

THE HADLEIGH MESSENGER

May 2021



The Magazine of the
United Reformed Church, Hadleigh, Essex

SUNDAY SERVICES - SUSPENDED*

*See announcement inside about re-opening

10.30am every Sunday

with Holy Communion on 3rd Sunday of the month

6.30pm on 1st Sunday only

with Holy Communion

Pentecost

Unless the eye catch fire,
The God will not be seen.
Unless the ear catch fire
The God will not be heard.
Unless the tongue catch fire
The God will not be named.
Unless the heart catch fire,
The God will not be loved.
Unless the mind catch fire,
The God will not be known.

William Blake (1757-1827)

Reflection on Pentecost

So how do we catch fire? We catch a cold because our resistance is down and in a similar way this is how we catch fire.

We ask God to search our hearts and to reveal any areas of resistance to the Holy Spirit: Lord, in what ways have I saturated my eyes, ears, tongue, heart and mind in a fire-retardant? By works? Addictions? Busy-ness?

How might I be trying to ignite my own fire by rubbing together the sticks of moralism and performance? Maybe I've just resigned myself to a dark, dank climate of the soul.

Doreen Colleen

Once these areas of resistance are revealed, we confess them as sin and to the degree that we are able, we place ourselves downwind of God's all consuming fire. In a posture of receptivity, we receive God's grace and forgiveness.

We ask for the Holy Spirit to make us kindling, to set our hearts on fire for God and his Kingdom. And when the rainy seasons come we ask each other to help us stoke the flames.

May the Spirit who set the Church on fire upon the Day of Pentecost bring the world alive with the love of the risen Christ. *Amen*



Prayer Reflection

Consider your life as a Christian and what results from that – not just church attendance, prayer and Bible study but also the way you relate to others. How is your attitude different from those without faith or have a different lifestyle? Thank God for his love for all and pray for grace to treat everyone with respect as someone for whom Christ died. May we care for 'the widow of the fatherless'. Praise God for answering such prayers.

Contemplate the things you don't do because of your faith – lie, cheat, gossip and ignore those in need. Thank God for all he has given us and determine to share what you have with the needy. Pray for the right attitude and perspective to see the world and events through God's eyes. May we increase our hope as we trust in him.

Confess how far we fall short of our own ideals. Know you are forgiven and pray for the grace to do better in future. Thank Jesus for his kept promise to be with us always to guide and strengthen. May we be enabled to follow his example.

Prayer – Thank you Lord for all your guidance and support. Grant us the grace to follow where you lead and to see others with your eyes and respond accordingly. May we know and do your will for us and so draw others to you. Thank you Lord. *Amen*

Beryl Hunt

Re-opening of the church

Dear Friends,

Covid-19 has required prolonged closure of the church, depriving us of the many benefits of public worship. It is therefore a pleasure to announce that, after careful consideration by the Elders and in line with URC guidance, the church will re-open on Sunday 23rd May, Whit Sunday.

Certain rules will apply in the light of the pandemic: most importantly, would you please contact Mrs Heather Brown if you would like to attend, in order to book a place. Limited numbers must apply at the moment in order to support physical distancing. This is a first step in an eventual return to normality in our worship.

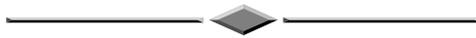
Heather will conduct both of the May services, which will not be advertised to the general public but church members and regular attendees of Hadleigh URC are invited to attend. If you have any questions about the forthcoming services then please ask Heather.

It is pleasing, after the ravages of Covid-19, that the church can resume on Whit Sunday (Pentecost) when we celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit. Our thanks are due to Heather for offering to take both services in May and we look forward to hearing from her.

Your friend and Interim Moderator,

Jim

Rev. Dr. James Tarrant



Guidelines for worship during Coronavirus lockdown

Here are some basic guidelines to follow when we meet for worship:

- Wear a mask or other face covering throughout the time you are inside the church building and maintain 2 metres social distancing.
- Sanitise your hands on entering the church building. Sanitiser and paper towels will be provided on a table in the foyer.
- For NHS Test and Trace purposes, a temporary record of those attending will be kept. You may also use the NHS app on a mobile phone to check-in. There is a QR code on the main entrance door.
- For the time being, only the disabled toilet should be used by anyone who requires it. Handwash and paper towels are available. Antibacterial wipes are also provided and should be used to wipe the toilet seat, toilet handle, sink taps and any other surface that has been touched. Please place paper towels and wipes in the bin provided and do not flush them down the toilet.
- Inside the church, certain seats will be marked off and these are not to be used. Please sit on an unmarked seat. A steward or Elder will guide you to a seat. Once you have chosen a seat, please remain there and do not move to another seat.
- Windows will be open in order to keep good air circulation so please wear appropriate clothing if the weather is cold. The heating will be turned on if necessary.
- The offertory will not be collected in the usual way. Instead, the plate will be placed at the back of the church and offertories should be made on entry to the church. The plate will not be brought up to the platform but a blessing will be given during the service.
- Bible and hymn books will not be used during the service. When hymns are played, singing is not allowed. We can pray together but in a quiet voice with our masks on.
- When the service ends, please leave in a prompt and orderly fashion, maintaining social distancing. Do not linger at the back of the church or in the foyer.

Heather Brown

From the Editor

Welcome to the May 2021 edition of the *Hadleigh Messenger*.

At long last, there is some good news. As formally announced on page 3 by Jim Tarrant, one of our joint Interim Moderators, the church is re-opening for worship on Whit Sunday, the first Sunday of Pentecost, on 24th May. This follows a Special Elders' Meeting held on 30th April via Skype.

Just because the church is re-opening, does not mean that all those who were attending before the start of the pandemic must turn up on day one. If you have any personal concerns about gathering in a group for worship then please wait until you feel comfortable in doing so. Step three of the lockdown easing will have taken place by the time of re-opening (on 17th May to be precise) and then, if all goes well, all legal limits on social contact will be removed on 21st June.

It is well-known that some people suffer anxiety at the mere thought of venturing out into a

'normal' society so we must respect this and show kindness and consideration as people come to terms with new freedoms. As we have often heard during this time of lockdown easing, the Coronavirus has not gone away so we must still take great care when we meet and follow all the rules for the safety of ourselves, our family and our friends. No COVID-19 vaccine is 100% effective.

It has been a struggle to find material for the magazine, which has resulted in the delay to its publication. Also, most of the articles consist only of words so it is rather a boring-looking edition. Apologies! There is no blog post from the Moderators of General Assembly this month.

Whilst searching for something about Pentecost, I came across a sermon by Keith Gargrave from 2001 and June has kindly allowed me to use it. It is nice to think that Keith's words live on even though he is no longer with us!

Malcolm Brown



Silence is Golden

There was once a young lady who entered a Trappist order where, of course, talking was not allowed. However, as a concession, after ten years, the nuns could visit the Mother Superior in her office where they were allowed to speak two words.

So, after ten years had passed, the young lady duly entered the office and said to the Mother Superior, "Hard beds." After another ten years, the not-so-young lady went into the office again and said, "Bad food." After a further ten years the maturing lady entered the office for a third time and said, "I'm off".

At this, the Mother Superior smiled and said, "Thank goodness for that, you've done nothing but complain ever since you came here."

Contributed to the February 2004 magazine by Ron Mallinson (Ed: A typical Ron joke!)

HADLEIGH URC OFFICERS

Interim Moderators:

Rev. Jim Tarrant/Rev. Celia Whitman

Hon. Secretary:

Mr Royston Brackin (01702 558862)

Acting Hon. Treasurer:

Mr Royston Brackin

Serving Elders:

Mr Royston Brackin

Mrs Heather Brown (01702 557678)

Mr Malcolm Brown (01702 557678)

Miss Jean Reeve (01702 554907)

Useful information

Address: 1 Church Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, SS7 2DQ

Website: www.hadleighsexurc.org.uk

An invitation

When the church re-opens, we invite you to join us for worship and fellowship at any of our services. In the meantime, if you are in need of help that the ministry of the church can supply then be assured of our interest and concern. If you are suffering from ill health, loneliness or bereavement and feel that we could help, or if you would like to ask for a prayer or personal visit then please let one of our church officers know. All such requests are treated in the strictest confidence.

Letter from Adrian

So, we are at last coming out of lockdown. How do you view it? Has it been a positive or negative experience? Will you be glad of the return to some sort of normality or are there aspects of the lockdown which you have become attached to?

Scripture tells us that God is at work in all our experiences for our individual spiritual lives and for the extension of His Kingdom.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” – Romans 8:28

I am sure that we can all identify the problems that it has caused us from isolating us from family and eliminating the physical church fellowship. You have only to listen to those about you, to watch television or read the papers to get a flavour of the negative aspects of the experience. However, as we love God and are working to fulfil His purpose, there must be positive aspects to the lockdown that we can praise God for.

From the point of view of the work of the kingdom, there has been a fantastic explosion online of the work of Christ. Many churches now broadcast their services and reach out through the media to people who would not normally come to church but who are almost eager to tune in from the comfort of their own homes.

But how about our individual experiences? What personal testimony have we got which will illustrate all things working together for our good. I suppose for me one of the main advantages has been time which has been freed up. As the

amount of preaching has dried up and we are confined to barracks, I looked to God to utilise it.

I started by looking to the future and planning preaching series. Then, as I was working through Ephesians, I wondered about using the work I was doing in a different way. I ended up writing a book. I am not sure how this will be used but I found a real blessing in the work. I have nearly finished a second one on the letter of James and I have really enjoyed the experience, both mentally and spiritually, when I had to tackle some verses that I would normally have skipped over. When you are doing a verse by verse analysis you cannot escape delving into it to find out God’s message in it, as Paul’s epistle to Timothy tells us:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Malcolm is always looking for contributions for the magazine. Wouldn’t it be good if we could fill it for him with the positive aspects of the lockdown for us as individuals.

Blessings,

Adrian

Editor’s note: For those who aren’t aware, Adrian is Adrian Tinning, a lay preacher from Westcliff Free Church, who, prior to lockdown, had been supporting the church in a number of ways, including leading a monthly bible study. He has continued to support the church by offering a thought-provoking article for the magazine most months, which, for want of a title, I have simply called ‘Letter from Adrian’.



Quotes about elections

- “A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman, of the next generation.” – *James Freeman Clarke*
- “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” – *Abraham Lincoln (shot dead on on 14th April 1865)*
- “Half of the American people have never read a newspaper. Half never voted for President. One hopes it is the same half.” – *Gore Vidal*
- “People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war or before an election.” – *Otto von Bismarck*
- “The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything.” – *Joseph Stalin*
- “Don’t vote, it only encourages them!” – *Unknown*

URC News

Rev. Lythan Nevard nominated as Eastern Synod Moderator

Rev. Lythan Nevard, a United Reformed Church minister (URC) currently serving at the Cornerstone ecumenical project in Cranbrook, Exeter, and previously a minister in Hartlepool, Romford, Brixham and Babbacombe, has been nominated to be the next Moderator of Eastern Synod.

The nomination follows the move by Rev. Paul Whittle to serve as Moderator of the URC National Synod of Scotland.

Lythan Nevard was a member of the URC's Ginger Group in the 1980s, a group of young people that visited churches around the country, leading a variety of church related projects, based at Yardley Hastings.

She grew up in the United Reformed Church – her father is Rev. Ivor Rees, a URC minister who served at Clapham, Ewell, Swansea and Bamford.

Lythan's husband, Rev. Phil Nevard, is a URC Minister currently serving Kingsteignton and the South Western Synod who has accepted a call to serve three churches in the Eastern Synod – Castle Camps, Whittlesford and Sawston. Lythan and Phil met while serving together on the URC's Ginger Group.

Eastern Synod Clerk, Keir Hounsome, said: "We are delighted that Lythan has accepted the call to be our next Moderator. She impressed us all on the interview panel with her spirituality, integrity, vision and leadership qualities and we are looking forward with excitement to her joining us."

Editor's note: Rev. Phil Nevard is known to Heather Brown as he officiated at the funeral of her mum, Marjorie Hannaford.

URC appoints new Deputy General Secretary of Discipleship

Rev. Adrian Bulley, currently Synod Clerk for the URC National Synod of Wales and Convenor of the URC Business Committee, has been appointed the new Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).

In January, Adrian had been seconded to the role of Assistant General Secretary, for a period of

seven months, to assist Rev. John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, who had been covering the deputy role following the retirement of Rev. Richard Church in July 2020. As interim Assistant General Secretary, Adrian had concentrated on safeguarding as well as other areas of the department.

Adrian begins his new role on 1 September.

Retired URC minister given prestigious award

Retired URC Minister Rev. Peter Beaman MBE has been awarded a Police and Crime Commissioner's award for his service as a volunteer for Merseyside's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) scheme.



Peter has chaired the ICV scheme since its inception in 1984, organising volunteers to visit police custody suites in Merseyside and ensuring that detainees are treated lawfully and with care and dignity by the police while in custody.

A minister of Oakvale URC for 33 years and now attending Parkgate and Neston, Peter received the Police and Crime Commissioner's award at a Covid-secure ceremony at Merseyside Police Headquarters earlier this month.

Peter has pioneered many changes which have improved custody procedures, including the availability of water in all custody suites and replacing wool blankets with safety blankets to prevent detainees from self harming.

Peter has previously been honoured in the Queen's birthday honours list in 2008, with an MBE for voluntary service to the Merseyside community.

Beware of phishing emails circulating in the denomination

Andy Jackson, Head of Communications for the United Reformed Church, recently shared news about a phishing attempt from someone claiming to be John Bradbury, the General Secretary of the URC. These emails had been seen before at Church House but this attempt had been sent to others in the wider Church.

Andy shares some tips about how to tell that's an attempt at fraud and what's genuine...

A phishing email is an attempt by criminals to use someone else's details to trick people into parting with money. For example, you might get an email from a person known to you, but from a different email account, an email from a supplier such as Amazon, or one from a payment platform, e.g. PayPal. I've had all of these in one form or another. These emails will try and get you to part with money or personal information that will be sold to those trying to get money.

And it's not just emails – text messages, social media and phones can also be used. Recently, I had an automated voice message at the office saying that our internet service was being stopped. It wasn't because the message came from the wrong provider. But they sound and look genuine.

Emails will be sent to millions of people asking for information such as bank details or containing links to websites intent on getting information from you. Some phishing emails may contain viruses disguised as attachments which activate if opened. A few years ago, a colleague at Christian Aid forwarded me such an email without realising the attachment contained a virus, and because it came from her, I opened it. I had to spend the rest of my day restoring my computer and files.

What steps can I take?

Information from your social media accounts – Facebook, Twitter etc. – leave a digital footprint that can be exploited by criminals. Publicly available information about you makes their phishing emails appear convincing.

Check your privacy settings and think about what you post, and who can see them. Also, be aware what is said about you online as this can also reveal information that can be used to target you.

What do I do if I've already clicked a link?

Don't panic and don't worry. Open your antivirus software and run a full scan, and follow any instructions given (for example, deleting files that contain a virus). If you've been tricked into providing your password, you should change your passwords on all your other accounts, as soon as possible. And if you have lost money, report it as a crime to Action Fraud on www.actionfraud.police.uk.

What are the signs?

Spotting a phishing email can be very difficult. Is the email addressed to you by name or does it use a generic title such as 'valued customer', or 'friend' or 'colleague'? This can be a sign that the sender does not know you.

Is it an official-looking email with logos and graphics, and is the design and quality what you'd expect or have received from that company before? Does the email contain an urgent action? Is it asking you to do something in the next day, or contains a link that you must click on immediately?

Look at the sender's name and email address. Sometimes there are words inserted to make it look like an email from a company or supplier – instead of john.smith@anytowncouncil.co.uk it could be john.smith@helpdeskanytowncouncil.co.uk which is a totally different website. Just because it has the name of a company or organisation in the email address doesn't mean it's genuine.

Or in the case of the phishing scam involving John Bradbury, the email was not the @urc.org.uk email address, but a gmail.com address. Is it likely that a known person in an organisation would use a free email account for official business?

Does it sound legitimate? Is the email offer too good to be true, e.g. designer trainers for £10, free films when you use this code or click on this link, or a free subscription to Reform?

Banks and other official senders of emails don't ask for personal information and haven't done for years so if the email is asking for that, it is probably a scam.

If you have received an email which you're not quite sure about, forward it to the NCSC's suspicious Email Reporting Service: report@phishing.gov.uk

Greenbelt Festival cancelled

This year's Greenbelt Festival has been cancelled for the second year. Among a range of issues, Greenbelt needed an insurance protection from the government should pandemic restrictions return but, unfortunately, was unable to obtain this.

Rev. Philip Brooks, URC Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, who is Chair of the URC Greenbelt Steering Group, said: "Naturally, we are very disappointed at the cancellation of the festival, particularly as many enthusiastic volunteers had come forward to help stage an exciting URC presence. However, we understand the pressures Greenbelt is experiencing. We look forward to a very special involvement in 2022, when we will be celebrating the URC's 50th anniversary.

Family News

Psalm 84 – for the re-opening of the church

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling-place, Lord Almighty!
- 2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young – a place near your altar,
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.
- 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.
- 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
- 6 As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
- 7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.
- 8 Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.
- 9 Look on our shield, O God;
look with favour on your anointed one.
- 10 Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
- 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favour and honour;
no good thing does he withhold those whose way of life is blameless.
- 12 Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.



Chapter & Verse – Reform, May 2021

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said:

“Surely the Lord is in the place – and I did not know it!” – *Genesis 28:16*

One of the students from our congregation recently interviewed me for her course. It was about the impact of the pandemic for the ministries of the church, and the last question was: ‘Have there been any positive experiences since the changes within church life?’

The first thing on my mind was the joint pastorate virtual service that initiated interaction between our three churches. We had a lot of contributions from the congregations with their singing of hymns, sharing stories, poems and Bible readings, including the Zoom meetings that enabled us to have a joint pastorate Lent group for the first time.

However, the most remarkable thing that I found was that we sought, and experienced, the very presence of God, even despite the isolated suffering in our ordinary places, and not being in the sanctuary of our church building.

‘Surely the Lord is in this place.’

‘This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’

Jacob ran away from his brother. That left him broken and separated from the family, alone in the wilderness, taking one of the stones as his pillow to sleep on. While Jacob was in agony, he had a dream — a dream with the message of God. It was about the promise of God’s presence for his personal life and, at the same time, the assurance of the great mission of God — ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring’.

It was just a dream among many dreams. We can assume that the message would not have been new to him, for he had probably heard the same from Isaac, possibly even from Abraham too. He was not at a sacred place, nor at a devoted time for worship.

But this dream was not just a dream to Jacob. It became the most remarkable transformation that he ever experienced in his life. In reality, nothing had changed at all. He was still in the wilderness, sleeping outside, in separation and in isolation because of his broken relationship with his brother.

But now he saw things differently in God’s presence and his promise.

With this awesomeness, he seemed to wonder why he did not know God’s presence through his troubles. Mysteriously, when the promise of God was proclaimed, especially when he was lying down in the wilderness, the eyes of his heart were enlightened, and he believed the words. This reminds me of the first letter of Peter, where he highlights ‘the genuineness of your faith’ regarding the question of hope and joy in the midst of suffering: ‘In this you rejoice, even if now you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.’ (1 Peter 1:6-8)

Even though it has been a very different set of circumstances for us, we have also been in isolation, with the fear of infection, the sorrow of losing family, missing our normal lifestyles, and many other restrictions. Who would have thought that our church doors would be firmly closed for so long, and that when we returned, we would not be allowed to sing hymns during the service, nor comfort one another with a loving hug?

Despite our troubles, we have wrestled and sought to create solidarity out of isolation. We have cared for each other, protected each other, sought God’s presence and help to overcome by exploring creative ways of worshipping, having fellowship and supporting mission. And we have proclaimed the message of God throughout this period, which we will continually proclaim – that Jesus, our Immanuel, ‘God with us’, came to save us in, and through, his death and resurrection.

It could be just a message that is repeatedly mentioned every year, especially at Christmas and Easter. But it could – and can – be a message to enlighten our eyes to see things differently in God’s presence, with hope and joy in the midst of suffering and in our ordinary places of life.

Surely, the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it.

Rev. Barnabas Shinn

Minister of Billericay, Brentwood and Ingatestone URCS

Editor’s note: Recordings of Barnabas’s virtual services are available on YouTube. The YouTube channel name is ‘Billericay, Brentwood & Ingatestone URCS’.

A Pentecost Sermon by Keith Gargrave

Preached at Westcliff URC on 3rd June 2001

Based on the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9, we could think that God has sympathy with those who want to look outwards and think worldwide. The city dwellers in Genesis talk of seclusion, keeping themselves to themselves. The leaders of the people in this city were single minded too. They wanted to preserve their way of life, their language, with no outside interference. As this story comes from the post great-flood era, it must be assumed that if God's plan was to use the flood and the Ark to preserve what was best in building the destiny of mankind, then He did not want people to act selfishly but help each other.

There was a growth of the population going on at the time; cities were growing in neighbouring kingdoms. The Babylonians, in this city, however thought they had an exclusive right to God. To this end they built a tower-like structure so they would be nearer to Him; up and up it went growing nearer to heaven where they thought God would be. So with bricks and tar for mortar they built an edifice; it became known as the Tower of Babel. A name that has since written its meaning into every society where confusion reigns.

It was a noble aim BUT there was one significant problem. God, himself, wasn't best pleased. It was almost as if He became jealous of the ingenuity of man. So He caused the tower to collapse. This in turn caused the people to disperse to the surrounding countryside and other cities.

Why? It is said that God was afraid that the kind of society the Babylonians were building would eventually lead to the people thinking themselves cleverer than Him; becoming omnipotent and not wanting to worship Him. In other words, they were prepared to look after No. 1; to make a name for themselves; to speak for themselves, but not on behalf of God.

Despite what the tidy minds among us think, it would appear as if God doesn't like self-imposed order but confusion. The word Babel gives the clue. Note that the word ends in EL. It is a name for God. The philosopher Voltaire said that in Oriental languages, Babel signifies the city of God. The Bible, Genesis 11, tells us that the word Babel actually means 'confusion'.

The result of the crumbling tower led to the break up of the Babylonian empire state like building in this particular city. The bible relates what happened next: "So the Lord dispersed the people from the city. The Lord made a babble of the language and scattered the people all over the world."

Thinking about the English language, it is astonishing how many foreign countries speak it fluently. But have you noticed too how the language has turned to a kind of American-English, slowly becoming the financial and media language of the world, but, are we any nearer the total understanding of each other, that Acts implies with the Holy Spirit? Or will American-English only be the arrogant, Babel-like building force of a race that wishes to emulate God?

At Pentecost, there could have been no more confusion than in that upper room where the promised Holy Spirit came upon the assembled disciples. The experience must have been quite frightening with everybody talking at once in different languages, perhaps seeing an opportunity for self-gratification. The text of Acts 2 describes the Spirit's arrival:

"Suddenly there came from the sky what sounded like a strong, driving wind, a noise filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them flames like tongues of fire distributed among them and coming to rest on each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues as the Spirit gave them power of utterance."

God released into the world. Today we are living with Babel-like confusion, but celebrating diversity.

Michael Durber, (then) Training Coordinator of the Congregational Federation, once wrote:

"The ruined tower of Babel is a symbol of our time. It stands for the culture of today, where things are not quite what they seem, where we find it hard to communicate even with our own children, or parents, because the words they use are far different from our own. You can tune across the FM band as you travel up the motorways of Britain, and find yourself listening to the Asian network. You can walk into a school, (if it wasn't for the security locks fitted to keep you out) to find children

learning another language, apart from English. After Babel, and despite all the progress in communication, we still need translation, and there is still as much diversity.”

In fact, we have added more languages – computer languages, street language, theological language, and especially during electioneering times, political jargon. But whatever language we use, God still speaks in languages we hardly comprehend. So maybe we do not need to worry if some strongly held principles, held dear, or some of the securities of the past are shaken, or old bastions fall apart as a result of others doing something quite different to our concept of things.

Pentecost reminds us that God, indeed, speaks not always in the way we ourselves think. For instance, when old buildings have to go, when congregations have to be broken up, then maybe God is doing the deconstructing. When some favourite edifices begins to crumble, like the certainty we once had that only men could lead church worship or be ordained, maybe God is undermining them. When we see new patterns of family life emerging, perhaps God is creating new cultures and new languages.

One thing we can be assured about is that God has not left us. God can still speak our languages.

We need to remember when God in Jesus Christ died on a cross on the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem he was not at the centre of a neatly ordered universe. He had certainly not imposed harmony everywhere he went, and he had not set up a new society in which there would be no differences. Jesus was at the centre of confusion, at the point where many cultures met. He was taken outside the city to a rubbish dump. He was crucified amidst mockers and those who taunted. He was not a new emperor in the mould of Caesar, imposing his will, making a state religion.

But where soldiers gambled and thieves cursed, God was present. Just as he had been amongst the Galileans and with the Samaritans. And now amidst our confusion, and in our own language, and in the language of others too, He still speaks.

Through him, we have to learn afresh and listen to what God is saying to us in the midst of change. Not an easy thing to do amongst all the babbling.

Amen.

Keith Gargrave

Editor's note: Keith was a much-loved pastor and preacher who passed away in November 2018. Thank you to June, Keith's wife, for allowing me to use his sermon in the magazine.



Epitaph

Following on from the humorous headstone epitaph for a fisherman that was included in last month's magazine, June Gargrave has submitted this one, which she found in a book entitled *A Book for All Occasions* by Peter Barkworth. The headstone on which the epitaph appeared is said to have dated from 1860 and lay in a churchyard in Bushey, Hertfordshire. The words were written down when the headstone was destroyed in 1916.

Here lies a poor woman who always was tired,
For she lived in a place where help wasn't hired.
Her last words on earth were: 'Dear friends I am going
Where washing ain't done, nor cooking, nor sewing.
And everything there is exact to my wishes
For there they don't eat; there's no washing of dishes.
I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing
But, having no voice, I'll be out of the singing.
Don't mourn for me now, don't grieve for me ever,
For I'm going to do nothing, for ever and ever.'

Unknown

Christian Aid Week 2021



This year's Christian Aid Week runs from 10-16 May and is the 75th anniversary. The focus this year being on climate change. Donations can be made online or by phone. To donate online visit the Christian Aid website at www.christianaid.org.uk where there is an online donation form. To donate by phone, please call 020 7523 2269.

Our planet is changing, but some people are feeling the effects of this more than others. Weather extremes are now more frequent and more intense due to the climate crisis and one place that has experienced this is Kenya. In parts of Kenya in 2020, drought was followed by relentless rainfall and flooding, which damaged crops that had struggled to grow. Together, the climate chaos and coronavirus are a double threat to lives and livelihoods.

Climate chaos is causing a hunger crisis

In Kitui, eastern Kenya, 8 out of 10 people depend on rain to grow crops. Without water, staple crops like maize and beans wither up and die. People can't earn a living and they go hungry.

People are forced to walk further and further to collect water. This daily burden robs them of the chance to farm and grow food for their families. Elderly women and children are especially vulnerable on these dangerous journeys and can face robbery or conflict as people battle over scarce resources. Cows, sheep and goats are becoming weaker and weaker. They can't produce milk or be sold. People are struggling to cope. Lives are at risk. Families need every last drop to survive this climate chaos.

Christian Aid has been working in Kenya since 1997. One of our long-standing partners in Kenya is Anglican Development Services – Eastern (ADSE). We are working together with communities in Kitui county to help them to adapt to drought as well as flooding, as climate chaos robs people of control over their lives.

ADSE helps communities build earth and sand dams, and rock catchments, so they can harvest water near their homes. Dams are simple and cost-effective natural storage solutions. They catch the rain when it falls, increase the amount of stored water available to communities, defend against intense rain and flooding, and free women and girls from making long and dangerous journeys to collect water.

Meet Rose: a loving, hard-working grandmother

One woman who is experiencing the worst of the climate crisis is Rose. A grandmother, Rose is an

experienced village leader. She is proud to be able to cover the costs of her grandchildren's education by working as a casual labourer.

After her husband died in 2006, Rose began to feel ill. She went to hospital and was diagnosed with HIV. She says: 'My faith has helped me to accept my status and I believe that, with the doctor's advice, I will live a long life.' The medication Rose takes requires her to eat a balanced diet, but because of the long journeys to get water, she can't farm the vegetables she needs and she goes hungry.



In this desperate climate chaos, Rose battles to bring water home for her grandchildren. Every morning, after nothing to eat, she sets out on a long, dangerous journey, walking six hours to collect water. While she walks, her stomach gives her stabbing pains. She feels weary under the hot sun and the full jerry cans are heavy (40 litres of water weigh 40kg). Her aching legs walk on, because if she gives up, her grandchildren will suffer hunger and thirst. 'We have to walk long distances. We are suffering,' she says.

Rose needs every last drop to survive the climate chaos

Rose remembers her childhood when the rain was reliable and there was plenty of food. She wishes her grandchildren could have the same lives; instead, she hopes that her sacrifices will give them the chance of a better future. But the climate crisis is driving her to the brink. When she arrives home, exhausted, her grandson Charles cooks her a meagre bowl of porridge – but he knows she is still hungry.

But it shouldn't have to reach this breaking point. There is a nearby earth dam just minutes away from Rose's home. It should be a lifeline. But it's not wide or deep enough for everyone's needs. It runs out of water too quickly. Rose and her community need a bigger dam, to help them capture the rainfall and create a long-lasting source of water for their families.

A song of hope and power

What happens when the search for water does not consume people's lives? What happened when people have the water they need to thrive? We can find out by meeting Florence: a woman who has transformed her life with access to a dam full of water.

Florence is a soulful, joyful woman: full of life, love and laughter. The women in her farming group look up to her. She's courageous and kind – a survivor. A few years ago, her husband died, leaving her a widow. At that time, she had no water to grow crops. Her children were hungry. Like Rose does now, she had to walk for



hours to collect water. 'Life was miserable,' she told us.

Florence could easily have been defeated. But she is a fighter. With help from Christian Aid's local partner, Florence and her community were able to build a dam together, just 30 minutes from her house. Using water from the dam, Florence grows tomatoes, onions and chillies on her farm. Her children can eat healthy, nutritious vegetables, and she has enough left to sell. It's her source of life and joy.

Florence also uses the dam to keep bees: the microclimate of plants growing around the dam means the bees don't need to search long distances for nectar. She sells the rich, golden honey at the market.

She says: 'I have been sustained by the earth dam. My life has changed. I am very happy. You can see it in my face: my face is shining. I have strength and power.'

Blessings for all in need

Florence is a generous woman of faith. She knows others are struggling to cope without a reliable water source, and wishes the same blessings she has received will be granted to them: 'There is a village nearby – they don't have an earth dam. They are suffering. I am thankful to people who have donated to build this earth dam. I am praying God will increase their giving.'

This Christian Aid Week, will you stand with people like Rose and Florence? Please donate – your gift could help a community build an earth dam, providing a regular and reliable source of water in affected areas of Kenya.

Every pound raised, every prayer said and every action taken, are expressions of our Christian love and compassion, of our belief that all life is equal and precious in the sight of God. Together, we stop this climate crisis, and give brave, hard-working women like Rose the chance to thrive. You can also join us as we call on the UK Prime Minister to lead the world with ambitious climate action that will also address inequality.

Also, pray with us for a radical change of heart for politicians, and that as a global community we will care for our common home and for people living in poverty. We can all be part of the solution. All we need is courage and determination. Stand together with us to fight this climate crisis.

Prayer for Christian Aid Week

Great God,
Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the heavens
Hear the cry of the people
Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair
Hear the cry of the people
Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and homes submerged
Hear the cry of the people,
When creation is hitting back, with rage and resistance
Give us hope, grant us salvation,
Give us a new relationship with creation
With reverence to tend this gift from You
And say once again of the earth and all you created
It is GOOD.

Bob Kikuyu (Global Theology Advisor, Christian Aid)

Lockdown mental fatigue rapidly reversed by social contact

This article from The Conversation, written by three researchers, offers some evidence that the mental effects of lockdown may not persist once it ends.

Many of us are looking forward to a summer of relative freedom, with road-mapped milestones that will grant us more opportunities to see our friends and family. But we'll be carrying the effects of months of isolation into those meetings, including a sense that our social skills will need dusting off, and our wits will need sharpening.

The mental effects of lockdown have been profound. Social isolation has been shown to cause people's mental health to deteriorate even if they have no history of previous psychological problems. Alongside this drop in mood, loneliness has been linked with a host of cognitive problems, including fatigue, stress and problems with concentration.

In our recent study (reported in Applied Cognitive Psychology) we set out to understand how people recovered from last year's period of social isolation, tracking their cognitive function as the UK transitioned from a full lockdown to reduced social restrictions in summer 2020. Promisingly, we found that people swiftly recovered from cognitive issues when given the chance to blow away the cobwebs by socialising once again.

Mass isolation

Lockdowns have given psychologists a unique opportunity to study the effects of social isolation on the general population. Such effects are normally only studied in older adults, or in very special groups of people such as astronauts, desert trekkers and polar explorers. But for over a year now, ordinary people of all ages have been experiencing prolonged periods with minimal social contact.

We know that humans derive many benefits from socialising. These range from preventing dementia and enhancing memory to improvements in concentration and the ability to think clearly. When our social lives shrank last March, we lost these cognitive payouts too.

To investigate what happens when these payouts return, we surveyed hundreds of Scottish adults between May and July 2020: a period when strict national lockdown restrictions were gradually eased. It was the perfect time to observe how the benefits of socialising might change how people think and feel.

Unsurprisingly, we found that people's moods were lowest when we first approached them in May. Those who were shielding or living alone suffered the most and only began to feel better when the final restrictions were eased towards the end of our survey period in July. But our study was most interested in other psychological indicators: those that would show whether people's cognitive abilities improved when they had more opportunities to socialise.

Psychological recovery

To measure this, we asked our survey participants to complete a series of online tests to assess changes in their attention, learning ability, working memory – and even their perception of time.

Attention, learning ability and working memory are all essential for tasks we might perform at work or while studying. They're indicators of how well we remember things we've learned, how long we can concentrate on a task, and how many tasks we can juggle in our heads at one time.

All of these indicators improved rapidly as lockdown restrictions eased, with clear week-on-week improvements each time we returned to our study participants for more data. This suggests that we're likely to enjoy a similarly speedy boost in our ability to work when lockdown restrictions ease this time around.

We've all been experiencing varying degrees of loneliness and isolation, so it's no wonder that we're running low on the benefits that socialising can bring. Our findings offer concrete proof that lockdown makes us all a little more distracted, sluggish and fatigued – cognitive problems that may be affecting our performance at work and our social interactions outside of it.

But the speed at which we witnessed cognitive function improve once people began socialising again last summer shows that there's hope. As days lengthen, the weather improves, and society reopens, our study suggests that renewed social contact will quickly and thoroughly reverse any cognitive decline we've experienced during the most recent lockdown.

Our findings extend beyond the unique circumstances brought about by the pandemic. While there's no denying that humans are social creatures, psychologists are only now beginning to recognise just how integral social interaction is

to every aspect of our wellbeing and mental ability – and how isolation, whether for elderly people or those with extreme vocations, can affect our mental health and aptitude across so many measures.

Christopher Hand

Lecturer, Psychology, Glasgow Caledonian University

Greg Maciejewski

Lecturer in Psychology, Univ. of the West of Scotland

Joanne Ingram

Lecturer in Psychology, Univ. of the West of Scotland

Editor's note: The report on the study referred to in the article can be viewed online at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.3821>.

For those without Internet access, here is the final paragraph from the 'Discussion' section of the report:

"We demonstrate that restrictive living conditions consequent of the COVID-19 pandemic related to poorer cognitive performance. Easing of restrictions allowed more mobility, and social contact coincided with improvement in a number of tests of cognitive function. This pattern was reinforced by evidence that individuals who were more isolated (shielding participants) demonstrated longer-lasting deficits in cognition. Our results support the theory of cognitive reserve and suggest that maintaining social relationships throughout the lifespan plays a role in maintaining cognitive ability. Continued restrictions to social contact and life-space may be highly detrimental to cognitive function. As such, if lockdown conditions continue to be used in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, strategies to alleviate cognitive decline during prolonged restrictive conditions should be considered. As a true substitute for social contact and lifespaces is unlikely to be found, policymakers may wish to also consider the effect on cognitive function when implementing restrictions. Future research may wish to address longer-term effects on cognitive function as restrictions continue to be relaxed and then tightened."



Changes to marriage registration

Marriage registers, a legal requirement for churches since 1837, closed forever on 4th May when major changes were introduced to help modernise the system. From that date, a single electronic marriage register is being created to make the system simpler and more efficient.

Clergy no longer have responsibility for registering marriages in church, but are required to complete a marriage document and return it to the registrar within 21 days, where it will be entered onto a digital database. Once the registrar has entered the details from the document in the electronic register, a marriage certificate will be issued to the couple. The marriage certificate has been re-designed and is now portrait format.

In the Church of England, regulations under the Marriage Act 1949 dictate that a priest who solemnises a marriage must also record certain details in a "Register of Marriage Services". This is to ensure that a historical record is maintained,

which can be searched by future generations. This regulation remains in force, but the new, simpler register may be completed by the priest after the service. A newly designed hardback book for the purpose is available from Church House Publishing, although churches may print their own.

The new system will correct a historic anomaly by allowing the names of mothers to be included in the marriage entry and on marriage certificates for the first time, instead of only fathers' names. The proposal concerning mothers' names was first brought to Parliament by the Bishop of St Albans, Dr Alan Smith, as a Private Member's Bill in 2018

According to the Home Office, creating a single electronic marriage register will save time and money and is a more secure system, eliminating the need for data to be extracted from hard copies. It will also allow amendments to be made more easily.



Marriage lines

"When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife." – *Prince Phillip*

"To keep your marriage brimming; with love in the loving cup... Whenever you're wrong admit it; whenever you're right, shut up." – *Ogden Nash*

"Marriage is a wonderful invention, but then again so is a bicycle repair kit." – *Billy Connolly*

"The most important four words for a successful marriage: I'll do the dishes." – *Anonymous*

Computer Corner

Castle Point Borough Council local election results

**Interesting
web page**

I'll leave it to the reader to decide whether local election results are 'interesting' but here is the link to the web page containing details of the recent local elections. It was nearly a momentous occasion but the Conservatives hung on to a majority by one seat.
URL: <https://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/elections/>

Opera browser

**Useful
free
software**

Opera is another browser, like Chrome and Firefox. It claims to be more efficient than other browsers and so uses less processor power. It has an ad-blocker but, more interestingly, it incorporates an optional VPN (Virtual Private Network) that can reduce online tracking and shield your browsing. The interface has a sidebar that incorporates a number of the main functions, which is useful now that most screens are widescreen and so have limited height. I still use a variant of Firefox as my main browser because I keep a lot of tabs open and Firefox scrolls them rather than shrinks them (which makes them unreadable). I'm amazed that others browsers haven't copied the idea.
URL: <https://www.opera.com>

Professor Jonathan Van-Tam lecture

**Interesting
video**

Jonathan Van-Tam (known as JVT), the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, has attracted quite a following as a result of his appearances at Coronavirus press briefings. He recently gave a guest lecture to students and alumni of Nottingham University (where he, and I, studied). For those interested, I have shortened the lengthy, original URL using a 'Bitly' link. It will take you to the appropriate page.
URL: <https://bit.ly/3vU6OTb>

Word Search – Words connected with political elections

X	N	V	E	S	V	T	O	L	L	A	B	U	A	G	O	D	B	B	Q
E	W	P	M	X	U	U	J	V	I	Y	Y	L	I	J	E	Y	D	Y	W
J	L	F	Y	O	J	V	D	S	T	T	Z	N	J	Z	Z	R	R	E	N
U	B	E	G	J	L	C	B	U	R	I	I	E	K	G	A	E	W	Q	F
M	H	U	C	N	E	S	D	A	T	R	K	N	G	Y	T	J	B	Q	W
W	L	N	H	T	I	W	P	D	Y	O	E	Z	D	U	O	Q	B	S	P
I	K	V	O	B	I	W	V	B	N	J	J	H	R	N	N	U	X	O	N
L	P	J	C	I	H	O	S	F	A	A	K	N	N	I	L	L	L	D	C
D	C	I	X	B	T	K	N	D	S	M	I	B	O	V	J	L	O	D	M
I	Q	N	D	L	M	A	S	D	A	N	G	E	M	L	Q	H	Y	J	E
H	K	V	M	V	L	D	R	B	G	R	E	G	I	S	T	E	R	Y	Y
Q	P	C	O	H	H	T	M	A	R	G	I	N	N	S	K	R	C	D	P
O	R	A	R	T	M	R	O	S	L	L	N	M	A	W	A	R	D	F	W
L	W	N	G	W	E	S	B	Z	H	C	E	N	T	W	X	U	Y	S	P
A	E	D	Q	S	J	P	Y	S	N	E	E	T	I	W	I	I	Y	T	H
T	S	I	K	N	V	F	S	A	A	E	U	D	O	X	U	D	X	X	P
S	X	D	W	P	Y	K	C	E	Z	J	K	H	N	C	M	P	O	W	O
O	T	A	C	T	I	C	A	L	V	S	Y	C	I	L	O	P	R	N	J
P	A	T	Y	L	O	Y	Y	L	I	C	N	U	O	C	H	Y	P	C	I
S	I	E	K	N	E	K	Z	C	Z	S	T	U	R	N	O	U	T	L	C

BALLOT
CANDIDATE
COUNCIL
DECLARATION
ELECTION
MAJORITY
MARGIN
NOMINATION
PARTY
POLICY
POLL
POSTAL
PROXY
REGISTER
RETURNING
SWING
TACTICAL
TURNOUT
VOTE
WARD

Words may appear in any direction including diagonally, back to front and upside down.