

Together as One

Newsletter of the Methodist Churches in Hungerford, Lambourn,
Newbury and Thatcham during Coronavirus Pandemic

Verses for the week

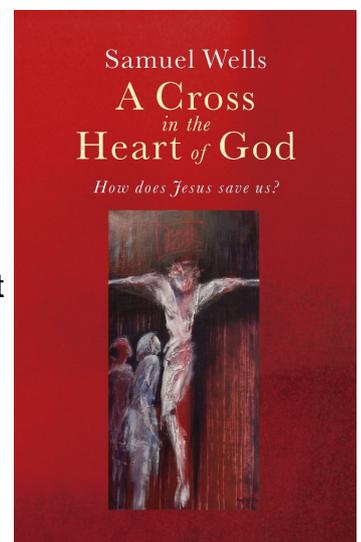
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5

Lenten reading

In this long season of the struggle against Covid I know there is a need for positive and uplifting stories when there is more than enough to drag us down. We are buoyed by the successful rollout of the vaccine programme. Many I have spoken to who have received their first dose have expressed their thankfulness and relief. We are buoyed by the fundraising efforts, the quiet dignity and determination of Captain Sir Tom Moore and the many local examples of dedicated community service. So why would we need the long, traditionally penitential, period of Lent which starts this week after the pancakes are eaten on Tuesday? Why would we want to give some time and thought to self-discipline, to abstinence or to considering the suffering and sacrifice at the heart of the Christian faith? Death and loss are all around us so surely we need a season of feasting and indulgence, a time to escape the gloom and doom. Well I think there is also richness and abundance to be found in a serious consideration of Jesus' suffering presence on the cross. There is food to sustain us both in the bad times and in the better times to come. It is easier to sail in fine weather when the sea is calm and the sun is shining. The boat and the nerve of the sailor are only proved when the sea is raging and the wind is blowing. So it is with our faith. It is worth far less if it doesn't make sense when life presses hard in upon us. That is also when others want to know there is life and hope and the power to save in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus about which we sing and pray so much. Of course we can take time to think this through, to read and pray at any time, but the 40 days of Lenten wilderness and the six days of Holy Week's dramatic events provide the perfect moment.

I have chosen for my Lent reading this year Sam Wells's 'A Cross in the Heart of God – reflections on the death of Jesus'. The back page blurb describes the contents as, '18 enduring motifs and images of the cross that continue to speak powerfully of God's will to be with us in Christ whatever the cost'. I can't wait to get started! I always love that moment of opening a new book for the first time but I have the feeling this will be especially relevant. I hope you have a similar sense of anticipation as Lent begins and Easter draws near. I look forward to hearing about what God is showing you, however you choose to redeem the time.

With love and prayers, Peter.



Other options for Lenten reading and study

If you have not yet decided what to take up during this Lent there are lots of suggestions to suit your mood or personality on the website of Shoemakers your local Christian bookshop here [Click Here](#). The front page of the website will give you 24 options to consider immediately including the course Caring for Creation which we will be following (if is not too late to sign up). There are many options from previous years still available as well.

You can also find a list of Lent courses and resources on the Methodist Church website here [Click Here](#)

Racial Justice Sunday

Today is Racial Justice Sunday and the subject of racial justice or the lack of it has been brought to the forefront of our attention during the Covid crisis. Are we at risk of forgetting the challenges raised? It was not only the very public and brutal death of one black man on a street of the US but also the disproportionate number of Covid deaths among the BAME community that stirred our collective conscience for a moment. What has changed? What might we do. There are resources to help us to respond here [Click Here](#) and a service from the URC here [Click Here](#)

Valentine's Day

According to a recent survey, for what it's worth, of those who plan to celebrate Valentine's Day, their total spend is predicted to drop to £926 million, from last year's £1.45 billion. So still a significant amount of money even though many shops will be closed and the pandemic means financial pressures have increased. Not bad for a saint whose story is still disputed today. Some accounts report that St. Valentine was a Roman priest and physician martyred around AD 270. Other sources identify him as the Bishop of Terni in Italy who was martyred, apparently in Rome; his relics being later taken to Terni. According to legend, he healed his jailer's blind daughter, then left her a note on the day of his execution signed "from your Valentine." In AD 496, the Pope determined that February 14 should be the day to celebrate St. Valentine's life and faith. He is venerated today as the patron saint of beekeepers, epilepsy, and, of course, engaged couples.



Do we need a day to remind us to celebrate love or to remember to tell someone we love them? We have someone who loves us all the time with a totally unshakeable love regardless of who we are or what we do. We need to know that we are loved before we can love well - 'we love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). This is how God loves you.

1. God loves you as much as he loves anyone who has ever lived. (John 3:16)
2. God loves you as much as he loves his own Son. (John 17: 23)
3. God loves you because he is love. (1 John 4:8).
4. God's love for you is not dependent on you or what you do. (Romans 5:8).

Now that is something to celebrate any day of the year.

And finally

Doctor, Doctor! My son has swallowed my pen, what should I do?
Use a pencil 'till I get there.