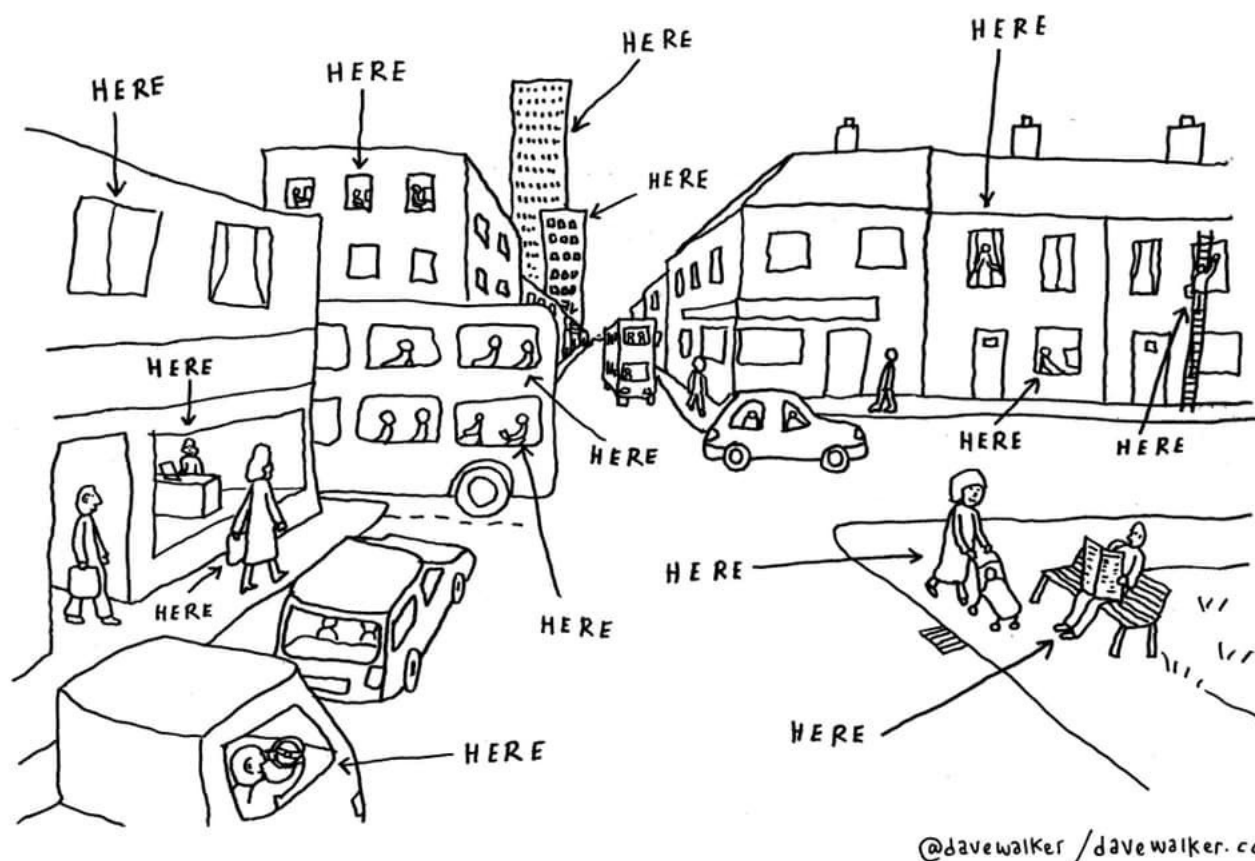


# TOGETHER

*only physically apart*

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

## Where the church is...



What an extraordinary week! Perhaps the strangest part was not meeting together on Sunday as we are in the good habit of doing - or perhaps the news of a 'lockdown' on Monday evening. That said, I was amazed by the many opportunities that sprouted out from all sides with TV programmes, Radio Programmes and the wealth of online and social media opportunities to 'do church'. Let me state clearly - **the church is alive and well!**

I don't know how you feel right now. Perhaps isolation is already taking its toll, perhaps it's a welcome opportunity to break with the norm and do things differently. I think the cartoon above is inspired! I have to say the towns won't look like that now (at least they shouldn't if we're treating social distancing seriously enough) but the sentiment is that **the church is still here, in fact it's now everywhere - and in one sense it's finally out of the box.**

The focus of this newsletter will be how we do church outside the box. To be clichéd it means thinking outside the box and doing church in our community (which perhaps we should always have been doing!) We are still called as Methodists to **Worship; Service; Learning & Caring; and Evangelism** - they'll just look and feel different. Read on to find how we are being called to love differently and for ways in which you can still worship, from your home. You remain in my prayers and I thank God for your faith.

## Home worship opportunities

Being unable to meet at church needn't be a reason to cease to worship. Never before have there been more opportunities to worship at home!

### 1. TV Services

Sunday Worship BBC One,  
11:30am, 29-3-20. Also [online](#).

### 2. Radio Services

Sunday Worship on BBC Radio 4,  
8:10am, 29-3-20. Also [online](#).

### 3. Online Resources

Please keep an eye on the **Circuit Facebook Page** (no facebook account is needed) on [www.facebook.com/Newarkandsouthwellmethodist/](http://www.facebook.com/Newarkandsouthwellmethodist/). Revd Nathan Falla is planning on streaming a weekly service there.

**Sunday Worship:** This Sunday I'll be preaching alongside Holy Trinity Southwell in a live-streamed service at <https://www.holytrinitysouthwell.co.uk/podcasts/> or on their [youtube channel](#).

9am Monday-Friday - from **Wesley House Cambridge:** [LINK](#)  
[RESOURCES](#).

10:00 Monday-Friday - from **Wesley's Chapel, London:** [LINK](#)

Also: Wednesdays 12:45,  
Thursdays 12:45, Sundays 9:45  
and 11:00. [LINK](#)

**Swan Bank Methodist Church** in Burslem. [LINK](#) [FACEBOOK](#)

#### Roots resources:

During the pandemic ROOTS is offering free resources to use at home every week on the ROOTS website: [www.rootsontheweb.com/](http://www.rootsontheweb.com/)

If you know of other resources, do let me know and I'll add them to the list for next week!

25 March 2020



## Love is a verb.

I've been overwhelmed by the amount of love that is present in our communities at the moment. Crisis often polarises but for many of us it makes us want to reach out. I drove this morning to get some essential supplies and felt compelled to speak to (from a distance) and even wave at perfect strangers in a way that I wouldn't normally and it made me wonder if this current climate is bringing us closer. At times of crisis we must focus on the most important things and love is surely central.

In Mark's gospel (12:28-34) Jesus is asked by the scribes what the 'first' (this is *prōtē* or 'most important') commandment is and replies with '*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*' He then adds (free of charge!) '*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*' I think this is what we're seeing, in action, at the moment and I think it's worth spending some time going deeper into and taking encouragement from it.

Firstly, how is this possible? Well, as with all things, it begins with God. My wedding ring carries an inscription inside it: '1 John 4:19' which reads '*we love because God first loved us.*' On our wedding day, we wanted to express that our love was only possible because of *God's* love and the success of our marriage would only be possible *with* God. There is something about God's very nature that is at the core of this. To love is rooted ultimately in the love of God himself. We are commanded in this passage to love because God is love and gives himself to us in love, through creation and in Christ. When we encounter the God who gave everything for us, we are compelled, in response to give all that we are.

Whenever we struggle to express our love, perhaps we need to begin by revisiting our experience of the love of God. Let me make it clear that without an experience of God's love, it is impossible to express love. Moreover, a daily experience of God's love in prayer and study of scripture will deepen our experience of God's love and fuel our love of others. If you've never experienced this, take time now, kneel before God and ask him to reveal himself to you by his Holy Spirit. Spend some time in the Gospels, reading of Jesus' life and love for us (John's gospel is particularly powerful).

The other thing that we should know about God is that God the Trinity is one. The complete first commandment, in Mark, begins '*hear O Israel, the Lord or God, the Lord is one*'. God is three but also one - united - and in one sense, so should we be, individual but also one. I wonder if this is what's

behind my need to talk to and wave at strangers this morning (and also why social isolation is so hard). I feel aggrieved at the artificial distance - the separation is not natural and it hurts. The Xhosa Africans have an ancient proverb that says, 'I am because we are.' It's called Ubuntu. It's this proverb that suggests that we are all joined, there is only one race - the human race - humanity is one. Perhaps the difficulty in social isolation is that we are meant to be together and it's a wrench to be apart.

So what does it mean to *'love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'*? Sometimes we make the mistake of compartmentalising it and making it a tick list, considering each separately. Actually it is a way of stressing that we must love God with *all* that we are.

This is where love is not an abstract noun, but a verb. Perhaps this is why Jesus adds the extra commandment (which is not necessarily separate from the first), *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'*. We can make the mistake of thinking that the first commandment is about worshipping God with our eyes heavenward, but it's not. Perhaps this was a mistake that the scribes (those questioning Jesus in this passage) made, they were so busy with sacramental and legal observance that they often neglected the love and compassion that the people around them needed. Jesus makes it clear that love is not an abstract noun, and neither is loving God. Love is a verb; it's active.

Perhaps *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* is the most famous biblical teaching - with good reason. It's inextricably linked to loving God and indeed, if we do not follow this commandment, we are not loving God. God is the ultimate source and object of our love which is expressed tangibly in our love for those with whom we live. We each need to reflect on how we are loving our neighbour in these strange times, it's challenging but essential.

The conclusion then is that our love will take all we have and all we are and we must be ready to give it sacrificially. The scribe speaking with Jesus in this passage is told that he is *'not far from the kingdom of God.'* I wonder if he took this as an encouragement or found it frustrating - being 'not far' is not the same as being there! Perhaps Jesus is prompting him to go beyond an understanding of the commandments and into a living of them.

The reality is that we are never far from God and even in social isolation we are not really physically far from each other. In these strange times, however, we must go beyond understanding what it means to love our neighbour and find a way to reach out and connect. Pick up the phone, send that email, tune in to something online or on the TV/radio. Send a letter or a postcard (assuming you can do so safely). Take opportunities to volunteer and give to projects that are supporting the most vulnerable amongst us. Spend time praying for our world, our country and our communities.

We must all find ways to demonstrate our love for each other and therefore demonstrate our holistic love for God.



## Prayer space



This space is designed to unite us in prayer. You may have joined the many folk who lit a candle at 7pm on Sunday evening to prayer for our world. If not, it's not too late. If safe to do so, why not light a candle in a prominent window each evening and spend some time in prayer.

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

## From the Northumbria Community Morning Prayers

<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/offices/morning-prayer/>

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think that I am following Your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please You  
does in fact please You.  
And I hope that I have that desire  
in all that I am doing.  
And I know that if I do this,  
You will lead me by the right road  
although I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust You always,  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death,  
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,  
and will never leave me  
to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton

## Prayer points

1. Pray for all as we come to terms with the requirement to remain isolated in our homes.
2. Pray for self-control for those who may feel tempted to leave their homes unnecessarily and put lives at risk.
3. Pray for the NHS, for much needed supplies and protection over front line staff and their families.
4. Pray for all key-workers and their families as they continue to serve us and keep much needed infrastructures going.
5. Pray for church leaders as they try to find ways to connect folk and provide spiritual feeding.
6. Pray for families with children at home that they will be able to provide for their children educationally as well as emotionally and spiritually.



## Hymns and songs to reflect on...

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

2 Have you heard God's voice (StF 662) [LINK](#)

3 I, the Lord of sea and sky (StF 663) [YOUTUBE LINK](#)

4 Will you come and follow me (StF 673) [LINK](#)

*If you'd like to borrow a hymn book during this time, do get in touch and we'll get one to you.*

## Can you offer help?

One of the most encouraging things at the moment is how many different groups are sprouting up and developing to support those in need. It's a real testament to the beauty of humanity and we should all feel proud! In particular these groups need your help...

### Foodbank

Foodbank collections in churches have been suspended and so it will be supermarket collection points that need donations now more than ever. If this is not possible then you can still donate financially:

Send a cheque directly to them at  
Newark Foodbank  
c/o Barnbygate Methodist Church  
15a Barnbygate  
Newark  
NG24 1PX

or do a direct transfer to their account Newark Foodbank  
Sort code: 40-52-40 Account: 00027004

### Southwell Civil Emergency Community Contact

The Southwell Town Council have set up an emergency hub and they will be triaging needs as they arise (for requests, see the card opposite). Cllr Peter Harris has also asked if there are volunteers from the Southwell Methodist Church to respond to practical needs. If you are not in a vulnerable group and would be willing to volunteer, please contact me and I will send you the information. We also need to identify a 'Community Contact' who will be the main point of contact for this SMC team. Please also get in touch if you could fulfil this role. ([peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk](mailto:peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk)).

**Similar schemes exist in the smaller villages so, if you are not from a vulnerable group and can volunteer there, please also get in touch and I'll connect you with the relevant teams.**

## 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](mailto: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.



## Families:

**Pebbles (Foundation Stage-KS1):** The bible is full of stories of how much God loves us. Did you know that in Mark's gospel, Jesus tells us that we should love God, but also love our neighbour as ourselves? What do you think that means? How could you show love and kindness to people this week?

**Activity:** There are lots of people in our communities at the moment who especially need some cheering up and to know God's love. Why don't you try one of these activities this week to help your neighbour and local community?

- when you go on a walk (as long as this remains permitted), collect litter on your way and put it in the bin when you get home (ask grown ups to help you do this safely)
- Make a card/picture for someone who feels lonely.
- Phone or video call a member of your family who you don't live with.

### Stepping Stones (KS2 - KS3):

Watch the following YouTube clip of a great magician: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lsmdnr8a3Oc>

Do you have any ideas how this guy did his trick? Obviously it wasn't impossible – BUT it was a trick. It's wasn't real. This week I want to introduce you to an incredible guy in the Bible called Elisha. Elisha loved God – and He loved people. Because God cares about people – Elisha cared about people. Because God wants to help people – Elisha was committed to help people. And because Elisha was close to God, God gave Elisha power to do IMPOSSIBLE things in order to help people. You can read his story in 2 Kings 4:1-7. Our life lesson from Elisha is the challenge to live a life where we're committed to help other people. To meet their needs. And with God's help – we can offer supernatural, miraculous help. God can answer prayers. Elisha performed loads of miracles to help people in his life. He did it -not because he wanted to look good – but because He loved people. At this time, perhaps more than ever, it is important to show love and help others whenever and however you can.

**Activity:** Spend a few minutes in silence thinking about ways you can show God's love and kindness to people you know or to your community (be realistic about what you can really achieve). Now ask for God's help to be able to do the things you've written. This week I'll be praying that you, like Elisha, will be a person that God can use to make a positive difference in your family and community.

**HELLO!** If you are self-isolating, maybe we can help

This is from the Town Council - which is working with many of the voluntary organisations in the town such as the Lions and the Churches Together in Southwell.

Our phone numbers are 07874 780931 or 07874 780932 or 01636 816103

**Southwell**  
TOWN COUNCIL

If you are self-isolating due to Covid-19 we may be able to help with

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picking up shopping / medication | <input type="checkbox"/> Urgent supplies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A friendly phone call            | <input type="checkbox"/> Posting mail    |

**Just call or text us and we'll pass your request on to a volunteer who will do their best to help you [for free]**

Coronavirus is contagious. Please take every precaution to ensure you are spreading only kindness. Avoid physical contact (2m distance). Wash your hands regularly. Items should be left on your doorstep. **#ViralKindness**