. If you're not sure, here's a prayer to pray. The beautiful thing is that it's also a great re-commitment so you can still pray it even if you already have faith! My suggestion would be that you pray it with your hands open, palms facing up, symbolising readiness to receive God's blessing!

Dear Jesus,

I believe you are the Son of God, that you died on the cross to rescue me from sin and death and to restore me to the Father. I choose now to turn from my sins, my self-centredness, and every part of my life that does not please you. I choose you.

I give myself to you. I receive your forgiveness and ask you to take your rightful place in my life as my Savior and Lord.

Come reign in my heart, fill me with your love and your life, and help me to become a person who is truly loving—a person like you.

Restore me, Jesus. Live in me through your Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit. Love through me.

Thank you, God. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.

If you pray this prayer, I'd love to hear from you and to pray with you. A good next step is to talk to a Christian friend about it so that they can support you in the next steps of your journey and even better - why not join a small group (currently happening on Zoom) where you can talk about faith, pray with others on the same journey and grow together.



FREE phone lines for prayers and news from the Methodist Church

Listen to a **prayer**: 0808 281 2514

Listen to **news**: 0808 281 2478

Content is updated weekly on Thursday afternoon

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

Our Tuesday Home Groups have just one week left but will probably continue after a week or two break, so watch this space. You can still join the last one in this series on Tuesday, at 2pm and 8pm via Zoom. Tune into our YouTube Channel for the services - Zoom details available on request.

ALL WELCOME - from any church or none.

Join us for a four week series exploring the parables of Jesus...

ONCE UPON A TIME

...they're no fairy tales.

Sunday worship - 10am. YouTube (see below)

Break and Sermon! [Watch Channel](#) - 10 - Sermon/Message in the Channel

Deeper in Zoom Groups - Tuesdays 2pm and 8pm (Zoom Details Available on Request)

19th-21st July: Seeds; 26th-28th July: Woods; 2nd-4th August: Growing; 9th-11th August: Seeking

Website: www.methodist.org.uk | Facebook: [methodist.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/methodist.org.uk) | Twitter: [methodistorguk](https://twitter.com/methodistorguk) | YouTube: [methodist.org.uk](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) | 01434 812166

Reflective songs...

You're calling us (StF 37) [LINK](#)

Be still (StF 20) [LINK](#)

From the highest of heights (StF 48) [LINK](#)

Beyond these walls of worship (StF 547) [LINK](#)

Come down, O Love divine (StF 372) [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.



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.

5-8-20

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!

Exploring seeds



Place some seeds on paper on the table – try to choose different sizes of seed, for instance, a daffodil bulb, a mustard seed, a sunflower seed and an apple pip (or whatever you've got at home!).

Can you guess into which plant each seed will grow? Which seed will grow the biggest plant and which will grow the smallest plant? Can you put them in order?

Try to find pictures of the full grown plant. (Most seed packets have pictures of the plant on them; for the apple pip you'll have to use a photo of an apple tree and one of a mustard tree.)

Now read the parable (Matthew 13:31,32):

What do you think Jesus meant when he told this parable?

Mustard seeds are very small and very ordinary (they grew wild in Jesus' country), but they grow very quickly. In the same way, the church started with a very ordinary man – Jesus – who had very ordinary friends – the disciples, but after Jesus rose from the dead, the church grew uncontrollably and became huge!

Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of Heaven will grow quickly, like a weed, in all the ordinary places... it will touch everybody. No one is too small or young to be part of God's kingdom. AMEN!

Bubble Prayers...

Blow bubbles together and watch them grow as you pray...

Either:

Pray that God's Kingdom will reach people and places that it has never reached before.

Or:

Pray that your friends will be touched by God's kingdom, especially if you have friends who do not go to church or believe in God.

Or:

You can pray to thank God that you can be part of God's growing kingdom and ask him to help your own faith to grow.

How are we doing? How could we help?

So far I've not heard much from folk about how we're going during lockdown! Either folk don't read this far or you're all hoping that someone else will give feedback! It would really help us (if you haven't already) if we could hear from...

How have you been encountering church during lockdown?

What have you found most helpful (from this church or any other) in your faith?

What has been missing that would have really helped you?

What has been unhelpful during this time?

What elements of our provision could you live without (where might we be wasting our resources)?