

# Glastonbury Together in prayer

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



## Growing Church

Christians know the good news of the Gospel and want to spread it to grow the body of Christ which is the Church. How can we do this whilst we still have limits on how many we can welcome through the doors of our buildings? In an age where many younger people are socially linked online, the University of Durham has a centre for digital theology. This group has studied the effect of the current crisis on involvement in Church "attendance". Although from a limited amount of data, they suggest that some 70% of people who regularly attended church services before the lock down have accessed the online church services available at this time. Despite the loss of 30% (perhaps those without online access) the numbers suggest that overall more people have accessed the online services than attended church before the lockdown. A growing Church needs young members so perhaps it is important to take the message to where the people are, if they are online then the message has to go there to reach them. In an earlier age John Wesley took his message to the workplace including miners coming off shift, perhaps this is a lesson to be learnt today.

Glastonbury has taken part in the online Church community with the Anglicans and Methodists both holding services on the zoom platform from early in the lock down. The Anglican services have now been replaced by a live stream on Facebook of the services that are taking place in St John's since they restarted. These have not had the take up of the more established nationally publicised services but have kept in touch with the local congregation. Local Church growth can happen and we should all pray that the best way forward can be found.

## A Historical lockdown

In 1665 the village of Eyam in Derbyshire suffered an out break of the plague and instituted their own lockdown to stop it spreading to the wider area. The lockdown was led by the local ministers to whom the village turned for help. The measures introduced included quarantining the whole village and social distancing keeping families together, and even being required to bury their own dead. Church services were held outdoors in a natural amphitheatre called Cucklett Delph. The plague isolation lasted for 14 months and a significant proportion of the local population died during the outbreak. One woman who did not become infected lost her husband and six children in a period of 8 days. The graves on their farm are now in the guardianship of the National Trust.

## Good news or Fake news?

The modern prevalence of "fake news" may have started with the tobacco industry when the link between smoking and lung cancer was established. The tobacco companies could not stop the message but they could delay the impact that would eventually come with regulation. They found ways to distract and divert attention for example by employing scientist to research the link between asbestos and cancer. Unfortunately the techniques they used were so successful that we now have doubt sown on issues of all sorts of things that some find uncomfortable and a society that questions everything. As Christians we must remember that we were told by Jesus that we shall know the truth and that the truth will set us free. We know that the Gospel is truly good news and we should continue to proclaim that news whatever the doubters put in our way. One piece of good news sent in after the last edition is that there is now a diocese providing recorded Sunday Mass by telephone for those without the internet.



Eyam parish church dates from the 14th Century

# The Christian way

## Thoughts for the day

BBC radio 4 have a daily thought for the day as part of the Today programme, usually at about 07:45, which are always worth listening to - they are available online if you have missed them. There are messages for the Christian community in Glastonbury to be found in their words. Tim Stanley, a historian and newspaper writer, on 22nd July discusses the rise of Islam and the apparent decline of Christianity which has caused some to question the opening of new Mosques in our cities. He argues that the changes due to migration have not just favoured Islam since Pentecostal Churches are also on the rise. It is not a new phenomenon as Christianity has seen peaks and troughs before, a cycle of scepticism and revival. The blame for decline lies squarely with the Christians who have stopped going to church and the churches who have lost members and failed to attract new ones. Being a Christian country he argues is not just about numbers and popular belief but about Christian Character. This he says means generosity, acceptance of others and importantly a rejection of fear. Fear can lead to despair and is self defeating. No one will have confidence in the message the Church preaches if it worries it can only survive by closing borders and preventing other religions opening temples. Rather the message of Christianity is one of good news and of Hope.

The message of the risk of shrinking congregations also arises in the talk on 28th July by Hannah Malcom, who is writing a PhD in Theology and Ecology. Talking about the reopening of Churches and the restrictions that are imposed by the continuing situation, she says that: There is a contradiction if we choose to limit our interactions to those we have chosen in ever decreasing circles, how will we react to the hospitality of strangers or come again to the table with guests we cannot control. To be in communion we will have to relinquish some control leaving our own interests behind, perhaps we will need to learn new ways to offer welcome.



## A look at the lectionary - Variety

There are three lectionaries listed online, Roman Catholic, Revised Common and Episcopal. The lectionary readings given for each Sunday usually have minor differences perhaps a few verses extra in one than another but at this time of year whilst the Gospel readings are the same there are changes elsewhere. The Epistle reading given in the Revised common lectionary for the 8th Sunday of Pentecost is long and is split over two Sundays in the other lectionaries although they break it at different verses. The whole reading is Romans 8:26-39 which is part of a chapter talking about our interaction of the Spirit and how this makes us children of God. The verses in the

reading develop the theme explaining how God loves us. Paul asks if God is on our side can anyone be against us? If he freely gave us his Son will he not give us everything else? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death separate us from the love of God? He answers his own rhetorical questions with an assurance that nothing can separate us from that love.

On the 9th Sunday of Pentecost (ordinary 18, proper 13) the Gospel reading is the feeding of the five thousand and the different old testament readings are from Isaiah 55 (1:3 or 1:5 ) and Nehemiah 9 (16:20) which have loose references to food.

## Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Written in 1972 by Karen Lafferty "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" is paraphrased from the King James translation of Mathew 6:33. Lafferty is an American who has worked with an organisation training young Christian musicians in Europe. Although it is a short hymn, with just three verses and a repeated Alleluia refrain, it manages to include three important messages, seek God and all things will be given to us, ask and we will find, and finally that we live not just on bread alone but on every Word that comes from God. The hymn is often sung in canon with the refrain which is beautiful to hear.

### Glastonbury services

The numbers attending Mass at Our Lady St Mary of Glastonbury in the first two weeks have not reached the limits imposed by social distancing. St John's has started communion services which are livestreamed on their Facebook page. The service is later edited to improve the sound quality and made available for viewing from a link on their website. The Methodists are not yet back in their building but continue to hold their weekly evening service using the zoom platform. By using an online service in addition to the local congregation they have also managed to interact with some people who used to worship at the church but are now living elsewhere.