

**St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley**  
*Extraordinary Times*  
*a magazine to help us through COVID-19*  
**Issue 46** **February 14th 2021**

From the minister...

The snowfall this week has made everything grind even more to a halt than usual. As well as lockdown we have had "freeze-down", and it just adds to the sense that life is on hold at the moment, frozen in time.

It reminds me of "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" by CS Lewis. In his seminal fantasy book for children, Lewis leads us through the back of the wardrobe into the magical land of Narnia, which is in the grip of a snowy Winter much like the one that we are currently experiencing. "Always Winter, but never Christmas", is how it is described to Lucy by Mr Tumnus.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, or TLTWATW as I shall refer to it from now on to save me typing it all again, is of course more than a simple fantasy novel. It's an allegory of Jesus, his death and resurrection. But it's surprising how many people don't realise that – I've explained this to a number of adults who had read it but had never twigged it at all (one of whom even accused me of trying to smuggle my Christian faith into an otherwise pure fantasy story).

I must admit that when I read it as a child it never occurred to me who Aslan was meant to be, though I did figure it out when I read the book again after becoming a Christian. That's the trouble with allegorical writing, Mr Lewis; unless you already know something about Jesus before you read TLTWATW, it's true meaning will evade you. This is even more true in his later Narnia books; although the final book, "The Last Battle" is quite clearly about the end times.

"Always Winter, but never Christmas" alludes to a world held in the cold grip of evil, waiting without hope of deliverance. I was always a bit uncomfortable with the arrival of Father Christmas, himself an essentially pagan figure, to herald the return of Aslan. Especially when you consider that he's probably meant to represent John the Baptist! But despite the frozen lockdown which nobody in Narnia believes will come to an end, the Springtime does return, the cold recedes, the trees bud, the flowers appear, and the birds return.

So it will be for us. Though our lives may appear to be on hold right now, we can see hope as the vaccination programme continues apace. It's hard to be overly optimistic when we have been living with the pandemic for so long, and the easing of restrictions is far from certain. But we know that Spring is coming, and we are confident in our Lord that he will deliver us. As it says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1:

*Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.*

Take care everyone and stay warm as well as safe  
God bless *Ralph*

## What's On

**Sundays 10:45am** online worship with Rev Ralph Ward

**Wednesdays 2pm** Rev Ralph's Bible study on Mark's gospel

**Find these live** on [Trinity's Facebook page](#) and [St Paul's Facebook page](#) with videos available afterwards

## Zoom for Kids

**Sundays 12noon and Fridays 6pm**

If you haven't joined in yet, email [ask.stpauls@gmail.com](mailto:ask.stpauls@gmail.com) for an invitation

## How about Zoom for Adults?

If you'd like to try joining a fellowship group on Zoom please let us know by emailing [ask.stpauls@gmail.com](mailto:ask.stpauls@gmail.com). If Zoom is still a mystery to you, don't worry. It's really easy to use and we can help you get started.

## In your prayers

**Continue praying for** Lester Ford, Geoff Manning, Geoff and Jean Rose, the NHS, hospitals, medical workers and vaccinators.

**Continue in prayer for** members of our church community and others you know who need our prayers at this time.

**Send** your prayer requests to [ask.stpauls@gmail.com](mailto:ask.stpauls@gmail.com)

*Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list*



Whatever the weather, join us for a  
**Take Time meditation**  
Wednesday on Zoom, 7.30 – 7.45pm  
this is followed by an optional 15 minutes for  
people who wish to share their experiences.

**Action needed:**  
email [clive@taketime.org.uk](mailto:clive@taketime.org.uk)  
for Zoom meeting details

Redhill & East Grinstead  
Circuit, Taketime video  
meditations online

take time

## How can we keep from singing?

by Roger Walton (*Theology Everywhere, February 8th 2021*)

Congregational singing has been one of the casualties of the pandemic. I am not much of a singer myself, but I have, throughout my life, found moments of deep worship when caught up in a song of praise with others. Like many, for the months of lockdown, I have been unable to experience this musical gateway to the divine. It is fine to sing along with a group or choir in a YouTube hymn, or to

encounter the extraordinary quality of people combining their musical talents from their own homes and making powerful creative art with music and visual images. I am thankful for both, but I miss the immediacy of other voices in the room. This absence was especially painful when we met in Church for a time but were not allowed to sing. We listened to the organ or piano and 'sang in our heads' but it was not the same, and, if anything, intensified the sense of loss.

On the upside, my daily attempts to sing the set hymn for the day in my morning devotions allow me to dwell with the words, for I regularly find myself reading the lyrics through slowly, prayerfully before and after my lone singing. John Wesley would have approved, I think, for his last instruction in his *Directions for Singing 1761* (yes, he told us how to do it) is: *"Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually"*

When I first ventured into a service in a Methodist Church as a teenager, I saw people quietly reading their hymnbooks before the worship. These books, I later discovered, were, for these devout souls, their prayer manuals, which they used at home and brought to worship, and through which they learned their theology and deepened their communion with God.

Of course, there must be a relationship between singing and pondering the words. For those Methodists of my teenage years, singing and praying their hymnbooks fed each other.

Perhaps for many Christians, the truth of being part of the body of Christ is first felt when the odd collection of voices in a Christian gathering join in singing. There is a momentary unity that is not only enjoyable but a means of grace and a foretaste of heavenly worship as envisaged in the Book of Revelation, where diversity is both celebrated and transcended at the same time. The eyes, ears, hands and feet of I Corinthians 12 can no longer see themselves as separate or vying for importance but find their place and purpose in Christ, galvanised towards a life of love, as they are bonded together in singing. However fleeting, this is a profound experience.

Music of many kinds can lift the heart but singing the truth about God, harmonising melody and metanarrative, contains a special nurturing power. Colossians 3.16 urges Christians to enter a spiritual rhythm. It involves dwelling with the word of Christ, teaching and admonishing one another, and expressing our gratitude through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Growing in the body of Christ, it suggests, requires mind, heart and voice.

Many are thinking about what Church will look like after Covid. Like the Exile, it has been a deeply creative period where we have discovered new ways of worship, new (ecologically friendly) patterns of doing business, and new communities that want to dip their toes into the spiritual waters of church worship from the safe distance of the internet. At the same time, we are rediscovering Christian practices, like daily prayer, that for some had been lost in recent years.

We will need to respond to all these various prompting and not simply fall

back into what was familiar before. Within this, we might consider the place and role of congregational singing. I hope it may have also a renewed place, not simply to fill in gaps between other parts of the liturgy, nor to do it because we always have. Wesley's Directions for singing recognised that it has significant dangers, if not pursued with the right intent and object. Rather through careful, prayerful and creative exploration, we may rediscover the deep joy of being connected and nurtured in the body of Christ through corporate singing.

## What is Lent all about?

This Tuesday many of us will be eating pancakes ahead of the start of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter when we remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing to take up his ministry. In the Christian tradition the period of Lent is spent in prayer and reflection, study and self-denial – hence the Lent courses and the idea of 'giving something up for Lent'.

Did you know?

- Early Christians started the tradition of Lent around the year 325, during the Council of Nicea. Over the centuries since, many denominations have taken on the tradition for themselves, including Western Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Anglican, and many Protestant traditions, including URC, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and many, many more.
- Lent comes from the Middle English word 'lente', which means springtime.
- One of Lent's central components is fasting. The practice has died in recent years, but that doesn't stop New Orleans from throwing a huge party called Mardi Gras. On the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, aka 'Fat Tuesday', people party in the streets and get fat since they should be fasting for the next 40 days.
- Violet is the official colour of Lent, which represents mourning for Jesus dying on the cross while celebrating His resurrection with the colours of royalty.
- In 2014, 72% of adults knew what Lent was, 88% of those participating in Lent were giving up some item of food for 40 days and chocolate was the number one food most people were willing to give up during Lent.

## And finally, a thought for Valentine's Day



## Contacts

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