

Glastonbury Together in prayer

A news sheet for members of Glastonbury churches during the crisis caused by Covid 19



Re-thinking society

There is a lot in the media about how the world will be after the current crisis is over. The BBC have been broadcasting a series called rethink where various people say what they believe should or might happen as a result of the current situation. They are available as podcasts and are well worth listening to. These short pieces cover a wide range of human activity but a common theme through many is the need to cooperate with ourselves and with nature and to work for equality in all things. Many also talk of this time as an opportunity—a chance to change for the better. The first talk was by Pope Francis and talks about the poor and rethinking poverty. Jesus in Matthews Gospel says we will always have the poor and given the way we determine poverty in our land this is likely to be true. Relative poverty, the usual measure, is defined by relation to median incomes so changes as incomes change. The Pope says we often treat the poor as things not as persons. Individuals who had a mother and who have a right to dream. We do not see them as poverty is bashful, we do not see them because we do not want to see them. We need to really see the poor to discover the piety that points towards God and towards our neighbour. We need a conversion to a more human economy but if we do not start ourselves it will not happen.

What is Normal?

In looking at what the future will hold some are talking of a “New Normal”. This is not a phrase everyone likes, indeed in one of his blogs Fr Bede, from the Glastonbury Benedictine community, says that there has never been a normal. Life has always been precarious, disaster events have always come along. We have deluded ourselves if we think they did not exist, or only affected someone else not us. So when people talk of getting back to normal what should we expect, particularly in a Church context? We should not expect that things will not change, that they will be exactly as they were before. It is the nature of things that we will see change. The church buildings we use today are not the same as they were just a few years ago indeed several of Glastonbury's churches have had major reordering in recent years. The people who have worshipped, and will worship, in these churches will also change. We need to embrace change where it happens but the most important thing is to focus on the important things. We should live our lives always in love for each other and love for God never knowing how or when He will call us to account for our lives on this earth. Loving one another takes many forms but is a central part of our Christian witness to the whole world not just our own friends and church families.

Next steps

The situation regarding church services is developing as this newsletter is being prepared. The Government have said that worshipping in churches can resume but with conditions attached. Here in Glastonbury decisions will be made by the individual denominations but there are likely to be restrictions on numbers so it will not be a case of everyone who wants to attend in person can. Given the changing nature of things please keep a watch on the web site for your own denomination in the main, but also the Churches Together in Glastonbury website where details will be given when known. Ministers in particular are asked to make sure Churches Together are included in any messages they send out so that they can be shared with the wider Christian community. Using the words from the Gospel of St John let us all be one so that the world may know that God sent Jesus to be our Saviour.



Whom do we value

Who means most to society

The message of Jesus Christ is one for all mankind and should be that we are all made equal and all loved by God. So often that is not the case but developing the new world after the crisis allows us to hope that things can be more equal. Many of the people who have been essential to living during the lockdown have been those whom society appeared to value least as their jobs are in the main low paid. This is not something that will change overnight but as Christians we should be campaigning for a more equitable distribution of wealth. Perhaps wages should more reflect the benefit to society as a whole rather than the financial benefits the occupation brings. It is difficult to place a monetary value on the caring occupations which do not generate profits, but the evidence of the current crisis suggests that society does value their input, and in many cases their sacrifice. Hopefully the crisis has taught us as a society that we are our brothers keepers and that there is such a thing as the common good, things Christians have know for some time. Instead of using hindsight we have a chance as a society to use foresight to help create a better world. If society can realise these things we will be able to recognise the worth of all our people and should pray thy kingdom come on earth as a response to the crisis.

A look at Zechariah 9

Zechariah whose writings form part of the lectionary set for 5th July is one of the minor prophets. He was from a priestly family born at a time towards the end of the exile into Babylon and was one of those to return to Judah. The lectionary reading from chapter 9 starts at verse 9 is a messianic prophecy. It may seem familiar for other times of the year as it talks of the humble King riding on a donkey. The chapter however starts with judgment on the enemies of Israel who will be punished. This is in contrast to the humble King who will destroy weapons of war and bring peace to a kingdom that will stretch throughout the earth. The end of the chapter, after the assigned reading, goes on to tell how the Lord will protect his people so that they thrive. It does however highlight how much we rely on those who translate the bible for us as the last verse is variously translated as young people growing like wheat or wine or as those same people thriving because of wheat and wine.

Sing a new Church

Delores Dufner, OSB is a 20th century hymn writer a member of St Benedict's monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota. She has published over 200 hymns one of which, written in 1991, has a strong message of the unity that can help us as we look for new ways of celebrating our God in difficult and changing times. The hymn starts "*Summoned by God who made us rich in our diversity, gathered in the name of Jesus, richer still in unity.*" this beautifully describes our human condition as a diverse people who are better working together for common aims. It is strengthened by the chorus that ask us to each bring our splendid, various, gifts into a new Church one in faith, love and praise. In new times many different gifts will be needed and we should all seek to find how our own personal gifts can help the Church, not just in Glastonbury but throughout the world. The hymn goes on to tell us to trust the Spirit and dare to dream. The vision of hope for every nation, called for in the hymn, is something we need now as much as we ever have at any time in history. If we can draw together all the people of the human family at one table, we can create an ever wider circle of ever free people. Hymnary.org lists 11 hymn books where you can find the hymn.

Is cash on the way out?

There has been speculation for some time about the demise of cash as newer forms of payment are introduced. The decline has accelerated during the crisis with shops preferring electronic payments that do not involve transferring potentially contaminated paper and metal between the shopper and the shop. This has implications for churches and other charities who have traditionally taken cash donations. In earlier days many would have just said "we will use a cheque" but they too are on the way out and perhaps faster than cash. Hopefully many who support our church communities are now doing so through standing orders or bank transfers but what of the future? Before the crisis closed the church doors there were reports that some churches have experimented with contactless payments during services. This is a novel concept but does raise a question of how much the payment should be if this method were to spread. Being asked to type in an amount would take up a lot of time whilst a set amount would not discriminate between those who can afford more and those whose widows mite is all they have. It would also change the way offerings are taken to be blessed during services if there was nothing to present as might happen if offerings were collected before or after the service.

