

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will sing.

What season is your soul in at present? It's impossible for me to write this with everyone's mood in mind but I think it's fair to say that there are many who might struggle to muster an Easter celebration and praise this weekend. Fortunately the Psalms reflect every season of the soul. But is God not worthy of praise whatever our circumstance? So how do we celebrate Easter amidst this crisis? It's certainly going to be a challenge to ensure that our praise does not ignore the current circumstances and doesn't sound hollow or awkward.

The Theologian Walter Bruggeman spoke of the 'costly loss of lament' in the church (perhaps we risk only focussing on celebration and don't often reflect despair in the way that we conduct our worship). That said, in the current climate perhaps we could risk what Richard S. Briggs (in his book 'How to praise God from the Hallel Psalms') calls, 'a costly loss of praise'. Briggs believes that praise should not be, 'the ignoring of reality' but instead should embrace reality and more importantly who God is, in that reality. This is what the Psalmists understood. Psalm 13 has an interesting balance. The Psalmist clearly feels some sense of abandonment, like God has hidden his face from them. (Perhaps you feel like God is distant at present.) The Psalmist asks: "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?" (Maybe this is a familiar season in your soul at the moment.) But they go on to conclude Psalm 13 with these words: *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.

May I encourage you to dig deep this Easter, and sing amidst the darkness. There are some truths that transcend this crisis. **Christ is Risen! God is sovereign!** We may be wrestling with our thoughts but we can still conclude in well founded faith that God is good to us. **God is Good, all the time - all the time, God is Good!**

1. Online Resources

We have some exciting worship opportunities this week if you're able to get online! They'll all be hosted on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF-CBiFzWL81CUJrKjC1Psw>) and details will also be on the 'NewarkandSouthwellMethodist' FaceBook Page (which can be accessed without a FaceBook account - [Click Here](#)).

Maundy Thursday:

8:15pm *Tenebrae Service*
12 candle-lit passion readings, music and prayers.

Good Friday:

10am led by Rev Peter Hibberts
8pm led by Rev Nathan Falla

Easter Sunday:

10:30am *Celebration and Love-Feast*.
A service of music, prayers and testimony with a traditional love-feasts included.

N.B. For the love-feast element of service, please have a biscuit and a glass of water ready as you gather, this will form the 'love-feast' element of the service (all will be explained on Sunday!)

2. TV Services

Sunday Worship BBC One, 10am, 12-4-20 - *Easter Day Eucharist*. Also [online](#).

3. Radio Services

Easter Day Worship (Also [online](#).)
BBC Radio 4: 8:10am, 12-4-20. *A live Eucharist from Southwell Minster*.
BBC Radio 3: 3pm, 12-4-20. *Choral Evensong from Southwell Minster*.

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

Victory?!

Homily on Matthew 27:32-28:10

We've been in the grip of this crisis long enough now for folk to start asking (and indeed having the time to reflect upon) where is God amidst all this? Passiontide is a season of ups and downs and there are some quite stark points of crisis but as we walk Holy Week and we follow that journey we always have Easter Day to look forward to at the end of it. N.T Wright described our current situation, in Time magazine this week, as a "Lent [with] no fixed Easter to look forward to." Easter is such a joyous festival because it's about Christus Victor - Christ the Victor! But where is the victory to be found in Coronavirus?

This is certainly something that has played on my mind recently. Why does God allow such a virus to grip his creation. Why does he allow folk to suffer - I'm mindful of the number of frontline healthcare professionals who have died as a result of their care for their patients. Were I God (thank goodness I'm not) how would I have played this? How would you have played it? Would you have prevented it in such a way that no one ever knew about Coronavirus, like it never existed? Would you have swooped in heroically to miraculously destroy it when it was appreciated as a crisis? (I've always liked the way the Covent Garden street performers struggle sufficiently with their stunt so as to ensure that the audience appreciate how difficult it really is!) There are two things that I am utterly convinced of: Firstly God is sovereign - he is in control and nothing happens that is out of God's control, his power knows no bounds. Of course we have to be careful with that, careful that we don't assume that that means God sent the Coronavirus (or indeed sends the other suffering that we experience) I don't believe that for a moment and would argue vehemently with anyone who suggested God did - but it does mean he could remove the suffering if he chose to. Secondly, God loves us dearly and only does what is best for us (including avoiding doing something that is not best for us). So what does this mean for the current crisis. Well...I don't know.

N.T. Wright's Time Magazine article carried the headline:

Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To

What I do know, and I have to trust this, is that if the two things I've stated are true, and Coronavirus still exists, then the reality God has created and how it will ultimately play out is the best reality for us. This is not a twee, 'it's all for the best' actually it's a screw your courage, press your faith, 'God I can't see you but I know you're there' reality.

Holy Week and Easter Services



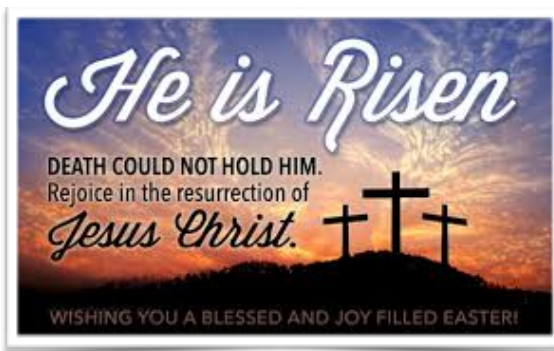
Come Worship With Us!

I wonder if that was how Jesus felt on the cross. There is possibly the most famous Aramaic ever in the gospel, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani!” My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? That point when Jesus, who walked to the cross to do God’s will because he was convinced of God’s power, sovereignty and love, comes to the point where he too must screw his courage and press his faith and at this point he can’t see God any more. Believe it or not, at this point Christ is victorious! It’s at the point of death that Christ says, ‘It is finished!’ But how can that be a victory? Surely it is no more victorious than God is over Coronavirus right now.

Actually the topsy-turvy victory is seen right through Holy Week - a king riding on a donkey? A great leader who washes his disciples feet? The saviour nailed to a cross? Perhaps we need to deepen our understanding of what victory is.

What if the victory is not to be had over Coronavirus but through it? The victory over death came through it. It is precisely the journey made by Christ that proves him Christus Victor. The post death and resurrection Christ we recognise from classic art always bears the stigmata - the wounds. It is the wounds that make Christ who Christ is. It is precisely what Christ did on the cross that makes him the saviour. By his stripes we are healed.

I think, despite the desperate pain and suffering that Coronavirus is bringing, God is at work. God is changing humanity. Look at the many cases of unbelievable community that are being born amidst this crisis. Look at the unity that we are experiencing as a nation. (I have not forgotten that just a few short months ago I was wondering how we could ever be a united nation again - Brexit had rent us apart in a way that seemed irreconcilable.) When I stood alongside my neighbours last week and clapped for our carers, I felt a bond with my fellow humanity that I have seldom felt. I have connected with folk in the last few weeks in ways I have not connected before. I have had a window into the world of many others that I have not looked through before. I just wonder if God is winning a powerful victory through Coronavirus. So screw your courage, press your faith, keep on keeping on and trust that though you have no answers right now, God is at work as much as God was in the tomb. There is no fixed Easter to the lent of our Corona-crisis but know that it may be Good Friday now, but Sunday’s coming and remember, it was actually Good Friday where the victory was won!



Prayer space

This space is designed to unite us in prayer. Why not spend a little time in prayer at 7pm each evening and light a candle in a prominent window to show the community that you are praying.

Specific prayer requests (or requests to join the SMC prayer chain) can be sent to Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

A prayer written by Joyce Ambler from Southwell MC:

More prayers at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/prayers-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Dear Lord your kingdom is now, now and forever.

We give thanks for your surfing borne;

Lift us to your presence and kindle our hearts with love that we might share,

To you we owe this blessing,

no other could inspire the beauty that we sense when you are near.

One lord, One God forever.

Strife tempered, life is clear.

Help us to keep this wisdom to keep you ever near.

Amen.

Prayer points:

1. Pray for those ill with Coronavirus, including our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.
2. Pray for all as we continue to live with the requirement to remain isolated in our homes.
3. Pray particularly for the police who, at this time, are taking on the role of enforcing the restrictions. May God guide them in this important role.
4. Pray for the NHS, for much needed supplies and protection over front line staff and their families.
5. Pray for all key-workers and their families as they continue to serve us and keep much needed infrastructures going.
6. Pray for church leaders as they try to find ways to connect folk and provide spiritual feeding.

Hymns and songs to reflect on...

The Greatest Day in History [LINK](#)

See what a morning (StF 309) [LINK](#)

Low in the grave he lay (StF 305) [LINK](#)

Thine be the glory (StF 313) [LINK](#)

Christ the Lord is risen today (StF 298) [LINK](#)

Help for the isolated

The Sutton-on-Trent Buddies Corona Virus Helpline is up and running - please pass the word around and do not hesitate to call if you need help with shopping, prescriptions or other errands. There are thirty volunteers, all ready and keen to help. 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.

Giving

A number of folk have enquired about how they can give to the work of the church in these times. Of course for those who give by standing order or bank transfer, giving will continue but for this who give using the offertory plate or envelope, this is not possible at present. Your giving is still greatly needed and appreciated (and remain part of your act of worship) so may I encourage you to continue to give, perhaps by putting the envelopes on one side until such as time as we are able to present them in our next gathering of worship.

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/](https://www.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.



8 April 2020

Families: families4SMC@gmail.com

Pebbles (ages 3-7): Mark two lines on the floor with tape/chalk. The gap between them should be too big to jump across. Sit behind one line. Ask your child what happens when they do something naughty. Do they get sent to the naughty step? Say that, in the beginning, when God created the world, everything was good and people lived happily together with God. But people started to do wrong things. Ask for suggestions of wrong things we all do. Because God's people did wrong things, they got separated from God. It's a bit like when you get sent to the naughty step - you get separated from the good stuff that's going on with the rest of your family and friends. Move all the children across behind the other line. Say that being separated from his people like this makes God really, really sad because he loves us so much. And people are sad too and they try to get back to God. Ask if anyone can jump across the gap. (No one will be able to but let them try.) Say that God wanted to change this so he created a rescue plan and sent someone to rescue us. Read the Easter story from a children's Bible. After the story, say that Jesus dying on the cross was a little bit like him going to the naughty step and being separated from all that was good. And he went there instead of us. So we can go back to being with God. But Jesus didn't stay on the naughty step - he didn't stay dead, he came alive again to show that no one needs to be separated from God ever again. It's as if he got rid of the naughty step completely!

Stepping Stones (ages 8+): Consider the Easter narrative and reflect on our situation in the midst of this pandemic. Listen to this track by Casting Crowns, 'I'll praise you in the storm', (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgpaULjZO18>) and discuss how to praise God and keep him at the centre of this Easter weekend even when life might feel scary at the moment. Celebrate together where you have seen God at work over the past few weeks.

This scavenger hunt is a fun activity for families of all ages to take part in!



Listed below are ideas for you to find around your house or garden. They are all linked in some way to the Easter Story, found in the Bible. Tick the boxes when you find them. Can you find them all!

Idea: You can do it together as a whole family, or why not have a competition against each other to see who is the winner!

- People waved palm leaves as Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem.
FIND: A Leaf (the biggest you can find!)
- Jesus held a cup of wine saying "this reminds you of my blood shed for you".
FIND: A drink
- Jesus took some bread saying "this reminds you of my body broken for you".
FIND: Something edible
- Pontious Pilate washed his hands and gave Jesus over to be crucified.
FIND: Something you can wash your hands with
- Jesus was dressed in a purple robe.
FIND: Something purple
- Jesus had a crown of thorns put on his head like a pretend King.
FIND: Something spiky (careful, nothing dangerous!)
- Jesus was nailed to a cross.
FIND: Something wooden
- When Jesus died, his body was put in a stone grave.
FIND: A rock
- The woman disciples took lovely smelling spices to put on Jesus' body.
FIND: Something that smells nice
- Jesus was alive again!
FIND: Something alive!
- The disciples were so surprised!
FIND: Something surprising (the biggest surprise wins!)
- It's great news Jesus is alive!
FIND: Something happy