

Weekly Newsletter (71)

by and for the Christ Church and Pagharn URC (St. Ninian's) families

18th July 2021

Musings from the Manse....

Dear Friends,

Well, the Government made its announcements; the cries of 'too much too soon' have resounded and are we any clearer about what we should and shouldn't do, after 19th July... or is it 26th July...or another date sometime in the future?

Well, I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I'm any clearer about the way forward than I was last week! Neither were the Trustees and Elders as we began our special meeting on Tuesday evening - called to discuss the guidance given and plan how we would respond!

If we are to believe the social media hype and the outcry from doctors and scientists, then we are in for a very rough ride in the coming weeks and months. *'The cold reality of Covid remains'*, said one news reporter, *'July 19th was meant to be a moment of celebration. Instead, we are bracing for danger.'* The politicians and decision makers have an unenviable task ahead – almost a case of not being able to do right for doing wrong. So how do we move forward in the light of the easing of restrictions?

At our meeting, the Trustees and Elders expressed concern about suddenly abandoning everything that had been put in place during lockdown and continued after opening once more on 23rd May. There seemed to be a middle ground that we needed to find which took into consideration those who had been double vaccinated, those who were still concerned about mixing and speaking with those not of their own household, the need, (or not), to keep going with masks and face shields, and, of course, *'to sing or not to sing – that is the question'*!

We took into consideration the document sent out from the URC General Assembly Moderators, called *'New Freedoms, Same Responsibilities'*, and also the guidance from the Methodist Church, updated on 13th July. Both denominations urge faith communities to exercise care for, and responsibility to, each other and the wider community. We were reminded of the Great Commandment: *'to love God with our whole being and love our neighbour as we love ourselves'* – therefore, our actions must be aimed at glorifying God and showing care for others. In order to do this, some practical suggestions were set out:

- Churches should regularly review their Risk Assessment
- Remember those who remain clinically vulnerable or anxious
- Continue the practice of washing or sanitising hands
- Maintain a careful cleaning routine - (particularly if the church and meeting rooms are going to be used more frequently)
- Show love to others through minimising risk to their health
- Consider whether it is appropriate to encourage face coverings to continue being used inside our buildings
- Encourage a risk-managed approach to congregational singing
- Encourage people to get fully vaccinated unless there are medical reasons why they should not
- Each take responsibility to do our part in keeping other people safe.

In the end, it was agreed by Trustees and Elders that **we adopt what has been suggested** but, also, - with particular reference to Worship at Christ Church - that **we also do the following**:



- **Booking for services will no longer apply** – if you feel confident enough to come to church, please do
- **Respect each other's personal space** – ie when seated or during conversation before and after the service
- If you have **particular needs regarding where you sit**, speak to one of the Elders on duty who will do their best to accommodate all needs
- It will be your **personal choice to wear a face covering** whilst entering or moving about inside the church (especially if we suddenly find ourselves packed to the rafters!!) but you will be respectfully asked to **wear one whilst singing**. If, however, when you are seated you find it more comfortable to remove your mask, please do
- **Doors and windows will still be opened fully**, for ventilation and air flow, so if you sit near the back of the church, be prepared for the draughts!
- **A review will take place in 4 weeks' time**, to assess views and adjust if necessary. If you have concerns therefore, **please speak to** your Pastoral Visitor, or one of the Elders, or me.

Covid seems to be something that we are going to have to learn to live with and, if we have managed our own risk and respected that of friends and strangers alike, it need not be something that we hide away from. Nor do we need to throw caution to the wind and suddenly start acting as though we are invincible! As it says in Galatians 5: 13, *'For you were called to freedom...only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence but, through love, become slaves to one another.'*

In all things we try to do the right thing – and if it is grounded in respect and love for God and for one another – then surely it is!

Yours in Christ,
Helen <><

Word for today Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, *'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'*

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. *(Mark 6: 30,31)*

Meditation of Matthew

He was concerned for the multitude; we knew that, for he'd ministered to them so often - responding to the broken in body, mind and spirit and bringing hope and healing.

But he was equally concerned about **us** – about our wholeness too. We'd forgotten that, in our excitement, too focused on our newfound mission after he sent us out to preach and teach in his name.

Some of us had travelled miles, determined to cover the most ground, reach the most people, win the most converts - each vying to outdo the other, almost as if it were a competition.

We meant well, of course, but, looking back, I realise it was too much about us and too little about him – as though everything depended on **our** efforts, whereas finally, of course, it was down to him.

You should have seen us when we got together again. Like excited schoolchildren we were - each desperate to share what we'd been up to and to win his plaudits, but he gently quietened us - urging us first to get some rest and take some food.

The message was simple: we were called to **serve**, not run ourselves into the ground; to minister to **others** but also to take care of **ourselves**, and, to do that, we needed time and space for reflection – time and space for God.

He didn't ram the point home, just gently offered guidance, and events were to prove him right, for, before we knew it, the crowd was upon us again, jostling, seeking, demanding.

We realised then, more than ever, the wisdom of his words, the importance of physical and spiritual refreshment.

Word for God's kingdom, certainly; do what you can to bring it nearer but don't think it depends entirely on you.

Make time for yourself as well as others or else you'll be no use to anyone - including him.

Prayer

Loving God,

among the duties and concerns of another day,
we can so easily forget you,
failing to make time simply to be still
and to focus on your presence.

We rush from one thing to another,
and forget what's most important: communion with you.

Even tasks undertaken in your service,
involvement in the life and work of your Church,
can suck us into a vortex of frenetic activity,
well meant, sincerely offered,
yet ultimately drawing us away from prayer and devotion,
from relating to you, one to one.

Teach us that, for our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being,
we need sometimes to step back from the world
and to recognise that you are God;
for, if we lose sight of that,
we lose sight of everything.

Amen.

Word for today, Meditation and Prayer taken from 'A most amazing Man' by Nick Fawcett

Prayer Gathering.... (formerly 'Gathered for Prayer')

.... will be taking a **break after our final gathering at 9 am on 21st July.**

We will **resume on Wednesday, 8th September** with the usual morning and evening sessions.

Here's the link....

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5742722693?pwd=R3BEQ3pPV0ZJNndRWVVKZWdvdWV6QT09>

Meeting ID: 574 272 2693

Passcode: xsX5UM

Other news....

Reopening the Church on Weekdays for Coffee

We are planning to **start up again from MONDAY, 2nd AUGUST.**

Why not take this opportunity to come along to meet up with old friends and make new ones?

Sadly, we have lost some members who used to help out regularly;

so if you feel able to offer a hand, please email me at

christine.gould@hotmail.co.uk

Christine Gould, Outreach Team

