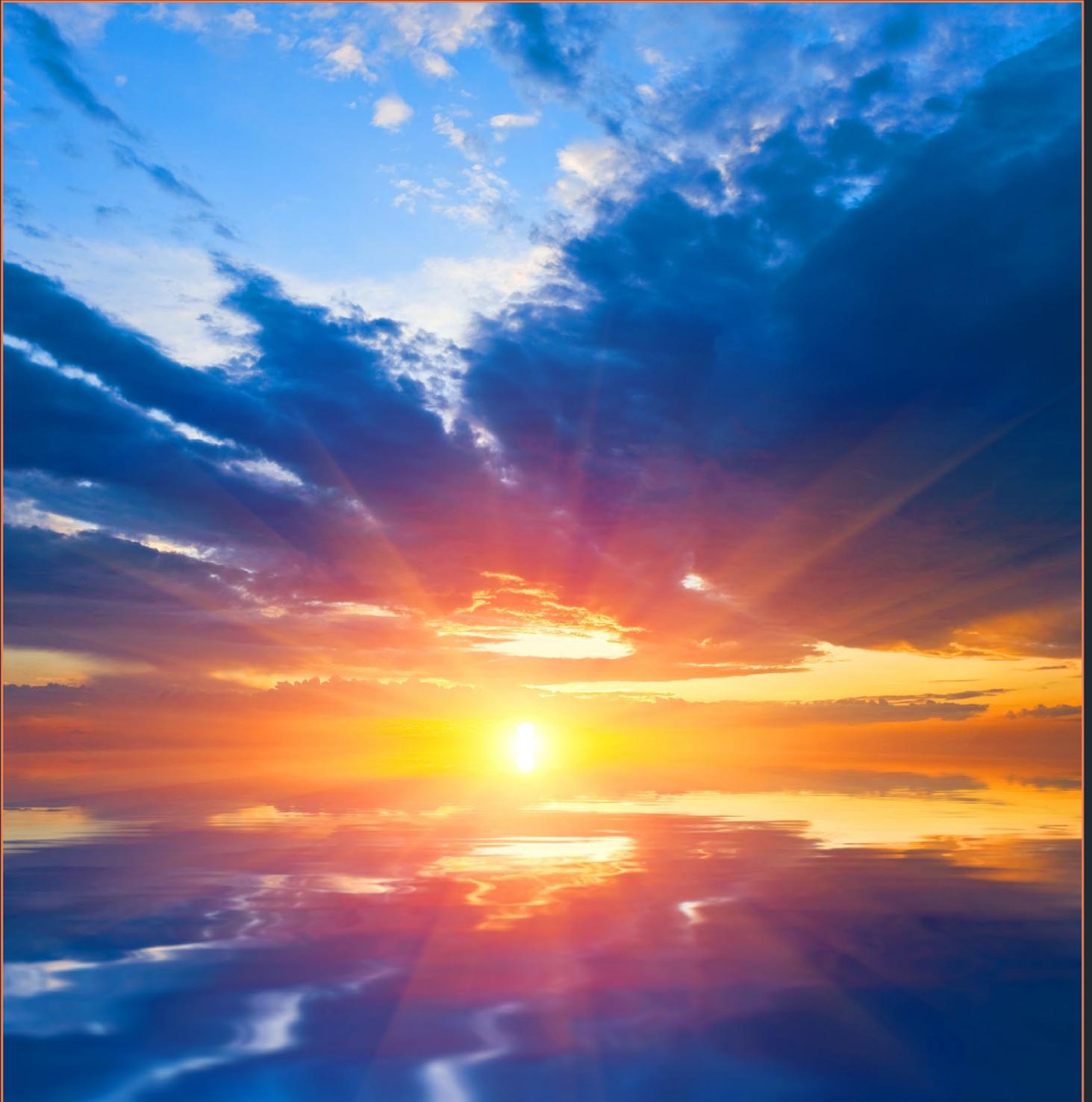


metconnexion

WINTER 2020/2021 | COVER PRICE £2.50

FEATURING

ANDREA WILLIAMS, ASHLEY COOPER, JANE HOLLOWAY, DAVID HULL,
TITILOLA OSSAI, DÁVE BOOKLESS



Speak, Lord: Discerning God's Voice in a Confusing World



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

As we enter a new year with all the hope and anticipation that this brings, particularly following a very difficult year for us all; we are mindful that we live in uncertain times. We perhaps have a tentative and optimistic hope that things will be better in this coming year. Many of us, I am sure, are pondering 'What is God saying in these times?' This question has led us as a team to explore this further and to focus on it as a theme for this edition of MET Connexion. The title 'Speak Lord: Discerning God's voice in a confusing world' was the title of our online day of teaching last October led by our Development Worker Derek Balsdon and Prayer Secretary, Roz Addington. We felt that this same title was apt and fitting to be used as we seek to explore and try to understand what God is saying to us as individuals, as a church, as a nation and as part of a global network.

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre, acknowledges that we often struggle to hear God's voice and stand up for the truth in 21st Century culture. She calls for a return to the truth in her article 'How Truth Has Stumbled in the Public Square'.

Ashley Cooper, Principal of Cliff College, reflects on the work of Cliff and the amazing journey on which God has led them, from the past to the present and how he is leading them forward into the future.

Jane Holloway, National Prayer Director for the World Prayer Centre, Birmingham explores how we can hear God's voice through prayer; looking at how we can hear God's voice personally; with others; and the importance of hearing what God is saying for outreach and mission.

David Hull, Chair of MET, poses an important question in these challenging times as we emerge from a global pandemic and as Conference is due to make a decision this year and asks: What is the Lord saying to the Methodist Church?

Titilola Ossai, the Evangelical Alliance's 'One People Commission' Coordinator explores and shares God's heart for unity in diversity amongst our churches and offers us some spiritual and practical steps for us to take as God's representatives.

Dave Bookless, Director of Theology for A Rocha International and vicar of St Mary's Norwood Green in multicultural Southall, asks what God is saying to us through current events of a global pandemic and climate change. He explores this in his article: 'Hearing God's voice when Creation is Groaning'. Our Bible Study section in this edition is the form of a shorter 'Bible Focus' and is a portrait of Abigail (1 Samuel 25) which has been compiled by the Rev'd Dr John Job, a Supernumerary minister and former Lecturer in Biblical and Evangelical Ministry at Cliff College.

We have included another 'Good News' section in this edition. We would love to hear from you if have some good news stories that you would like to share in the next edition. Please do send them to editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

The next edition of MET Connexion will be the spring edition, available in mid-May.

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 5. HOW TRUTH HAS STUMBLERD IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE
By Andrea Williams
- 8. CLIFF COLLEGE - AN AMAZING JOURNEY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
By Ashley Cooper
- 11. HEARING GOD'S VOICE THROUGH PRAYER
By Jane Holloway
- 14. TBC
By David Hull
- 18. GOD'S HEART FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY
By Titilola Ossai
- 21. HEARING GOD'S VOICE WHEN CREATION IS GROANING
By Dave Bookless

REGULARS

- 3. FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER
By Derek Balsdon
- 16. GOOD NEWS STORIES
- 24. RESOURCE REVIEWS
- 26. BIBLE FOCUS
By John Job
- 28. PRAYING ALWAYS
- 31. FROM THE CHAIR

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FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Revd Derek Balsdon



Our lives continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in so many different ways. I am grateful to God and to you for being able to continue serving MET as the Development Worker, especially for your support through prayer, giving, and participation in MET events. My title, 'Development Worker,' has certainly been applicable over the past year as we have had to develop different ways of working, with such an increase of things now happening online. Several people have been able to join online events which would not have been possible if we had been physically meeting. With our day conferences, 'Digging for Treasure' and 'Speak, Lord', the speakers pre-recorded their sessions, and we then played their videos on the day. We have now uploaded the videos onto the MET website and YouTube channel so that more people can benefit from this inspiring teaching. To watch them go to methodistevangelicals.org.uk/videos or methodistevangelicals.org.uk/youtube

One thing that has become evident is that, despite this pandemic, God is still mightily at work, and that his Spirit can flow through our online gatherings. He is continuing to speak and minister to us, his servants. Our Digging for Treasure 2020 theme was 'Word and Spirit: Authority and Power', and in one of the pre-recorded videos, the Revd Catherine Hutton included prayer for us to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit. Through emails a number of people have testified to experiencing a fresh anointing of God's Spirit, including one who has written 'that evening, out of the blue, I

was overcome by the presence and love of the Lord! It was like falling in love with Jesus all over again! And to a greater, or sometimes lesser, extent that remains with me.' The 'Speak, Lord' day included 'listening to the Lord' exercises, and many participants heard the Lord speaking to them, not audibly, but through the Bible and through words that came into their minds. During the MET Prayer Meetings, participants have also received verses, words and pictures from the Lord. The theme of this MET Connexion is 'Speak, Lord,' which comes from Eli instructing Samuel to respond to the Lord's voice with 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:9). The 'Speak, Lord' videos, with their teaching and listening exercises, can help us to hear more clearly from the Lord.

For a significant number of people, the MET online meetings have been a spiritual lifeline. In some places local churches and circuits have not offered much in the way of online Bible studies or prayer meetings, so people have been grateful for what MET has offered. Even before this pandemic, some evangelicals felt quite isolated in their church and circuit, and for them, our online meetings have provided an enriching opportunity to share fellowship and pray with like-minded people. Whenever we get to post COVID-19 we will need to consider MET's ongoing online ministry.

Within MET we are aware that a significant minority of our MET partners are not on the internet, so are not able to participate in our online meetings. Post

COVID-19 MET will resume face to face events. In the meantime, you may like to consider purchasing MET books to assist your devotion and study. We do have over 20 different MET books available. To find out more about them, please phone me, and then you can place an order by telephone or by post. MET books are priced between £4 and £6 each (+ p&p), with discounts for multiple purchases. With Lent approaching, one appropriate book is 'Looking at the cross through an Old Testament lens' by the Revd Paul Smith. If you are on the internet, but have not yet provided us with your email address, we would be pleased to receive it so that we can send out occasional email updates, please email Marian at admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

2021 is going to be a challenging year for the Methodist Church in Britain owing to the God In Love Unites Us report and resolutions coming before most of the spring District Synods and to the Conference. May we hear the Lord speaking, guiding, strengthening and building us up in our faith. May our prayer be 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

Even though I have not been travelling for MET, I have had a few local opportunities to preach and share holy communion. I am willing to make provisional bookings for preaching and teaching across the Connexion, even if at a later stage they have to be cancelled, postponed or moved online. I am also happy to preach within an online service either live or pre-recorded. I will continue to be involved with the weekly prayer meetings and Bible studies. These continue to provide opportunities for us to speak to our Lord, and to hear him speaking to us.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Derek



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY 2021

Click 'Stop' and 'Reset': Mission and Ministry Beyond COVID-19

Saturday 27 February 10am - 3pm on Zoom (including breaks)

Further information and to make a booking contact len.pereira@methodist.org.uk or call 01942 526773

met | Methodist Evangelicals Together

LIVERPOOL 200

We are hoping to hold this event in either Autumn 2021 or Spring 2022. Please check the website for updates or phone us on 01983 642024

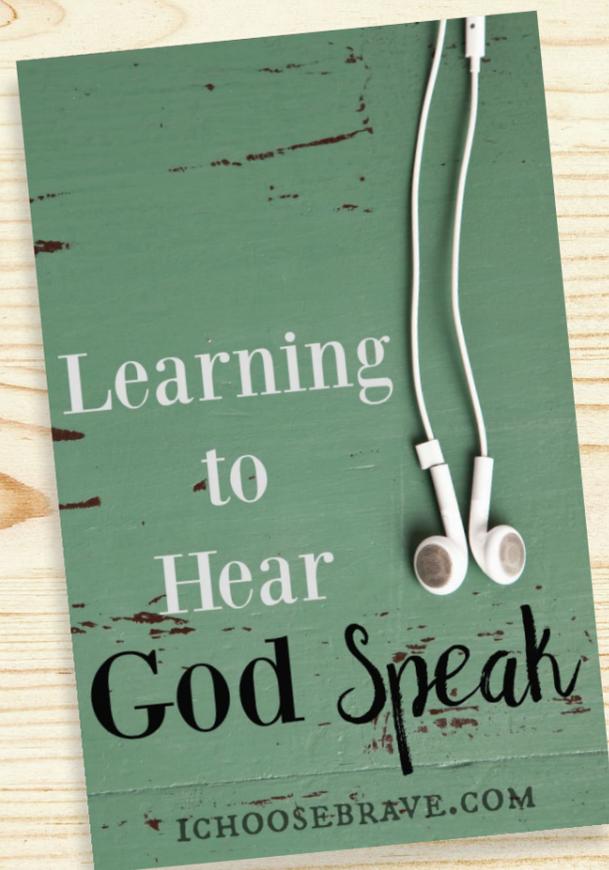
REVIVE: THE MET PRAYER WEEKEND

Living Through Forgiving

Speaker: Derek Balsdon

22-24 October 2021

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick



HOW TRUTH HAS STUMBLERD IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Andrea Williams

“

'A Church that believes eternity hangs in the balance would boldly proclaim the gospel as the only true remedy for death.'

”

'Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.'

So much of what plagues our nation depends on falsehoods. And I'm not talking about the coronavirus. Illness, disasters, crime and poverty will always be challenges. But it's our society itself that is sick. And much of what is wrong with our culture is the lies we've come to believe.

LAWYER AND CAMPAIGNER ANDREA WILLIAMS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF CHRISTIAN CONCERN AND THE CHRISTIAN LEGAL CENTRE, CALLS FOR A RETURN TO THE TRUTH.

'What is truth?' Pilate famously asked. Even though Pilate found no guilt in Jesus, he had him flogged and then crucified to satisfy the crowd. Or rather, to satisfy the chief priests and elders who had incited the crowd to call for Jesus' death.

Jesus called himself a witness to the truth. 'Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' Yet in today's society - just as in Jerusalem 2000 years ago - we struggle to listen to God's voice, to stand up for the truth.

I often quote Isaiah 59:14 which seems to describe our society just as well as the nation of Judah:

One lie is that your value is found in what you can do. We give honours to the highest achievers in business, sports, entertainment, politics and the arts; not a bad thing in itself, but nothing we can do in our lives matches the value we already have, simply because we were made in the image of God.

But the danger of this lie is really how it makes us act towards those who can do little or nothing - most of all, unwanted babies in their mothers' wombs. 200,000 of them, every year, are deemed disposable because, at that stage of life, they are wholly dependent and have nothing to give. Babies with Down's Syndrome are aborted up until birth - assumed to be a burden, assumed to have no value because people can't see past their genetic condition. It also, tragically, is shown in other countries around the world where people who feel like a burden on others are helped to kill themselves through assisted suicide and euthanasia.

An equal and almost opposite lie is that your value is found in being 'you': in expressing yourself. We assume that expressing our inner being - what we feel we are - is automatically a good thing. But our innermost being isn't necessarily good. Jesus said, 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.' Just because we have certain feelings, emotions or desires doesn't make them morally good. And it certainly doesn't make them wise to follow.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in issues of sex and gender. Feeling sexually attracted to a person does not make it OK to pursue them. That leads to adultery, divorce, homosexuality and broken homes. On gender, this is even more obvious - it's not just transgenderism that is being mainstreamed but tens, even hundreds of alternative genders.

'Safeguarding in Schools', for example, informs schoolteachers that: 'Pangender is someone who experiences many genders that can extend infinitely'. Infinitely? New gender definitions are being invented by the day, for example: 'Smokegender', 'Agender' and 'Puzzlegender' each with matching flags. People are trying to reach deep into their souls in an attempt to find and express what's there. But much more glorious, again, is the reality that we are made in God's image, male or female, with real value and real purpose.

Raising up a new generation of Wesleys

An evening with the vice-president & friends.

EVANGELISM | CHURCH GROWTH | PRAYER | REVIVAL



Nathan Veall
RISING GENERATION REPRESENTATIVE



David Hull
CHAIR, METHODIST EVANGELICALS TOGETHER



Carolyn Lawrence
VICE-PRESIDENT, THE METHODIST CHURCH



Ben Juliano
STUDENT AT FLORIDA SOUTHERN COLLEGE

The video is available on our website and YouTube channel

We are made, as John Wesley once wrote, to 'know, and love, and enjoy, and serve [our] great Creator to all eternity'. But another lie our society believes is that God does not exist, or at any rate has no interest in our lives. Christianity becomes merely a club for people interested in being kind to others and maybe reading their Bibles - rather than a holy people called to worship God inside and outside church. Until recently, many churches were filled with people who would praise God loudly on Sundays but do little to apply their faith to their home, their workplace or anything else outside the sanctuary walls. Now with COVID restrictions, we've lost even that.

A Church that really believes that eternity hangs in the balance would not only be seeking to stop the coronavirus, but would boldly proclaim the gospel as the only true remedy for death.

But we also go along with the world's lie that Christianity is oppressive: that to disagree with people from another religion or to criticise someone's views, demonstrates a lack of love. We believe that it's the government's job to fix everything rather than praying to God with faith and seeking to be the answer ourselves.

We call good 'evil' and evil 'good'. Truth has stumbled in the public square. Enlightenment philosophers sought to think their way to the truth. Postmodern thinkers came along and questioned whether there was 'a truth' to be found. In different ways, culture is enslaved to one or other of these ideas. But Christians should know better. We follow Christ the Truth! Truth is real and we don't find it primarily by stretching our brains or reasoning from first principles. We find the truth when we listen to God.

WHERE DOES GOD SPEAK?

First, God speaks through creation. The heavens declare the glory of God because God made them that way. God spoke the world into being and everything in it. If we understand it properly, it reveals his character. 'His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.' (Romans 1:20).

We don't always get this right. We are finite. We - including our minds - are marred by the effects of sin. Nevertheless, we can see

the sun rise and know that God is faithful. We can see a rainbow and remember God's promises. We can see God's good design for sex between one man and one woman, for companionship and offspring.

If we are walking in step with the Spirit, we must also believe that God guides our thoughts and actions - that he prompts us to holiness and to worship Jesus. Christians differ on exactly how to understand this - on how to understand prophecy and words of knowledge - but we all must agree that the Holy Spirit really does, in some way, speak to us and guide us.

But, you may say, don't atheist scientists tell us they've looked at the world and can't find God? Aren't transgender people just listening to the voice inside their head? If listening to God simply means paying attention to the world and our feelings, we haven't got anywhere in addressing the lies of society!

That's why the Bible is so precious. The scriptures, breathed out by God, are trustworthy and true. Everything else we think, feel or believe must be tested against what God has clearly said in his written word, or we are lost at sea; adrift without an anchor in the turbulent storms of 21st Century culture.

God's words have profound depth. Rightly understanding just one verse would be enough to undo so many of the falsehoods that society believes:

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'
(Genesis 1:27)

There is a God. He made humans to bear his image, endowing us all with purpose, dominion and value. He made men and women the building blocks of society, both equally reflecting God's goodness and ruling under him. Truly understand and believe that verse and you will be immune to so many of the world's lies. And there are 30,000 other verses for us to meditate on, to hear from God and gain his wisdom.

If we rightly are to understand the times we live in, we must be steeped in the Bible. We should know what faith-filled obedience looks like through the law and, as we read stories of the Cloud of Witnesses, we should be filled with its wisdom and overflowing with its songs.

Then, we might be better placed to assess and confront the confusing post-truth culture we live in. Division, confusion, lawlessness, plagues, sexual immorality - these are all biblical signs of a society that has abandoned the true God and embraced the devil's lies. In turn, God judges the nation by giving it more of what it wants, until people realise that God's ways are best and turn back to him.

As Isaiah said, righteousness stands far away. On the topic of abortion alone, 200,000 lives are unjustly taken every year in England and Wales. Our consciences are numb to this horror. Nothing short of wholesale repentance will turn our nation round.

The overwhelmingly good news is that when we do repent - we have a spotless Saviour who is ready to forgive. Jesus is better than our failures and his blood, spilt at the cross, is sufficient to cover every sin. On his account, God forgives us, and the Spirit works in us, pointing us back to the Truth.

'Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice' said Jesus. Why wouldn't we?

Andrea Williams qualified as a barrister in 1988. With her background in law, she founded Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre, which have run some of the most high-profile Christian freedom cases and campaigns in Europe. She is a leading analyst, campaigner and spokeswoman on issues of national importance in the moral life of the nation and a defender of Christian liberties in the parliamentary process, the justice system and the media. She is passionate about seeing our culture transformed by the gospel in every area of society. She is married to Gareth and they have four children.



Artist

JANETTE GORINGE

My heart is to paint the beauty of creation that draws me closer to God; especially to paint those moments that I would say out loud: 'Wow Lord, this is incredible!' Most of those moments have been on walks along coastlines, mountains or woodlands where I live in Wales.

More recently, as we have had to engage with church on Zoom, I have struggled to worship. I decided to give what I could in that time by asking the Lord to inspire a painting that would encourage someone in my church family. I started painting small canvas in the worship. These paintings have been very abstract and full of colour. One week I painted the four seasons each speaking of hope and the fact that God always moves us onto the next season because he is at work for good in each season of our lives. See colour rather than darkness! Trust in him!

My website is:
jgoringedesigns.weebly.com
or facebook page: 'Janette Goringe paintings'.

CLIFF COLLEGE — AN AMAZING JOURNEY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Revd Ashley Cooper

CLIFF COLLEGE PRINCIPAL ASHEY COOPER REFLECTS ON THE WORK OF CLIFF AND HOW GOD IS LEADING IT WITH CONFIDENCE INTO THE FUTURE.

I honestly think the role I currently fulfil as a Presbyterian in the Methodist Church is one of the best: to serve as the Principal of Cliff College for the last 4 years has been both the most rewarding and the most challenging of my life. To be part of Cliff's story and help shape it for the future feels an awesome responsibility. Every day that I sit in the Principal's study I feel the weight of history and the expectations of students and friends of the college calling us into the future. As with every other institution or movement of which I have been a part, we cannot simply rest on who we once were or try and do things the way they used to be done. Instead we must look back with gratitude and learn from our history whilst discerning the Spirit and the Spirit's voice, who is calling forward with boldness.

So, as I begin this article, it is important to look back at the journey so far...

THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

In 1903 the Wesleyan Methodist Church took responsibility for 'Joyful News Home and Mission' and purchased Cliff College for the training of evangelists. Since that date, the college has undergone many changes, both in its

role and appearance, but it has always retained evangelism and mission at its heart. This has been lived out through a range of training programmes, a focus on evangelistic mission and through gathering people together for worship and teaching. We have retained a commitment to serving the church and training disciples effectively to communicate the gospel in a contemporary context.

In 1993 the college first offered academic programmes, initially validated by the University of Sheffield and then by the University of Manchester. Since that time, the challenges of being a small alternative provider have increased, both in terms of regulation and the nature of the market in which the college operates. The validation relationship with the University of Manchester was strengthened in 2018 when Cliff was identified as one of two alternate providers that the university were happy to continue to validate.

In 2013, a review of learning and development across the Methodist Church, the Fruitful Field Project, led to the college being identified as one of the two learning centres of the Methodist Church. This strengthened the relationship between Cliff and the Methodist Church and has brought a renewed desire to identify and recognise the role of the college within the church. This relationship has been strengthened in recent years through a number of Cliff staff working closely

with the Connexional Team, particularly the Children, Youth and Family Team, the Evangelism and Growth Team, the Global Relationships Team and the Ministries Cluster.

The review of the College's international work in 2018 led to the recognition that an online approach to learning was the most appropriate method of serving partner churches. Therefore, a learning platform, 'TheologyX', was developed in response to this need. This platform has enhanced our global work but has also enabled the college to use the same technology to deliver its current programmes online and to develop a more hybrid model of learning that is available to all students. Having already developed this platform as part of our discerning the voice of God, it put Cliff in a very strong position to face the challenges of 2020 and a global pandemic with a sense of optimism and positivity. This platform has enabled many of our partners not only to survive this crisis but also to thrive in the midst of it.

WHO ARE WE NOW?

During these last few months, we have been exploring the college's future and developing a new vision for the next part of our journey as a college. A key part of that discernment has been to identify clearly our 'raison d'être'. So, I am excited to be able to share with you our new Identity Statement which expresses who we are now and the things that will be our priority as we journey into the

future as Cliff. As you read, I hope you will see both the shaping of history and the prompting of the Spirit who calls us into new adventures.

Cliff College: A Global Centre for Evangelism and Missiology

Cliff College is a Methodist evangelical learning community which is rooted in God's Word and Spirit for the purpose of equipping God's people for practical ministry and cutting-edge missional engagement.

Theological - our emphasis as a college and as a community is on discipleship - both personal, as we pursue God in our individual faith journeys, and social, as we seek to offer Christ to the world and maintain our historic motto: 'Christ for all - All for Christ'. Our commitment to discipleship shapes us for mission in today's world. We stand in a tradition of Wesleyan holiness and charismatic renewal, with the Word as our light and the Spirit as our guide. This enables us to welcome students, staff and visitors from a variety of church backgrounds with open arms. We encourage everyone to join us in the adventure of faith as we learn and grow together as a community. We are part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain and operate as one of their training institutions, with a particular calling to serve global Methodism. We are also a member of the Evangelical Alliance.

Academic - Cliff was birthed from a desire to train and equip God's people to reach others with the good news of Jesus. As the college has developed over more than a century, we have maintained this passion and calling. As we look to the future, we rejoice in the ways that evangelism and mission remain deeply rooted within every area of the college's life and community. Pursuing this ongoing calling involves the need for academic rigour, to prepare our students for the unique challenges of mission in today's world. Our partnership with the University of Manchester has enabled us to challenge and develop our students to this end as they study for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, while our Short Course and CliffYear programmes offer high quality teaching and learning to help equip the wider Church. This commitment to learning is not for mere academic speculation; rather, we participate in



theological formation that shapes our thinking, our worship, our prayer, and our lifestyles.

The education we offer at Cliff is theology for the real world: rooted in practice, forged in community, grounded in the authority of scripture and consistently prompting us to face outwards. We proclaim the gospel and invite everyone to experience the life-changing transformation of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This identity is underpinned by holding the following values as expressed in the commitments of Cliff College's historic charisms:

- Evangelistic zeal: commitment to spread Scriptural Holiness and proclaim the evangelical faith.
- Wesleyan holiness: commitment to the entire transformation of heart and life by the Spirit.
- Evangelical theology: commitment to scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice.
- Kingdom praxis: commitment to put into action discipleship that is missional, accountable and radical.
- Community of grace-led hospitality: commitment to build up one another in Christ.
- Discipleship: commitment to a distinctive character built on learning, discipleship, mission preparation and caring for one another through prayer, worship and hospitality.

This identity can be explored through the following three words that will be used to underpin our life and work as we journey forward:

Encounter : Equip : Engage

ENCOUNTER

- daily prayer and weekly celebration available both on-site and online
- an annual festival of word, worship, learning and music, available on-site and online
- a weekly discipleship programme available to all members of the Cliff community
- the Cliff Year: a gap year programme consisting of evangelism, mission and vocational exploration
- a programme of 'global immersion' trips

EQUIP

- a portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes
- a selection of specialist courses, both validated and non-validated, for those in ministry roles
- support for global partners: learning and equipping
- Cliff Local: a full programme of local learning and community building designed to strengthen and equip those in local lay leadership
- a variety of UK and global research opportunities
- a learning platform that enables a variety of organisations to offer online learning

ENGAGE

- a programme of local missional activities
- a missional support programme offered to churches throughout the UK
- the support and enabling of online church
- a vibrant conference centre providing catered accommodation to groups and individuals

- camping, caravan and self-catering accommodation allowing access to the beautiful Cliff College site
- a community of businesses and individuals based on the college site

FACING THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE

As we emerge from a global pandemic, we hope not only to have survived, but to have strengthened our vision and clearly discerned what God is asking of us as we move forward. It is important to state that Cliff remains committed to its historic calling to train both evangelists and share the 'Joyful News' of the gospel. This must look different in 2021 than it did in 1903/1904. Our work, both at home and abroad, must change and develop as it supports a shifting culture, but our passion and desire to see transformation in both individuals, communities, the nation and around the world has not diminished and will not diminish while I sit in this chair. We will place evangelism and mission at the centre of everything we do. Evangelism will be central to each of our programmes and academic offerings.

As we develop a new 'Global Centre for Evangelism and Missiology', we will explore relationships with agencies, with those engaged in cutting edge mission, and those involved in developing new and exciting models of mission and evangelism - both in the UK and around the world. We will work alongside MET and all others who have a passion to see a lost world redeemed and who long for people to find that hope is only found in Jesus Christ.

This renewed emphasis on the whole college engaging in evangelism and mission is central to the work of our Evangelism Team. The Cliff Evangelists, alongside myself and the college staff will commit ourselves to exploring new ways of engaging with local churches, circuits and districts to work together in both sharing and being 'Joyful News' for many years to come.

The Revd Ashley Cooper has been Principal of Cliff College since September 2017, having previously served as the Superintendent of the Burslem Mission Circuit and worked as part of the Evangelism Team for the Methodist Church. He is also the Chaplain at Port Vale Football Club in his spare time and exploring church planting in his home town of Leek.



LISTEN FOR
God's
 VOICE IN
 EVERYTHING
 YOU DO,
 EVERYWHERE
 YOU GO;
He IS
 THE ONE
 WHO WILL KEEP
 YOU ON TRACK.

Proverbs 3:6
 THE MESSAGE



HEARING GOD'S VOICE THROUGH PRAYER

Jane Holloway

JANE HOLLOWAY, THE NATIONAL PRAYER DIRECTOR FOR THE WORLD PRAYER CENTRE, EXPLORES HOW WE CAN BE OPEN TO HEARING FROM GOD

HEARING GOD'S VOICE THROUGH PRAYER

So here we are at the start of another year, 2021 stretches out before us. And while in past years we would have been eagerly awaiting the beginning of new initiatives, projects and setting our New Year's resolutions, this January will be very different.

Many Christians have turned to prayer, especially during lockdown 1.0 and 2.0, and there have been numerous prayer initiatives all across our UK nations led by denominations, national and local organisations, which has meant many more people have attended prayer meetings online than they ever did in person! And it has also been noted that large numbers of people, as yet outside the church family, have turned to prayer, seeking help and peace. How can we all seek to move forward in learning how to listen as we journey through 2021?

HEARING GOD'S VOICE – PERSONALLY

I have found the discipline of writing this has given me permission to reflect on my experience over these last nine months and note how the Holy Spirit has been

speaking into my personal situation and into the groups of which I am a part, locally and nationally. Personally I sit within both the charismatic and contemplative streams but I am finding new ways to seek out God's company in order to enjoy his presence and gain his perspective. I am loving God out of doors, loving God through ritual and symbol, loving God by loving others (as I am my elderly mother's main carer) and have found inspiration through the book by Gary Thomas: 'Sacred Pathways - Discover your Soul's Path to God'. Yesterday morning, as I began to write this, I looked up into the early morning sky over my mother's house to see an incredible thick white cross covering half of the sky made by two plane trails. That was a deeply reassuring sign to me on the third day of lockdown 2.0 that on the cross death was defeated, Jesus is on the throne and that all things are under his authority and helping me again put my trust and faith in him and him alone.

Two insights have helped me recognise the complexities of our current situation. The first is: understanding that we are all living in a time of trauma, which affects how we react to and cope physically, mentally and spiritually with life. This can easily make us less confident of whose voice we might be hearing - our own or God's. The second is learning to embrace that we are also living in transition, between what we called normal and what is yet to emerge. This also impacts our spiritual walk with God. I have found the Transition Prayer

Journey from LICC (London Institute of Contemporary Christianity) a helpful tool to learn more about the four key stages of transition: discerning the signals of change; ending well as you let go of the old; feeling disorientated; and getting re-orientated.

Online surveys have shown that more people are turning to the Bible as a source of help. Spending time in God's word has always been foundational to the way I seek to listen and follow the Lord. But I have been drawn more intentionally to embracing Old and New Testament scriptures daily in order to gain a broader narrative. The Psalms have particularly come alive to me and, I know, for many others as they help us to express the deepest feelings to God about what we are living through, particularly using the prayer of lament. Just this morning Psalm 91:15 spoke into today's assignment! 'When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.'

Each of us, created in our own unique way by our heavenly Father, will have our own different experiences of how we are made to hear God's voice. For some it comes through the scriptures, for others through asking questions in the place of prayer, for others in times of fasting, solitude, worship - there are so many ways to position ourselves. I think our challenge, as we all seek to move in step with how the Holy Spirit is leading, is to review how we are making time

to discern the voice of the Lord above the noise and confusion of our culture. It is interesting to note how John Mark Comer's book 'The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry' (written before 2020) has become a best seller as people are being reminded about the disciplines of slowing, silence, solitude and Sabbath. For me the prayer technique of 'Examen' is one of the best ways of noting the many and various ways that God 'speaks' to me - an ancient discipline of simply pausing to review the day that has just past, noting where God has been at work and whether I have been open or not to that, bringing any regrets to the foot of the cross, asking for his grace for the day ahead and then noting or journaling what I discern.

HEARING GOD'S VOICE – WITH OTHERS

I have the privilege of linking up with many different groups to pray for our nation and the nations, all via Zoom. The lockdown has enabled us to connect much more than we previously did in physical meetings. A spirit of humility, honouring the different gifts, and recognising that God gives different perspectives has been essential in our discernment. The Lord has spoken into our gatherings about his heart for his people, his longing to lead us out into new rhythms and the need for us to wait on him, wait for him and to wait with him in these days. Ministering to the Lord in worship has been a vital part of these times of listening. We are learning that, the more we focus on the risen Lord and get his perspective, the more we are enabled to link up in line with the prayers of heaven. We are also learning not to be afraid to ask God questions in order to gain a shared agreement for what we should be praying. In every case, we have received much encouragement from the Holy Spirit as he has shown us scriptures to use, declarations to make and areas to release prayer into.

Learning to use Zoom for hearing God in the place of prayer, technically as well as spiritually, has been a big learning curve for many of us! Nothing beats gathering together physically and I know I, along with others, have struggled with this new format. Once, when I was asking the Lord how I could meet him in this way last autumn, I sensed the Holy Spirit whisper 'Don't watch but worship'. This has transformed the way I approach and use all online pathways.

The pandemic has forced a number of groups, networks, churches and organisations to go back to their foundations to hear their fresh mandate for the future. Friends who lead Flame International called for a twenty-one day pray and fast season in 2020 for their close supporters. They received twenty-one A4 pages of God's prophecies, sharing: 'We have taken great encouragement from many of them, been chastened by some, and most of which sent us to get down on our knees ... we have worked to ensure all legal compliance was in place, our motives and attitudes in line with the Lord's word and to be ready for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit when we return to the overseas mission field.'

HEARING GOD'S VOICE – FOR OUR OUTREACH AND MISSION

So many of the initiatives that churches and organisations have started, either before or during the pandemic to serve their communities, have at their source a person or a group of people who sought the Lord within the place of prayer, heard his voice and then sought to put it into practice. Partnerships have developed in many towns and cities with church unity movements working together with local councils, businesses and charities. 'Prayer has played a crucial part in our journey through COVID-19. It has opened doors that were previously shut, brought favour in place of suspicion, brought unity instead of division and sustained faith where we were weary. Lockdown forced us both to slow down to pray individually and to discover new ways of praying together.' (Love Southampton article, Evangelical Alliance's 'Idea' magazine, November 2020)

The desire of us all has been to see a fresh move of the Holy Spirit in the middle of this crisis leading people into a relationship with Jesus. Initiatives like Try Praying have adapted their resources from 'use it or lose it' to 'try it and buy it' and are finding new ways to invite those who don't yet know Jesus personally to explore prayer. Hope Together and the 24-7 Prayer Hope Spaces, designed to help those who are spiritually seeking God, have created a new out-facing website. Hope Together and Every Home for Christ are planning to make 2021 a year of prayer walking with a specially designed app. Prayer walking is a brilliant way to listen to the voice of our Father as we see, feel and experience real life at street or road level and are able

to bless the people and places through which we walk.

In my circles of connections, the Lord has spoken much about reset and his repurposing of us, his church, to get us ready for the next stage of the journey. We have been challenged by his rebuke; we have been encouraged by all his promises and together we believe that, as we continue to seek to listen and to obey what he shows us, we will see him lead us through into new ways of worship and witness both in our homes and in corporate gatherings in the future. His words of comfort speak into our storms today: 'Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid' (Matthew 14:27).

Early in 2020 the Lord spoke to us in the World Prayer Centre team that it was time to get ready to move from our base in the centre of Birmingham. We met together and said 'We are ready, Lord'. Lockdown 1.0 made it very clear that we could not stay and so we gave our notice to the landlord and moved out at the end of October 2020, so now working from home, and hosting all our prayer gatherings online. We have a real sense of excitement for the next stage of our Abrahamic journey - and we know we are not alone in learning to walk along unfamiliar paths. 'I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.' Isaiah 42:16.

Jane Holloway has been the National Prayer Director for the World Prayer Centre, Birmingham, since 2005 - a role that gives her lots of scope to encourage, mobilise and network in prayer across the British Isles and Europe. Visit www.worldprayer.org.uk for further details.



WHAT IS THE LORD SAYING TO THE METHODIST CHURCH?

David Hull

It is an important question to ask within these challenging times. We are yet to emerge from a global pandemic that has led to the greatest restrictions to life in peacetime, seems likely to have damaging effects on economies around the world and has caused great suffering to many people. Additionally, the Methodist Church stands at a crossroads within its own institutional life. It is due to make a decision when its annual Conference meets in the summer that is likely to have a profound effect upon the denomination. What is the Lord saying to the Methodist Church at this moment in time?

BUSINESS AS USUAL

As the first national lockdown began, one phrase in particular circled my mind: 'Business as usual'. It was particularly striking because many others seemed to be saying, 'Whatever else this means for the Church, it cannot be business as usual'. It has also been suggested that, even when we emerge from the pandemic, we must not expect to return to business as usual; instead we must expect a 'new normal'. I understand, I think, what they have meant. The significant disruptions to life present us with an opportunity to review our old routines of worship and activities - the style and timing of our services, the role of online streaming and, perhaps most importantly, the nature of our mission to the wider community.

I agree that all such reviews could be immensely valuable, but none of

it should involve changing our core business - unless, that is, we had already lost sight of what our core business is and need to rediscover it. Even as a child, Jesus knew his destiny in life. 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked his parents when they finally found him after a long and distressing search. 'Didn't you know that I had to be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2:49). He knew his vocation was within the family business. As he grew into adulthood, that family business became a partnership: 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working', he said to those seeking to condemn him for breaking the Sabbath (John 5:17).

Surely, though in a lesser degree, our calling is no different - in the power of the Holy Spirit to enter into partnership with our Lord, praying and labouring for his will to be done and his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. The early church continued with business as usual, with extraordinary power under terrible restrictions - and restrictions that were not generally imposed upon the whole population, but viciously focused on Christians. Our brothers and sisters facing dreadful persecution around the world today continue the work of the family business. Surely we can therefore continue under whatever restrictions we face. It may not be done in the ways to which we have become accustomed, but the core business of praying and labouring for the kingdom can, indeed must, continue.

I believe the real opportunity we have, as we begin to emerge from a global pandemic, is not to tinker with the structures we have built, as valuable as that may be, but to look again at our foundations. Are we genuinely still committed to the family business, to working in partnership with the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeking first his kingdom here on earth, or have we somehow lost our way?

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

It would, of course, be unusual to ask 'What is the Lord saying to the Methodist Church' and not to consider the circumstances within the denomination, particularly the debates which are due to come to a head at the Conference in the summer. I have sensed the Lord speaking powerfully to me frequently throughout these debates. Here, I will highlight just one seminal experience.

Towards the end of a meeting of conference representatives in 2019 at which we had discussed the proposals arising from 'God in Love Unites Us', I ended by saying I was aware that I was being an immovable object and recognised that an unstoppable force may be coming against me, but I could do no other than to stand where I stood. I left the meeting feeling drained and discouraged and returned to my hotel room. Before getting on with my work, preparing for the next event in which I was due to participate, I turned to my Bible readings for the day. It turned out to be one of the most profound moments

of experiencing the Lord speaking to me directly. The reading set was from Ezekiel 3: 'Go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel - not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the people of Israel will not listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate.' Then, remembering the remarks I had just made about being an immovable object, I read: 'But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are' (Ezekiel 3:4-8).

I knew without a shadow of a doubt that my task was to play my part in calling the Methodist people to remain faithful to the Lord and his Word - even though there was no guarantee that anyone would listen. I have had to learn that sometimes faithfulness is simply about speaking out, whether or not anyone listens.

It has been tempting at times to yield to a Jonah spirit and to feel that the Methodist Church has already gone beyond the point of no return within these contemporary debates. An alternative proposal to those of 'God in Love Unites Us' cannot mean turning the clock back and retreating a few steps to where we stood a few years ago. It must surely mean a change of direction, which of course, is the definition of repentance. That, I believe, is the Lord's call to the Methodist Church: to repent and to remain faithful to his Word.



I believe the Lord is calling us to return to the central concerns of the family business; to repent of our current direction of travel; and to rediscover Pentecost.



REDISCOVERING PENTECOST

Finally, I turn to a favourite theme. Last year, I finally completed my doctoral research! Many readers will know that I

have been investigating the legacy of the Revd Dr Rob Frost as an evangelist within the Methodist Church. I am very grateful indeed to have been able to do it. It has had a profound effect on my ministry. I must confine myself to a brief comment about only one aspect of that research.

Rob Frost's first written work was published in 1979, a chapter in a book edited by the Revd Brian Hoare, *Methods for Mission*. Amongst his last published work was his introduction to the book *Pentecost: The Church Has Left the Building*, which launched the vision for his final initiative, Pentecost Festival. In both this first and this last publication, he called for a rediscovery of Pentecost.

This provided a central theme for my research. Pentecost forms the linchpin between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the church. The disciples of Jesus came to the realisation that, in him, they encountered the very presence of God on earth: 'we have seen his glory,' one of them wrote, 'the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). The glory of God, which had once filled the temple and then departed in the time of the exile, had finally returned to his people, just as he had promised. Following Pentecost, those same disciples came to an equally astonishing realisation: that the very same glory of God which they had recognised in Jesus was present in the midst of their Spirit-filled community as they gathered together. Indeed, he was present within each one of them: 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?', wrote the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The church is called to be glorious! We are called to be glorious, 'being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18)! So, where has the glory gone?

As the year turned from 1738 to 1739, not long after his heart-warming experience in Aldersgate Street, John Wesley gathered with some friends in Fetter Lane. That night, as they prayed, they received a remarkable experience of the presence of God, which Wesley described in his journal: 'About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and

many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord"' (1 January 1739).

The glory of the Lord fell upon them; they were transformed and a flame of revival was ignited which spread around the world. Later that year, only six months after that momentous night, there was a sense that the glory had departed from them. The Methodist leaders in London sent a letter to John Wesley in Bristol, asking him to return urgently. He did so and recorded in his journal on 16 June 1739: 'We met at Fetter-Lane, to humble ourselves before God, and own he had justly withdrawn his Spirit from us, for our manifold unfaithfulness. We acknowledged having grieved him ... In that hour, we found God with us as at the first. Some fell prostrate upon the ground; others burst out, as with one consent, into loud praise and thanksgiving; and many openly testified, there had been no such day as this since January the first preceding.' Thus the revival continued. They had rediscovered Pentecost.

What is the Lord saying to the Methodist Church? I believe the Lord is calling us to return to the central concerns of the family business; to repent of our current direction of travel; and to rediscover Pentecost, seeking a fresh revival as the glory of the Lord falls again upon the church and upon the nation.

The Revd Dr David A. Hull is a Methodist Minister with permission to serve within the Free Methodist Church UK as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol, based in Kingswood. He is Chair of MET and of Share Jesus International.



The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
No sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
Their words to the ends of the world.

PSALM 19:1-4

GOOD NEWS STORIES



GOOD NEWS FROM THE WIRRAL

Revd Heather Cooper

During the pandemic, a number of asylum seekers were billeted at a hotel in Hoylake. Along with the other churches in the town, St Luke's Methodist Church became heavily involved in supporting them. Some of the asylum seekers are Christians who were forced to flee their homes or be killed because they followed Christ. A few began to worship with us at our weekly Zoom services and four asked to be baptised. This was something they had been denied in their home country. So, on 25 October, COVID-secure and socially distanced baptism was held. The local Independent Evangelical Church was used as they have a baptismal pool. Their pastor and a member of the Methodist Church did the immersion as they were part of the permitted social bubble. The exuberance of the men as they rose out the water brought tears to many eyes – those who were in the church and those watching it being livestreamed. This was a celebration that brought the churches and the community together and provided a powerful sign of hope.

From the Revd Heather Cooper, St Luke's Methodist Church, Wirral Circuit



GOD'S HEALING GRACE

Rachel Saxton

In February 2019, I suffered a brain haemorrhage whilst staying at my mum's flat in Liverpool. I was staying there whilst my husband John was working in America. I felt very sick and then was rushed to hospital as I had apparently collapsed.

I was taken to Walton hospital in Liverpool and was in ICU for two weeks. I was then transferred to a ward and then to a rehab unit. I was in hospital for about four months and God saved my life literally. In rehab I learnt to walk, talk and eat again. My family were amazing and God stayed close to me the whole time.

After a few months, I was given my own flat to live in. I became independent. I learnt again how to cook meals and to buy food. I was then allowed home for two weekends, which was great. Soon afterwards, I was able to be discharged and my husband helped me each day; he was amazing. The care I got in Walton hospital was exceptional and God gave me such courage. I am now living and doing the things I never thought I would do again. Praise God! He has healed and restored me.

Rachel Saxton lives in Lymm near Warrington and attends Lymm Methodist Church where she is a worship leader.



ETERNAL WALL OF ANSWERED PRAYER

A new national landmark which aims to profile a million answered prayers has been given the go ahead to be built on a site near Coleshill on the outskirts of Birmingham. Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer, which will eclipse the size of the Angel of the North, will stand at 169 feet and is expected to attract 300,000 visitors each year, contributing £9.3 million to the local economy.

The iconic 'eternal' arch structure will be constructed using one million bricks with each representing individual prayers that have been answered for people across the country. In addition, using interactive technology and a bespoke app, visitors will be able to use their smart device, holding it against any brick to read the individual answered prayers and the personal stories behind them.

After North Warwickshire Borough Council granted planning permission, the Secretary of State ratified the decision, giving Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer CEO Richard Gamble the green light to start the build. The former chaplain of Leicester City Football Club is the visionary behind the monumental structure.

Richard Gamble says: 'It's been 16 years since the idea was first born. To finally receive the official consent is incredible. We are building a very special landmark and it is an amazing opportunity for the British people to leave a legacy of hope for future generations. Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer will make hope visible to the UK. It is unique in that it is all about the community: it is crowd-funded and a million people will come together to crowd-create this incredible piece of art with their stories of hope. What we're doing is historic.'

It is anticipated that Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer will create 60 new jobs during its two year construction phase from 2021, thereafter providing 20 full-time positions for employees to work for the charity in the visitor centre, café, bookstore and a 24 hour on-site chaplaincy support service. It is also estimated that the monument will generate an additional gross social value of £1.4 billion, including £430 million in charitable donations. It has recently been announced that the project plans to fund one million bricks to social housing projects – a brick for each answered prayer.

Richard continues, 'We want to celebrate and remember all the prayers that God has answered for individuals throughout our nation's history. Each answered prayer could provide hope to those who visit. Our desire is to create thought-provoking public art and offer a space for recreation and reflection for everyone. Our hope is that those who visit will see how God can bring peace in life's storms and be encouraged to reflect on the power and relevance of prayer.'

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands comments: 'I am delighted Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer has now finally got planning permission and work can get underway. It's an incredibly ambitious, stunning project and is a landmark for the Midlands. It has been a long process, but this landmark will serve as a place of hope for many, and one that will help us remember the Christian heritage of our nation.'

Construction is expected to begin in Spring 2021 with completion in Autumn 2022.

Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer is looking to gather one million answers to prayer. Share yours by going to eternalwall.org.uk/testimony

GOD'S HEART FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Titilola Ossai

THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE'S ONE PEOPLE COMMISSION COORDINATOR, TITILOLA OSSAI, EXPLORES AND SHARES GOD'S HEART FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY AMONGST OUR CHURCHES.

UNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH DIVERSITY

We see God's heart for unity, the coming together of his people, throughout scripture. In Genesis God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness". So, God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:26-27).

In John's Gospel, we find Jesus interacting with a Samaritan woman by the well, going against gender as well as cultural barriers (John 4:4-26). In Revelation, John prophesied: 'After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb' (Revelation 7:9).

Often it seems, particularly in these times, that the world, and occasionally the church too, couldn't be further from God's vision of unity. This year we've seen old wounds of ethnic tension resurface in the US, the UK and different

parts of Europe. And these challenges are not peculiar to the west; the Global South has had its fair share of ethnic conflict and violence too. Then, when we look at some of our local churches, while of course we don't see this type of hostility, neither do we see the level of diversity and integration which should be expected of the people of God.

But this is just one side of the coin. With many of our communities becoming increasingly multicultural, we are witnessing a significant rise in inter-racial marriages and relationships. According to the 2011 census, the number of dual heritage children up to four years old rose from 116,000 in 2001 to 220,000 in 2011. Does this indicate that while division and disunity haven't been eradicated, we are also seeing signs of a people united first and foremost by love? Surely our churches are to be ready and equipped for this changing landscape.

As the epicentre of most communities, the church has the responsibility to emulate kingdom-like behaviour by bringing together communities that would otherwise be divided by racial, social and sexual distinctions. The church should serve as an exemplary blueprint of what community looks like when people come together and embrace their differences as they work towards a common goal. The church should be the solution to the challenges we have in our communities and the model of the progress we long to see.

For we, the church, where 'there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28), are called and empowered by God to embrace and celebrate one another in love despite our peculiarities, and in so doing we reflect the love of God in this fallen world.

As it has been put by the Revd Yemi Adedeji, Director of the Evangelical Alliance's One People Commission, and Steve Clifford, former General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, 'When God's people from diverse ethnic backgrounds focus on him and express themselves in worship, it demonstrates the unity we will experience when we come before God's throne as that "great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language"' (The [Im]possible Dream' 2019, page 105).

You see, though we are in this world, we are not of this world and we operate kingdom principles. The church of Christ is empowered to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, awaken from slumber, stand strong, and put on the whole armour of Christ to live up to God's heartbeat - unity. 'Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world' (1 John 4:4).

TIME TO GO THE EXTRA MILE

At the beginning of 2021, what spiritual and practical steps can we, God's representatives, take to reflect better our Father's heart for unity?

“

Prioritising diversity is not about tokenism or merely for an affirmative action, but realising that it is the heartbeat of God to have the Church 'as one'.

”

1. THINK LIKE GOD

We are to align our hearts and minds to God's word. We are admonished to renew our minds (Romans 12:2) and align our hearts with God's, which is for all people. 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5).

2. LISTEN TO GOD

Our diverse society requires that church leaders spend time praying together, regularly leading the congregation through prayer meetings, small prayer hubs, etc to ensure that they stay connected to God. We can get a 'now' direction from the Holy Spirit, who knows the heart of the Father and teaches us all things. Do not be in doubt that you would not hear him when he speaks to you. 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me' (John 10:27).

3. THINK SMALL AS WELL AS BIG

Diversity is not only about bringing different perspectives to the table. It is in the very small and little things that we do, for example, the food we eat, the

places we go. People should be made to feel welcome and included. These things just don't happen, they are made to happen.

4. CHECK WHO IS IN YOUR TEAM

It should be a priority for leadership in churches' pastoral teams to ensure that their teams are diverse. Diversity brings about informational cohesion and enhances creativity and unfettered innovation. When church leaders embrace diversity, they dare to come out of differences and lay more emphasis on commonalities, getting into how God views us and what he says. 'Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all' (Colossians 3:11).

5. ESTABLISH YOUR MISSION

It is key that the leadership has a heavenly vision - a united vision precedes a united mission. Being strategic and aiming to build churches that reflect heaven on earth should be the focus. If your church is not diverse, consider exploring other modes of outreach, such as where and how you evangelise, the resources that can be used, and the message.

6. DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

Creating a short and long-term action plan for implementation through strategies by the leadership team, church workers, trustees, advisory groups, etc (Habakkuk 2:2). Prioritising diversity is not about tokenism or merely for an affirmative action, but realising that it is the heartbeat of God to have the church as one.

7. UTILISE RESOURCES

With churches going virtual and faced with the challenges on the coronavirus restrictions that keep evolving, it's no longer business as usual. This has brought about new opportunities to reach a wider audience - one of the positive things in terms of outreach that has come from a difficult year. Regularly check in with your tech/social media team to ensure that all relevant modes of communication are being utilised in order to engage current members and reach new ones.

To find out some more information on the Evangelical Alliance's changing church guide during and after the lockdown, please visit eauk.org/changing-church/gathering-church

BRINGING GOD'S PEOPLE TOGETHER

We are living in the times when Christians are encouraged to be the voice of God on earth, live by the example set by the word of God, and spread Christ's love to the world graciously. We should be relentless in giving, for freely we have received and freely we should give.

The One People Commission (OPC), a key part of the Evangelical Alliance, was born out of a response to God's word and a move of his Spirit towards unity and mission. It is committed to supporting churches and Christian organisations as they seek to promote in all its vibrancy whilst celebrating diversity across the evangelical churches in the UK.

As the Rev Adedeji put it, 'Embracing diversity is like inviting people to the party, inclusion is inviting them to dance,



but integration means we host the party together.' (Steve Clifford and Yemi Adedeji, *The [Im]possible Dream* 2019, page 39).

My prayer is that, as we unite as the church in the UK, we will see more and more people come to find faith in Jesus Christ, having their lives transformed by relationship with him. It is hoped that churches would engage and demonstrate to the world how the impossible dream of uniting as one through ethnic integration can become a possible dream irrespective of race, culture or background, as Christians learn to love each other, bringing glory to God in heaven and here on earth.

As Jesus prayed: 'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17:20-23).

We are blessed to have a relational heavenly Father who cares about us and our world.

Titilola Ossai is currently the Evangelical Alliance's One People Commission Co-ordinator. Coming from a legal background, she was involved actively in championing and supporting the

emergence of new communities in Ireland, lobbying and dialoguing issues on race, equality, diversity and inclusion across border counties and national European Union funded initiatives.



HEARING GOD'S VOICE WHEN CREATION IS GROANING

Rev'd Dr Dave Bookless

SPEAK O LORD

*Keith Getty &
Stuart Townend*

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

DAVE BOOKLESS ASKS WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO US THROUGH CURRENT EVENTS

In January 2020, when many of us hadn't yet heard of COVID-19, I preached in a large London church on 'A 2020 Vision for Planet Earth'. I stated that 2020 will probably be a tipping point for human society. I didn't have a global pandemic directly in mind. Existing long before it, loomed even larger and more destructive waves: a global economy built on destroying the earth and stealing from future generations, climate chaos, and collapsing biodiversity, each more complex and demanding to tackle than any vaccine can fix.

So, what is God saying to us, through the scriptures, through the Spirit, and through discerning the signs of these times of such global upheaval?

Firstly, I believe God is saying 'You are not in control.' A friend, with a well-tested prophetic gift, discerned at the start of the pandemic that God is saying 'We (the human race) are not in control'. He explained: 'We are well educated, live comfortable lives and with the eradication of most diseases expect to live into our eighties. This has led to the development of the myth that we are in control, hiding the reality that life is fragile and depends on the grace of God.'

The myth of continual human progress; of constant growth in technology, lifestyles and ecological footprint has

been shattered by a tiny virus that no economist or politician predicted. In James 4:13-15 we read:

'Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'

The Bible and coronavirus both challenge the myth of human superiority and control. God created us as contingent creatures in an interdependent ecological system. The Christian gospel is profoundly about relationships: with God, ourselves, each other and creation. Ecology is the study of relationships between organisms and their surroundings. In that sense, Christianity is a profoundly ecological faith. When we damage our core relationships, through selfishness and greed, we suffer consequences, because those relationships are deeply interconnected. Our relationship with God, our neighbours in Africa and Asia, and with the soil, rainforests and creatures God entrusted to our care, are all linked. Today, through the unleashing of multiple unforeseen consequences as we destroy the fabric upon which all life depends, we see ecological collapse: all our most important relationships breaking down. God is powerfully reminding us that we are not in control.

Secondly, God is calling us to lament for all that has been lost. Christian music is often dominated by 'praise and worship', but worship without lament is ultimately fake and dishonest, because it fails to connect our relationship with God with the disharmony in our other key relationships. Biblical worship, in over 30% of the Psalms, includes cries of lament, complaint and mourning.

- We should lament as we hear the figures of COVID-19 infections and deaths, particularly amongst the poor and vulnerable, and reflect on how human abuse of tropical forests and wildlife unleashed this pandemic upon us and, scientists warn, may lead to further ones.
- We should lament as we watch stunning nature documentaries delighting in the diversity and beauty of life on earth, but then hear that 70% of wildlife populations have disappeared since 1970. Iconic images of orangutans fleeing burning forests, polar bears on melting ice floes, and albatrosses, turtles and whales starved to death by ingesting plastic waste, should drive us to our knees before God, who created them all 'very good'.
- We should lament as we hear about unprecedented climate-related fires in California and Australia, hurricanes and typhoons in the Caribbean and the Philippines; droughts and floods in India and Africa; failed harvests in Russia and China, and the tens of



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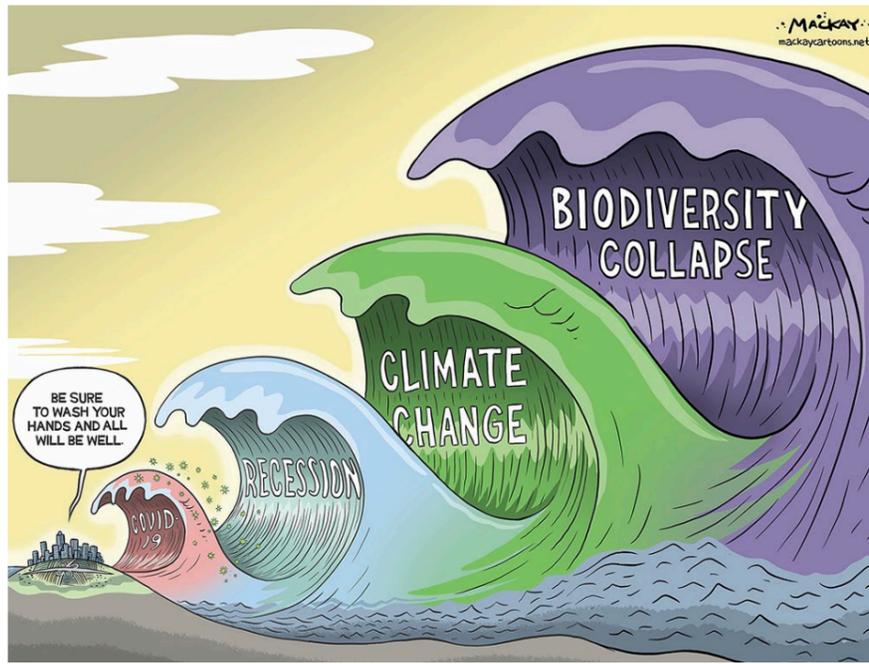


millions of climate refugees seeking safer homes.

Lament is not simply feeling upset or guilty. It is the cry of those who know they are part of the problem, to an almighty, all-loving God who alone can change our hearts. It is a groaning, from our deepest core, at the scale of problems we cannot solve. As we endure our era of ecological collapse let's turn to Romans 8, where lament links to a triple 'groaning'. In verse 22 'the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.' In the following verse we, as believers, 'groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.' Finally, in v.26, God's Holy Spirit 'himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.'

These three groanings are intertwined, through their shared Greek root (stenazo), and also because this groaning reveals the interconnection between creation, people and God's Spirit. Stenazo entails the feeling of being compressed and constricted, being pushed forward (as in a baby's birth), with either extreme distress or pleasure. Today we experience great pain and longing but, as the pain becomes more intense, so the hope of deliverance and future joy is ever closer.

As we lament so many deaths from COVID-19, so many avoidable extinctions, so much trauma from the climate crisis, so our hearts as Christians



are intimately tied both to creation's suffering, and to God's Spirit, who breathes life into all creation, suffers alongside as comforter and intercessor, and yet also brings hope.

That brings us to the third thing I believe God is saying: seek a renewed vision of the future. Amidst all the talk about green recovery and building back better, there's been little coherent vision. Surveys around the world are clear that most people want things to change. Our old economic structures have brought material comfort and technological progress, but have also caused the problems we are now facing. Ever since the industrial revolution, the myth of progress has dominated: unlimited resources for an unlimited population; exponential growth in lifestyles, waste, resource-use, without any worry for the future. We have acted as if the earth exists simply for humanity to use and abuse as we wish.

Today we need a new story or, in fact, to return to the old story the scriptures narrate. We need to expose the dangerous heresy that being made in God's image gives us licence to exploit, pollute and destroy the creation God declared very good. Instead, we need to recover the biblical vision summed up in two biblical terms: shalom and Kingdom of God. They describe the same vision in different ways.

'Shalom' is far more than the absence of conflict. It is about restored, harmonious

relationships in every dimension, reflecting the harmony within the Godhead. It includes the spiritual, societal, economic and ecological dimensions. The Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated is similarly Good News in every dimension: it includes freedom from sin and death, sickness and suffering, exclusion and oppression, decay and fruitlessness. Shalom and Kingdom of God are comprehensive and all-encompassing, bringing a vision of well-being for humans within a flourishing creation.

The passage I've turned to repeatedly is Jeremiah 29. Verse 11 has become the most-quoted Bible verse online: 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Its positive, hope-filled message is wonderful, but in isolation could be read individualistically and materialistically. Its context is crucial. These words were given to exiles in Babylon, when it seemed all God's promises had been broken and there was no future. Contextually, they follow vv. 5-7 which give the fullest description of shalom / the Kingdom of God to be found in scripture, and which sum up a Christian vision for a just and sustainable world:

'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have

carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

Here is a Christian vision for the twenty-first century. It is urban, yet deeply connected to the soil and local food systems. It is about putting down roots where God has planted us, even in exile, and believing it's worth investing in the future by starting families. It seeks, and prays for, the 'peace and prosperity' of a pagan city that is now home. Peace and prosperity mean far more than a booming economy. Biblical prosperity is the shalom vision of restored relationships with God, myself, other people, and the created order. Only then can we truly thrive.

This vision thus includes everything from tackling injustice and racism, to church-planting and evangelism, to simpler, more joyful lifestyles and campaigning on climate change. What makes it radically different from a secular agenda is that it is always, biblically, focused on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If we say that 'Jesus is Lord', the most basic Christian confession,

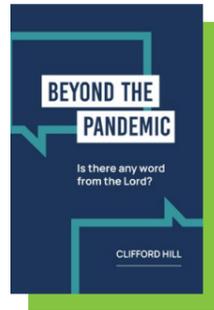
then all that his Lordship includes becomes part of our vocation and mission. Biodiversity loss matters, first and foremost because all things were made 'by and for' Jesus Christ, 'hold together' in him, and are included in the 'all things' covered by his death and resurrection (Colossians 1:15-20). Climate change is a missional concern both because it affects the 'least of these' (Matthew 25:40-45) most severely, and because it prevents creation declaring the praises of the one who made and sustains it.

If we recognise we are not in control, lament for all that we've lost, and seek renewed vision for God's future, I believe we could yet see an answer to creation's 'longing in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' (Romans 8:19). God's answer to today's crises is not spiritual escapism or technological fixes. It is neither education nor economic renewal, though both are vital. It is, to repurpose 2 Chronicles 7:14, for God's people, who are called by his name, to repent, return and seek his face so that he can indeed renew the land and its creatures.

The Revd Dr Dave Bookless is Director of Theology for A Rocha International (www.arocha.org) and vicar of St Mary's Norwood Green in multicultural Southall. He also serves as a Global Catalyst for Creation Care for the Lausanne Movement, is on the Church of England's Environmental Working Group, and has a global speaking and writing ministry on creation care.



RESOURCE REVIEWS



BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?

Clifford Hill

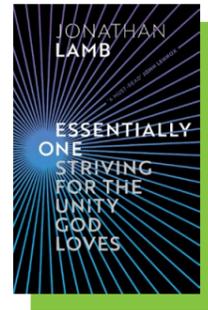
London: Wilberforce Publications Ltd, 2020
ISBN 978-1-916121-1-9 | pp170, £10.00, Kindle Edition £4.99

When the coronavirus pandemic struck, Clifford Hill saw a growing increase in spiritual hunger, with many Christians wanting a Bible based perspective on the crisis and asking: 'Is there any word from the Lord?' He noticed the silence among church leaders. Incredibly, 'no-one among prominent church leaders of any denomination was responding to the needs of the nation, but seemed only to be concerned with giving pastoral support to their own people'. Prompted by the Lord, he wrote this response which deals with the biblical background for understanding the current situation.

The book looks at biblical prophecy, the justice and ways of God, listening to God, all in the context of the secularisation of Britain. Abortion, LGBTQ+, the Black Lives Matter movement are all examined through the lens of his background as a sociologist, political researcher and theologian.

The last two chapters are 'The Word of the Lord to Britain' and 'The Word of the Lord to His Church.' He sees Britain as a nation under judgment for which there must be a call to repentance. He believes that God allowed the closure of churches, even if he did not cause it. The book looks at what God is calling the post crisis church to be. It's not an easy read, but well worth reading. You can watch the launch of the book on youtu.be/SCN1y1xGQ3w

Reviewed by Mike and Lesley Sergeant, MET partners in Melton Mowbray



ESSENTIALLY ONE – STRIVING FOR THE UNITY GOD LOVES

Jonathan Lamb

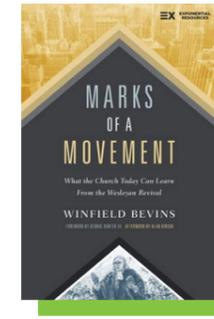
London: Inter-Variety Press, 2020
ISBN 978-1-78359-911-0 | pp. 220, £12,99

Essentially One is a very beneficial resource for Christians, particularly in the light of current conflicts in churches and within denominations. From a firm biblical foundation, Jonathan Lamb expounds God's desire for unity within the Body of Christ. Christians are encouraged to listen carefully to the words of other Christians, and to explore with them what they actually mean by their words, so as to gain greater understanding.

Jonathan Lamb writes about the 'theological triage', looking at the difference between first-order doctrines, second-order doctrines and third-order-doctrines. First-order doctrines are foundational, and any compromise on these truths would be to lose the gospel itself. He summarises these as 'the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith and the authority of Scripture'. Second-order doctrines are still important and might include baptism, the role of women and the use of charismatic gifts. Third-order doctrines are ones which are less important, and of which different beliefs may even exist within the same congregation. This 'theological triage' helps readers to discern between the fundamentals of Christian faith and the non-essentials.

Jonathan Lamb advocates that as individual Christians and as churches we should be willing to work with other Christians and churches with whom we do not see eye to eye on everything, yet disagreeing on first-order doctrines is likely to mean that we can't work together. There is a recognition that truth and error cannot be held together. Each chapter ends with several questions for reflection and discussion, and these help the reader to consider prayerfully how we can be essentially one. This book is both theological and practical, as it provides helpful examples of how we can strive for the unity that God loves.

Reviewed by the Revd Derek Balsdon who is a Methodist Presbyterian, and serves as the Development Worker for MET



MARKS OF A MOVEMENT *Winfield Bevins*

Michigan: Zondervan, 2019
ISBN: 978-0-310-09835-5 | pp220, £8.74

'An epidemic of spiritual laxity and even immorality among some clergy with many ordained ministers not having a living faith which sometimes caused more harm than good'. Is this Bevins' description of the situation from which the Wesleyan revival grew in the 18th Century or our 21st Century context which so desperately needs a fresh wave of God's Holy Spirit?

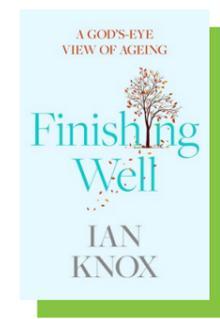
The book begins with an amazing and very perceptive quote: 'This book highlights the stashes of gold in Methodism's past that most Methodists (today) ignore'. From the outset, Bevins is very clear to point out that simply returning to the past is not the answer to the problems that we face in the established church today.

Within its 220 pages, we experience what it was - the marks - that made the Wesleyan revival such a contagious movement of its time. It has some excellent sections about the interrelated and interdependent relationship between discipleship and evangelism: that only those already totally convinced of the transformational work of God in their own lives can infect others with the same passion and desire for transformation. Bevins poses the question: 'Can there be real Christianity without active and defined discipleship within the church community?' My answer and that given by Bevins is an emphatic 'no'.

Each chapter begins with an illustrative quotation. The section concerning Discipleship Systems begins: 'The Wesleyan revolution is an illustration that long-lasting spiritual transformation is not the product of dynamic preaching...it comes only through discipleship building', D. Michael Henderson. This chapter in the book emphasises that for many churches, discipleship is not considered essential but has become an optional extra, a scheme or 'the icing on the cake' rather than being the cake itself.

This book illuminates very clearly the possibility of a different path to that of mediocrity and passivity which many churches are on. Instead, it portrays a path of committed discipleship that means far more than just putting on attractive events and adding attendees. Three appendices are included to help church leaders tackle these very relevant questions and form some action steps. The churches with which I am involved have already begun this process with some encouraging results.

Reviewed by The Revd Philip Dixon, minister in the Christchurch and Wimborne Circuit.



FINISHING WELL *Ian Knox*

London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), 2020
ISBN 978-0-281-08349-7 | pp 283, £8.99, Kindle Edition £5.59

The mission statement of publisher SPCK expresses the desire to 'lead the way in creating books and resources that help everyone to make sense of faith'. Finishing Well is insightful and well written by the long lived and well-travelled evangelist Ian Knox. It is a great refresher as the reader is brought to consider for the first time, or perhaps yet again, the effect of the ageing process. It not only makes sense of our faith in God, but also offers a valuable source of understanding how it is that God has made us to grow old, revives our faith, and helps the reader to appreciate the very real spiritual value of a longer lived life.

Drawing on his life experience, Ian takes on board the value of generations who have set the example, adding quotations and scriptural references that help things that might not otherwise at first be clear, especially when 'aloneness' can leave us with negative thoughts. Its reading is like walking into a clearing where enlightenment brightens inner thoughts of the heart and mind.

The chapters as they unfold are full of anecdotes, quotes, and real-life references, together with many well-appointed scriptures. A book that can be read on grey days and Mondays, and for those who feel they are old, there is a very real opportunity to receive the realisation that there is yet more to come. Delivered in its reading is an expectancy that, as each day dawns, God gives yet another refreshing perspective for our daily life and faith.

The ageing frame of our earthly tents may well tell us that we, like everyone, will pass on from this life, but 'Finishing Well' puts back what sometimes, if not often, we can feel we have lost.

It is a book you can also pick up and put down chapter by chapter, and it also helps to engage with the Apostle Paul who encourages us in his writing: 'whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things'.

Reviewed by Brian Reece, a Local Preacher in the Peak District. Brian has had a career in engineering spanning more than fifty years, and is now working into retirement within the global orthopaedics supply sector.



PORTRAIT OF ABIGAIL

(1 SAMUEL 25)

John Job

The story of Abigail is found in its entirety in 1 Samuel 25 and it is unlikely that she would have made any appearance at all in the Bible, if her husband Nabal had played his hand more wisely in this dealings with David. The portrait of her in this passage is very striking and far from irrelevant for 21st century Christian examination.

What linked Abigail and David in the first place was the sad train of events which connected David with her husband Nabal, which began with the unsolicited kindness shown by David and his men in giving Nabal's shepherds protection in their area of operation.

Nabal was a sheep owning tycoon in a big way, as indicated by the scale of the festival he was organizing for his sheep-shearers. When David's request for a share for his men in the feast was rudely rebuffed by Nabal, David's reaction was to exact a fearful revenge. In the nick of time, one of Nabal's young shepherd boys related this to Abigail, fully endorsing the protection that he and his fellow shepherds had received from David and his men. The young shepherd boy also complained that Nabal's behaviour had been completely unreasonable, albeit in character.

Abigail reacted quickly by seeking out David with a handsome gift of goodies which required donkeys to carry. More importantly, she sought an audience with David to plead for mercy, not revenge against Nabal. David was convinced by her argument and believed that she had been sent by God himself to change his mind and so he sent her home with the assurance that all was well.

On arrival home, Abigail found her husband Nabal dangerously drunk and decided to leave her confession of all that had happened until the morning. When morning came and Abigail shared about her encounter with David, it was greeted not by her husband's loss of temper; instead Nabal had a stroke, which left him only about ten more days to live.

Abigail's part in the story ends by David sending some of his servants to invite her to be his wife and concludes with Abigail's humble acceptance of the proposal.

QUESTIONS

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. When Abigail first heard of the crisis, what might have been her reaction? What might Jesus have said, looking at Mark 14:8?
2. Think of reasons why Abigail does not need defending for her mission to defuse the situation behind Nabal's back.
3. Nabal is called a fool by the narrator and his name means 'fool' in Hebrew. How is his folly illustrated by his reaction to David's request?
4. What basic arguments in Abigail's approach to David are of particular importance as an illustration of how a Christian might act and respond, and why?
5. If there is an element of sadness in the fact that, by marrying David, Abigail was moving into a polygamous household, what arguments can be raised in her defence?
6. 'A woman of good standing' is Bible commentator Matthew Henry's description of Abigail. In what order would you place also her tact, spirituality, humility and courage? Can evidence for each of these be found in the text?
7. Is Abigail profitably to be compared with Ruth?
8. What qualities portrayed in Abigail most liken her to the picture of a follower of Christ as found in the New Testament?



The Revd Dr John Job entered the ministry in 1960 and has ministered as chaplain to Westminster College, Oxford and Rydal School, Colwyn Bay. He has also served in Leeds, the Midlands and overseas as Old Testament lecturer at Immanuel College, Ibadan, Nigeria. From 1975-1984 he was Lecturer in Biblical and Evangelical Ministry at Cliff College. He retired to Chesterfield where he lives with his wife Christine.

DEAR LORD AND FATHER OF MANKIND

*Charles Hubert Hastings Parry
& John Greenleaf Whittier*

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
reclothe us in a rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple rust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dew of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!



PRAYING ALWAYS

Roz Addington, MET's new Prayer Secretary

As I write this, we are going into a second lockdown owing to COVID-19. It seems there are dark days ahead as we wonder how we are going to get out of this. It is crucial at this time that we seek God, praying to him, as we search for ways of coping and dealing with the current pandemic. I don't for one moment believe that God sent this disease, but he is using it to bring people to an awareness of their need for God instead of relying on their own strengths and science to find solutions. We live in a confusing world and we need to discern his will for the way ahead.

As a nation, as a church, as individuals we need to humble ourselves before God, seek his will and acknowledge our sinfulness. We have wandered far from Godly ways. The laws of our land, which had been built upon biblical truths, have been and are being eroded more and more from those foundations. God is slowly being removed from all aspects of society: our schools and further education establishments, the business sector, the commercial sector, and government. We can no longer call our country a Christian country. We have forsaken our Christian heritage, which has almost become a minority as secularism takes over. It is vital to find our way back to God and his values. We can only do that through prayer.

The Bible is full of examples of Godly people doing just that. To seek God and listen to what he is saying is vital in the turmoil with which we are faced in our country today. During the pandemic this has already begun to happen. I believe that God is shaking the nation through all that is currently happening. People are beginning to realise that what they do in their own strength is not enough. We do not have the solutions, only God has those. We need to fall to our knees - at least metaphorically - and seek God and his ways, repent of our sinfulness - pride, greed, arrogance, self-righteousness and egotism - and pray for a humble spirit and a returning God. When we humble ourselves before God, he will come and flood our land with his righteousness, and only then will we find the peace that people crave.

There is hope in all this. Back in August as I was praying, God gave me the following message which sprang out of Isaiah 43:14-21

'I will do a new thing. Watch and wait. Be vigilant, be alert, pray and see what I will do. I will set my church on a new path. I will guide and show you the way you should go. I will take you by the hand. I will lead you and be with you. You must stand firm, but you do not stand alone. You cannot imagine what I am about to do. Everything will be as new.'

'I will purge the land of all the dross, the things that are hindering my work. Then my Spirit will sweep through the land, cleansing and healing whatever it touches.'

This was accompanied by a picture:

'I saw a fire spreading through the country - not a furious raging fire, but gentle, though persistent. It was like controlled burning, so it was not out of control, rather like heather being burnt to encourage the new shoots to grow. It was burning away the rubbish, leaving the ground fertile for the new shoots that are there, to grow. After the fire there was a fresh green spreading across the land as the new shoots began to grow and flourish.'

For this to happen, we must do our part and pray; listening to what God might be wanting to say, letting the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts and prayers. As is the way with such messages, we do not know the time scale for this, but whether it is imminent or whether it is years, the important thing is to pray.



WEEK 1 | THE CHURCH

- 1. For our church leaders:** the President and Vice-President of Conference, Richard Teal and Carolyn Lawrence, for Chairs of District and Superintendents as well as our Presbyters, Deacons and Lay Workers; for Local Preachers and Leaders of Worship. We pray for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them, that there will be resurgence of true biblical teaching at all levels within our church. (Isaiah 30:21; Deuteronomy 32:1-4)
- 2. For a thirst among people of all ages for biblical knowledge:** for the Holy Spirit to fall, convicting the church of its faults and failings, that there will be a true repentance of wrong teaching and failure to follow true biblical teaching; for a turning back to our roots and the teachings of John Wesley. (1 John 2: 1-6 Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 51:7-12)
- 3. That as a church we will learn once again how to listen for God:** for a real desire for prayer and the true seeking of God among all his people; for an expectancy to hear God speak to his people, that God's Spirit will sweep through the church, bringing revival and a vibrancy all too often missing from many of our churches. (Psalm 25:4-5; John 16:13)

- 4. For our churches to be ready to accept and embrace new ways of being church once we emerge from the current pandemic:** for the empowerment by the Holy Spirit on all our local churches, for creativity in their worship and enabling them to reach out into communities in new and exciting ways. (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18)
- 5. For the work of MET:** for the 3Rs: Rekindling of the Wesleyan vision, Renewing the Wesleyan vision and Raising up of a new generation of Wesleys; for David Hull as he seeks the way ahead in remaining faithful to biblical teaching in the face of opposition; for the Remaining Faithful network, for courage to stand up and speak out for biblical holiness. (Lamentations 3:22-27; 2 Peter 1:10-11)
- 6. Pray especially for our children and young people growing up in a confusing world:** for vision to reach out to them in meaningful ways, teaching them godly values and enabling them to come into a deep faith; for Nathan Veall as he reaches out to the rising generation, particularly those who are at university; the initiative of WHOTWay; for all youth leaders - pray that they will know God's guidance and inspiration in all that they do in reaching out to our young people and children. (Proverbs 22:6; Titus 2:6-7)
- 7. Encouragement for all churches up and down our land as they start to re-open after the pandemic:** for the safety of all and the courage to open up their buildings. We pray for those who are fearful of returning to worship in our churches, that the Lord would grant them courage to know when the time is right for each of them to venture forth. Help congregations to be patient and understanding of those who don't feel the time is right for them to return. We pray that these people would not feel isolated in any way and that they will feel loved and cared for by their local congregations. (Deuteronomy: 31:6; 2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 29:11)



WEEK 2 | GREAT BRITAIN

- 1. COVID-19:** those who are suffering severe effects of Long Covid, that they would have courage to face the future; for those who have been left with mental health problems, that they would find the help they need. We pray for the vaccines that have been developed to be effective, that they would be available to all, not just the richer nations; strength for all who work in the health service and for all their needs to be met including the rest they need. (Isaiah 40:28-31; Psalm 46:1)
- 2. Job losses:** pray for all those who have lost jobs and livelihoods through the pandemic; those who are facing an unknown future and problems of how to feed their families and pay the bills. Pray for the mental health of these people, for God to strengthen them

and that they would find the financial and medical support they need. Pray for food banks and other agencies that help to relieve suffering. Pray for a spirit of hope to enable them to be positive. (Jeremiah 29:11; Isaiah 40:28-31; Matthew 6:25-34)

- 3. Brexit:** pray for those who are taking the country forward now that the transition period with the EU has come to an end. Pray that those who are negotiating trade deals would seek guidance from the Lord; that all the necessary negotiations and discussions with regard to trade deals, along with all the other checks and structures, would fall into place. Pray for God's guiding hand on the whole situation. (Isaiah 42:14-17; Psalm 31:8-9)
- 4. Revival:** for people right across the country to realise their need for God. Pray for an awakening to the fact that no single organisation has the answers to the complex issues that are facing our country. Pray for a thirst amongst the population to seek God and his ways as we move forward and for the Holy Spirit to convict people of corporate selfishness, pride, greed, arrogance, self-righteousness and egotism, and to come before God in repentance and seek the way of the Lord for their lives. (Psalm 42:1-2; Psalm 80:16-19)
- 5. The Government:** pray for Boris Johnson and all members of the Cabinet, that they would truly seek the good of all in the policies they make, that they would be just and fair. Pray they would turn to God to find the answers for the many problems which are facing the country; that they would be enabled to address peoples' fears of the future. Pray for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, for the right policies to be formulated, and that his proposals for the ongoing budget to be fair and realistic; that we would discern how to deal with national debt racked up owing to COVID-19. (Zechariah 7:8; Proverbs 31:8-9)
- 6. The Homeless:** pray for those who find themselves, often through no fault of their own, without housing. Pray for homeless shelters and those who run them, for adequate funding to be secured. Pray for the government to find solutions to the problems for affordable housing and rental properties to be found and/or built. (Psalm 121; Matthew. 11:28)
- 7. The Marginalised:** remember those who are on the edges of society - those with mental health problems who find themselves side lined and ignored by society; those who are disabled who have fallen through the net and find themselves isolated and alone. Pray for people to come alongside them to help them both practically and financially. Pray for all charities reaching out to these people, that they will be able to secure adequate funding to carry on their good and essential work. (Matthew 25:34-40; Psalm 34:8; Philippians 4:19)



WEEK 3 | CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

(Genesis 2:15; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 24:1-2)

- 1. Pray for governments around the world** to hold good to commitments made to reduce carbon emissions, not just to what they are already committed, but to go further and to dare to make radical changes, that a real difference can be made; to find the ways and means to change over and commit to using more renewable and green energy sources.
- 2. Pray for those who are living in areas vulnerable to flooding** owing to rising sea levels and who are in danger of losing everything they have, often the poor of the poorest societies. Pray for solutions to be found that radically will alter their vulnerability; for fair and just governments who have their people's interests at heart, rather than their own selfish desires and ambitions; for financial aid.
- 3. Pray for those countries where deforestation and illegal logging is rife.** Pray for funding to enable governments to tackle the problem, that these areas can adequately be patrolled, saving the loss of precious habitats and preventing the extinction of increasingly rare species of wildlife and adding to the problem of increased carbon emissions and rising sea levels.
- 4. Pray for the reduction of the use of all plastics,** especially single use plastics. Pray for funding of research to find alternatives to plastic, especially those which are oil based. Pray that there will be incentives from governments across the world to prevent their use; for our oceans to be cleaned and prevent the damage to fragile eco systems.
- 5. Pray for areas in the world where there is increasing hardship** owing to changing weather patterns, areas where there is greater risk of flooding, drought and the associated problems of forest and moorland fires and crop failures. Pray for new strains of crops that are with able to withstand more extremes of weather. Pray for farmers across the globe who are having to cope with these extremes of weather.

If you wish to contact Roz with any prayer requests then please email her at: roz.addington1@btinternet.com



WEEK 4 | WORLD ISSUES

- 1. The Persecuted Church:** pray for strength for those who are in fear of their lives for simply worshipping God. Pray for courage and strength; for comfort and help for families where a loved one has been detained; for release of those who have been detained. Pray for churches in parts of Africa, the Middle East, China and North Korea. Pray for countries like Russia where worshipping is becoming increasingly restricted. (Matthew 5:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; Romans 8: 35-37)
- 2. China and Hong Kong:** in Hong Kong, pray for justice as those who are pro-democracy are being persecuted and ousted out of governmental positions. Pray for strength for those who have been detained and for fair and humane treatment. Pray for governments around the world to take a stand against the injustice that is happening. Pray for freedoms to be re-instated. (Psalm 72:2-4; Psalm 9:7-9)
- 3. Areas in the world where there is war and conflict:** where the land has been laid waste and people are struggling to survive; where famine and disease are rife, and people are desperate; for refugee camps. Pray for justice and relief for the helpless, prevention for the spread of disease, especially the coronavirus. (Proverbs 31:8-9; Psalm 72:12-14).
- 4. Aid Agencies:** pray for aid agencies, for them to receive the financial support they need to alleviate the suffering of the destitute around the world, also that they will have access to the worst affected areas. Pray for compassion, understanding and financial support from the wealthier nations of the world. (Luke 16:19-31; Zechariah 7:8-10; 1 John 3:16-18).
- 5. America:** pray for unity across the nation as a new government is brought into place, especially for Joe Biden as he takes up the role of President; for calm in a deeply divided country and that people would set aside differences to build a united country; for truth to prevail where there are accusations and counter accusations of dishonesty, deception and corruption. (Colossians 3:12-14; Matt. 7:1-2; Romans 15:5)



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year to you - and I do pray that it will indeed be happy. Whatever the circumstances, may we all know what it is to 'rejoice in the Lord always'.

The year ahead is, in many ways, set to be a defining one. It will be a defining year for the world. We are still to emerge from a global pandemic which has already had a profound effect on the lives of everyone around the world. Vaccines are being rolled out and we are told we will need to discover a 'new normal'. It has been suggested that the world will never be the same again. - Just as the terrorist attacks of September 2011 have cast a long shadow that still falls across the world today, so the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be long lasting.

Thus, this must surely also be a defining year for the Christian Church. It will be necessary to work out our mission in a new context. Towards the beginning of the first lockdown, there was talk of a new openness towards matters of faith amongst many people as large numbers joined church services which were being streamed online. Questions of suffering and evil are at the forefront of the minds of many. There will undoubtedly be new needs surrounding us: mental health struggles, loneliness, financial concerns and grief. The uncertainty of life, which has been more strongly underlined than ever in a generation or two, presents us with the opportunity to make known, in word and deed, the rock of our salvation.

It is also a defining year for the Methodist Church. The Methodist Conference, when it meets in the summer, is due to vote on the ratification of the resolutions arising from the report, 'God in Love Unites Us'. For the first time, the Methodist Church is considering writing into its doctrine and discipline a position that is directly contrary to the teaching of the Bible. MET is committed to continuing to call the Methodist Church to remain faithful within these debates and to supporting all our members, however they feel they must respond following the decisions.

As it happens, exactly twenty years ago, it was a defining moment in another ministry. Earlier in this edition, I have referred to the ministry of the Revd Dr Rob Frost, founder

of Share Jesus International, a partner organisation of MET. This year marks the 20th anniversary of SJI and I am greatly honoured to have been invited to join the present day Director, Andy Frost, in a celebration streamed live online via sharejesusinternational.com/20years on Thursday 4 March at 7:30 pm. Please do join us to celebrate the work of a ministry that has had such an impact on the Methodist Church over the years.

As another year ends for the work of MET, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those who have come to the end of their terms of service on the Executive Committee. The Revd Dr Tim Woolley has served for a number of years in different roles, not least as editor of MET Connexion and, more recently, as one of our Vice-Chairs. The Revd Len Pereira has led our Equipping for Ministry work and Dr Ed Mackenzie has been our Theology and Research Officer. I am very grateful to them all for the immense amount they have contributed to our work over the years.

As we look ahead, perhaps this will be a defining year for you too. Whatever the future holds, no matter the uncertainties of it all, we could do no better than to put our trust in our unchanging Lord, who holds all authority in heaven and earth. As generations of Methodists before us, we may again commit ourselves to the Lord, 'I am no longer my own, but yours', and pray with Charles Wesley:

The covenant we this moment make
Be ever kept in mind!
We will no more our God forsake,
Or cast his words behind.

We never will throw off his fear
Who hears our solemn vow;
And if thou art well-pleased to hear,
Come down, and meet us now!

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

David



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