

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley
Extraordinary Times
a magazine to help us through COVID-19

Issue 51

March 21st 2021

From the minister...

This Sunday (March 21st) will be the last time that we share our online Sunday service with Trinity in East Grinstead. From March 28th onwards I'm pleased to say that our Sunday services will be coming from St Paul's: these will continue to appear on Facebook every week on the St Paul's page, but will be pre-recorded rather than live streamed. This enables us to involve our church choir and young people's singing group, plus our local preachers. Sunday services will be posted to Facebook at 10.30am each Sunday.

In addition to this, we have a special service for Maundy Thursday (led by Rev Clive McKie), and a Good Friday service (led by Pat Oakley). These too will be pre-recorded and posted on the St Pauls Facebook page on the appropriate days.

At our leadership team meeting this week we acknowledged that we should also be looking to reopen our building for worship. Although we are prevented from singing together, we know how important it is to meet together in church, albeit masked and maintaining social distance.

So, we've taken the decision to reopen the church for "spoken word" services from Easter Sunday onwards. These services will commence at 9.30am and have a duration of approximately 30 minutes. You are very welcome to attend. Please note these 9.30 services are **in addition** to our 10.30 online services; if all goes to plan, they will mostly be led by the same preacher, and feature the same message.

The first of these 9.30am services will take place on Easter Sunday, with a Communion service led by our former minister, Rev Sue Conroy. We appreciate how much you have missed sharing in the Lord's Supper, and we're grateful to Sue for making herself available to help us achieve this.

I will be starting my sabbatical on April 1st, so I will be leading our 10.30 online service from St Pauls on March 28th for the last time until July.

This Sunday my course of themed preaching on the "7 Deadly Sins" comes to an end. Thank you for the many appreciative and encouraging comments I have received about this series of teaching – I have certainly enjoyed preparing and delivering it.

You probably figured out a long time ago that I find thematic preaching more helpful and rewarding than the exposition of a single passage of scripture. A downside of this is that you have to be a bit handy with your Bible if you are going to follow all the places that I take you – but one of the benefits is that we get to travel together into many different parts of the Word of God that we would not get to visit under normal circumstances. This is particularly true with some of the books of the Old Testament: you'll have noticed frequent references in recent weeks to the "Wisdom" books like Ecclesiastes and Proverbs in particular, along with prophets major and minor and, inevitably, Psalms.

But as the course comes to an end this Sunday, I thought it would be useful to examine the final piece of scripture to which I will be referring; because it makes a really significant point in our current situation. Here it is, James 1:22-25:

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do.

It's almost exactly a year since we started living with lockdown. No one will be baking cakes and celebrating this anniversary. At the beginning we were all quite optimistic: we were going to take the opportunity, whilst furloughed from work with more than the usual amount of time on our hands, to do all the things that we wouldn't normally have time to undertake. It seemed to many of us that, never mind the minister - we'd all been granted an unexpected sabbatical! We pledged to write our first novel, or get ourselves truly into good physical shape for the first time in years. We all bought bicycles, there was a huge boom in DIY activities (I know this because of all the associated DIY accidents which my wife found herself dealing with at the hospital).

We all stepped out into the Spring air and made the most of reduced traffic, taking country walks and rediscovering nature in our local area. We paid more attention to the song of the birds, we found lots of beautiful new places in our local area which we had never bothered to visit before. It was cathartic, it was a blessing – even alongside the fear and horror of Covid. It was like the Lord had pressed the "Reset" button and allowed our planet to rest and recuperate.

But as time went on, and especially as the second wave struck hard as Autumn turned to Winter, we began to lose the positivity. In a weird paradox with the optimism displayed in the opening months of World War One, the popular sentiment that "it'll all be over by Christmas" proved to be as misplaced in the Covid era as it was in 1914.

As we've endured the long Winter of lockdown we've lost focus – we've lounged around the house more in our leisure wear, we've binge-watched TV. We've got "lockdown hair" – the gyms are shut, and the bad weather puts us off outdoor exercise. All our great aspirations have fizzled out, and it's become a game of endurance. More and more people have struggled with their mental health as time has gone on: cases of domestic abuse have risen alarmingly. The 40 days of Lent this year have had a resonance like no other, as we have waited with increasing frustration for our deliverance.

In the face of such a mental, physical and emotional malaise, my personal aspiration has been to try to maintain and encourage our spiritual engagement, so that we might stay close to Jesus during this time of trial. I've tried to be "Joe Wicks for Jesus", if you like, with my regular broadcasts on Facebook. I hope it's been helpful – many of you have said that it has, which fills me with joy. If during the massive challenge of this last year you've been able to develop your relationship with Jesus by means of all our online services and Bible studies, then

I give sincere and grateful thanks to God. If you now know your Bible better than you did before Coronavirus then I say 'Hallelujah'. But let us all remember that knowing about something is very different from making it the template for our lives.

In recent weeks many of you have commented about how interesting it has been to examine the sins and temptations that are part of our human nature and prey upon our vulnerabilities. But once Easter is passed, if we then forget all about it we are no better off than we were before. James warns us that we must put all of the lessons of our Bible teaching into practise, so that it will be of benefit to us in facing the considerable challenges of being a human in 2021.

This year has taught us so much (and challenged us) about our identity and our dependency on Jesus: we've had the time and opportunity to see our reflection more clearly as the Lord has held up a mirror to our faces. As lockdown restrictions ease, let's not forget what we have learned. Let's remember, apply the teaching of God's Word, and be stronger for the experience.

God bless, *Ralph*

What's On

Sunday 21st March 10:45am online worship with Rev Ralph Ward

Palm Sunday 28th March 10:30am online worship with Rev Ralph Ward

Maundy Thursday 1st April 8pm online worship with Rev Clive McKie

Good Friday 9:30am online worship with Pat Oakley

Easter Sunday 9:30am in the church Communion with Rev Sue Conroy

Easter Sunday 10:30am online worship with Helen Greaves

Wednesdays 2pm Rev Ralph's Bible study

Find all online services on [St Paul's Facebook page](#) and [website home page](#)

For Kids and young people

Sundays 12noon Zoom sessions for King's Kids and King's Teens. If you haven't had your invitation please contact Carol or email ask.stpauls@gmail.com

Fridays 7pm Young Peoples' Singing Group

In your prayers

Continue in prayer for Pam and her family mourning the death of her brother, for Lyn's mother and for others you know who need prayers at this time.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

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

How to get your Palm Cross this year



Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey with his followers spreading palm branches, symbols of victory and triumph, at his feet with cries of "Hosanna" as he passed by. Christian churches traditionally hand out palm crosses to their congregation as a reminder of Christ's victory over death.

This year we won't be in church to hand out the crosses but, if you happen to be passing St Paul's on Saturday, Sunday or Monday next weekend, there will be palm crosses in the porch so that you can take one for yourself and, if you wish, another to pass on to someone else. St Paul's people who receive this newsletter by post will have one included.

Reflecting on the pandemic a year on

The Revd Richard Teal and Carolyn Lawrence, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, have issued this message ahead of the anniversary of the first lockdown:

"The past year has asked much of us as individuals, families and communities. For many hundreds of thousands of us it has been a time of immense grief for the loss of loved ones. For others the economic uncertainty and restrictions on our day to day activities have taken a huge toll on mental wellbeing. Others may be living with the effects of long Covid not knowing how long it will last. We pray that this anniversary will be a time of deep reflection, prayer and a time to process all that has passed. We also mark a solemn time in Lent just ahead of Holy Week. As we begin the journey to the cross, let us take comfort in the knowledge that we are never alone, that Jesus is walking with us and that our hope lies in Him.

"We invite you to join us at 12.45pm on Monday 22nd March, Live on Facebook, where we will offer a reflection, prayer and a short time of togetherness to acknowledge what we have all been through and ask for God's guidance as we face a hopeful but uncertain time ahead.

"And please join the national Day of Reflection on Tuesday 23rd March when there will be a minute's silence at midday and an invitation to join in lighting your doorstep at 8pm that night."

How's your hearing?

Thanks to Arthur Parish for sending this story he came across recently:

I heard a story this week about a man who was walking through a busy city street with a friend who had come up from the country. Suddenly the friend stopped and said, "I can hear a grasshopper".

"Don't be stupid," said the man, "We're in the middle of a city." But his friend walked over to a huge plant standing in a pot outside a restaurant, and there in the leaves he found a grasshopper.

"How on earth did you hear that?" asked the man. "No one else heard it."

His friend took a coin out of his pocket and dropped it on the pavement. Immediately, everyone around stopped and looked in the direction of the sound.

We hear what we're tuned in to hearing. People who pray get tuned in to God. And it's surprising how often we can hear him in our day-to-day lives."

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Prayer requests & newsletter items ask.stpauls@gmail.com

St Paul's website www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk

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