

Glastonbury Together in prayer

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



Closed under protest

The new lockdown includes places of worship for services although the guidance does allow places of worship to remain open for the “purposes of independent prayer, and service broadcasting and funerals” the latter will be restricted to 30. Travel to a place of worship for private prayer is also allowed but weddings are not. These new restriction have been strongly challenged on the grounds that Church services are important and communal worship has helped many during the pandemic. Churches have acted safely and are Covid secure. Church leaders have written to the Prime minister to challenge the new lockdown and stress the importance of communal worship. Faith communities have been central to the response to the pandemic and will continue to be so they write. But public worship is necessary for social cohesion and connectedness with increasing evidence that these aspects are important in helping people to stay resilient throughout the restrictions. Quoting from the study “Psychology of Religion and Spirituality “ the letter notes that people turn to faith communities as a way of coping with trauma and grief. This means that attending public worship is important for the mental health of the nation. Places of worship who are embodying behaviours and attitudes that are Covid safe encourage others to do the same and are part of the journey to recovery. Public worship is therefore an essential sign that we can find new ways of living with Covid-19 until the vaccine is found. It is part of the psychological and social cohesion needed to exit restriction measures. Public worship should therefore be supported to continue. The letter is signed by senior faith leaders from Christian and non Christian faiths and includes Archbishop Welby and Cardinal Nichols.

Helping out

Christians have been known throughout history for helping out the needy. In Glastonbury this work continues with food provision for those who would otherwise go hungry. During lockdown as well as the foodbank supplying food parcels simple meals have been provided outside the URC church building. Christians have also been involved in other projects such as setting up a community fridge where short life fresh food that the foodbank cannot use can be distributed to those in need. The soup lunches at St Benedict's had to be suspended with churches closed although efforts are now being made on an experimental basis to bring this service back to the town. The new lockdown will mean it has to be at the door instead of in the building. Glastonbury always has the poor and attracts people who have no roots and live rough. These services are essential to these people.

Christianity in Glastonbury - St John's

St John's Church has a long history with a building on the site for over a millennium. Until the dissolution of the monasteries it was under the control of the Abbey. In the 16th century it passed to the Crown and a century later passed to the control of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The Church is built from local stone and features a tower which at 41 meters high is the second highest in Somerset. It is more richly adorned than the rest of the church

and dates from the 15th Century. The current tower replaces an earlier central tower that is believed to have collapsed in the years before. The Church has been restored and repaired over many years with major work in the 19th century overseen by Sir George Gilbert Scott which removed Medieval and Georgian fittings. During the 20th century the tower was restored and internal changes made to altar and organ. Work continued in the

21st century with major work on the floor closing the Church for a number of months.



Mission explored

New ways of spreading the word

Churches Together in Somerset welcomed Gavin Calver to an online meeting on 4th November where he talked about evangelisation in the current Covid situation. Gavin, who is currently the CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, said that there has been a change in the spiritual temperature. Many who used to normally go to church have stayed away whilst others who do not normally take part have started to do so. People are once again becoming interested in religion. If you have spoken to someone about the Gospel before and they have not shown an interest they may have a different reaction now, so it is worth trying again. As evidence of this Gavin mentioned that his barber was pleased to see him and to talk about God which had not been the case previously. We are living in a different age with on line services which are reaching a different audience and we should be aware of this. This calls for a change in style, it is not a case of just cut and paste from the services we would have held in our buildings. We must take note of the audience and their needs. Alpha courses have moved online and have worked well with 1600 courses taking place during the crisis.

Gavin said we should look at how the Church can help to rebuild society, we should be working in today's moment not yesterday's moment. Have we sung the song but not lived the life? Healthy things grow so we need a healthy Church faithful to Jesus.

A balanced Christian is a faithful messenger and people are open to the message at this time. We must live balanced Christian lives being servants with our hands as we proclaim the message with our mouths.

The Evangelical Alliance have called for a UK wide day of prayer on Friday November 13th, so please put the date in your diary.



Lift up your hearts

Charles Wesley hymns are very well known and "Rejoice the Lord is King" is no exception with the call to "lift up your hearts, lift up your voice" in the refrain being a message for our troubled times. Hymnary.org notes that the hymn is published in 685 hymn books and was first published in 1744 as a hymn for Easter and Ascension. With the restrictions placed due to the covid crisis many miss the singing that Christians use in their praise of the Lord. The call in the first verse to give thanks and sing with the repeated call in the refrain is something we must pray to be able to do again as soon as the crisis is resolved. The hymn is listed as suitable for the readings used on 8th November where in 1 Thessalonians. 4:16 we hear that the return of the Lord will be announced by the sound of trumpet and call of the Angels. Wesley's hymns were written at a time when literacy was a lot less than it is today and they could be seen as a way of teaching the message as the listeners learnt the song to sing themselves. As we sing the verses we learn about Jesus as King, at the right hand of God with a kingdom that cannot fail. Originally with 6 stanzas the number published varies but the relevance to the lectionary is strengthened when at the end we learn that Jesus the judge will come and take his servants home.

A look at the lectionary - 1 Thessalonians

As we come to the end of the Church's year the lectionary finishes the last of 1 Thessalonians, a short Epistle that only features in a few weeks of set readings. The readings for the 8th and 15th November this year follow on starting at the end of chapter 4 and ending in chapter 5. In chapter 3 Paul writes that he has had good reports on the Church in Thessalonica from Timothy who has just returned from there. He goes on in chapter 4 to give moral guidance on how to live in a way pleasing to God, by living this way they will win the respect of outsiders. He then moves on to discuss those who die which is the theme for these two Sundays. Paul does not want his followers to grieve over those who die in the way of those who have no hope. At that time there was a belief that the second coming would not be long delayed so Paul tells them that those who have died will be resurrected just as Christ was resurrected. If we are following the words

in Church we have to wait a week to hear Paul talk, in chapter 5, about the timing which is known only to God. The Lord will come like a thief in the night a phrase that will be familiar. But, Paul says, his readers should not be surprised as we are children of the light and do not live in darkness. So we should not be like others, we should be alert and self controlled. Using language that would be understood in a time with swords and shields Paul says faith and love will be our armour and our hope of salvation will be our helmet. The Epistle ends with final instructions and greetings. We are told that we should be joyful always and pray continually. We should not put out the Spirit's fire, rather hold on to good and avoid evil. Paul asks that the God of peace will sanctify them and in return ask them to pray for him. He instructs them that the letter is read to all and ends by calling for the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with them.