

GLAZEBURY METHODIST CHURCH

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**Bible readings for Sunday, 19 July Genesis 28:10-19a, Psalm 139: 1-12 and 23-24,
Romans: 8: 12-25 and Matthew 13: 24-30 and 36-43**

REV ANDREW'S MESSAGE – Weeds among the Wheat

So, here's my penultimate thought for the weekly notice sheet, and it surrounds Jesus parables as found in Matthew's Gospel – the weeds among wheat. Jesus delivers the parable and leaves the crowds on the beach and went into the house, and his disciples approached him, wanting to know what he was talking about.

Monday, March 23rd may not go down in history, and in time you may forget the exact date, though that was the day that we in the United Kingdom began our 'Lockdown' with the instruction to stay at home. Much has changed since then, and life is nowhere near how we remember it and unlikely to be so for some considerable time. I recall right at the beginning, as the virus was being experienced, how Christians immediately claimed the defence of God as sovereign and protector – as indeed he is, and as indeed we ought, and in the weeks and months that have passed, I wonder how many of you and how often have asked the question – why doesn't God do something?

This most often asked question, as people, as nations suffer tragedy and horror, accidents devastate lives and families, governments and authorities force their policies and laws on people (think of Hong Kong) and appear to get away with it, and sensitive souls ask, again and again, why is God apparently silent? Why doesn't he step in and stop it?

The parables of Jesus may not answer the question directly, but they do show us that God's sovereign rule over the world isn't quite as straight forward as people sometimes imagine. Would you or I or people generally the world over really like it if God were to rule directly and immediately, so that our every thought, word and action were weighed and immediately dealt with and if necessary punished in the balance of his absolute power and holiness?

Actions and events do not come out of nowhere, what intervention would God have to engage, (to prevent a virus or pre-empt the 'Black Lives Matter movement') is he to wait for things to happen and simply step in to put right some human wrong a sort of global fire fighter of all our wrongs and failings?

If we ask God to intervene on special occasions, do we really suppose that he could do that simply when we want him to and then to back off again for the rest of the time?

The parables including the one concerning weeds and wheat are to do with waiting, with patience, which if truth be told none of us really care for, though in some ways being 'locked down' or 'shielding' has forced many of us to find a new strength a new patience. The farmer waits frustratingly for harvest as the weeds grow and multiply as they always do among his grain, the woman must wait for the bread to rise, the bird for the seed to grow, and that is what God's Kingdom is like.

God isn't going to step in and put everything back to how it was pre-March 23rd, nor any time before or since. God has already acted decisively, dramatically and precipitously in the

death and resurrection of Jesus, and what we are awaiting is the full outworking of those events – patiently, and in the intervening period work with him to bring in the harvest.

We in our waiting may become frustrated if we feel unable to engage in our normal life, if we feel our Christian life of faith and witness is somehow engulfed in 'weeds,' then this parable reminds each of us of the power of waiting. Though let's not forget that in the waiting there is work to be done.

The question during the 'Covid era' is how do we do that work?

What will church look like?

Robert and others, Circuit wide and beyond, are looking on the internet about churches and the post-Covid world, there is much about health and safety, but not so much about strategic stuff or theology. Or moreover, how do you apply that which we have learned of God and the Kingdom over the years, into a new way of being?

One of the big issues is online gatherings versus in-person gatherings. Part of our culture, both in church and beyond, is that of gathering with others e.g. sporting fixtures, concerts, etc. It's hard to believe that the future will be devoid of live/attendee events, who saw the cricket last week and found it quite odd that there were no crowds cheering and chanting waving and whistling?

It's very likely that the future of church will be a mixed economy – some content delivered online, some delivered live. What seems clear is that only the best of online delivered content will prevail. Already some online viewing figures, previously encouraging, are beginning to decline (that is as true with our own daily podcast) how can we reach out further online but bring people closer? How on earth can we forward-plan when there are so many uncertainties?

I would suggest a theme that all church leaders, and Circuit officers need to address is how to prepare for an uncertain future, what it needed is radical, and risk-taking leadership.

And while that is going on, what can you do in your situation, what new opportunity as you wait patiently - well let me make one or two suggestions.

- We know that over 20 members of the church are able to use 'Zoom', now I'm not aware if it's happening, suppose one of you decided to arrange a weekly Zoom prayer meeting, coupled with a virtual coffee?
- Many of you have spent hours and hours in your gardens, why not invite 6 church members to join you in your garden, social distance of course, with coffee if you feel able, let them admire your handy work, encourage and share pray with and for each other, open scripture and see what God has to say to you?
- The more energetic of you could arrange a walk, a gentle stroll across the moss, or around the village, pausing for prayer at street corners, and business doorways, sow some wild flower or herb seeds as you go?

The Bible has quite a lot to say implicitly and explicitly about preparedness, explicitly this relates to the return of Jesus, being prepared for we know not the hour or the day and implicitly, Jesus invests serious time in teaching discipleship to his followers – preparing them for life in the world and its relationship to the world to come.

Jesus also told the parable of the sower, the message of that parable seems clear, the best way to increase the harvest is to sow as much seed as possible. We may wait patiently, though that doesn't stop us spreading seed of the Gospel wherever we go and whatever we do.

Garden Communions next Tuesday and Wednesday week, and again in August after shielding is lifted.

We are thankful for those who are willing to host these acts of worship and thanksgiving, a time to receive bread and wine, and a time for brief fellowship as we say goodbye to Andrew and Steph. If you've not been contacted and would like to receive communion before Andrew moves then please speak to Delia.

Please Note - SAYING 'GOODBYE' To Reverend Andrew, Steph, Rebekah and Nicholas - Things have changed and having taken advice from the Connexional office, we now know that we are not permitted to hold the picnic as planned. Whilst this is disappointing and the guidelines may be open to interpretation the advice is to say safe and not to create any situation that may appear to contravene that overarching message. So instead, as we share communion next week, we will take the opportunity of saying a few words and our goodbyes. Remembering that though we are parted physically we are united by the Spirit. One Church, one Faith, One Lord.

LOOKING FORWARD TO RE-OPENING GLAZEBURY METHODIST CHURCH FOR SERVICES

There is a lot of preparation taking place in the background to get us there.

We are aiming to re-open the church at this stage for worship on the second Sunday in September ie - 13 September.

Things will be quite different as we get used to the 'new normal'.

Doors will open at 10.00am with the service starting at 10.30am.

The service will be the same as broadcast centrally by our Circuit and the Liverpool North Circuit on the phone. No other services are 'planned' to take place in addition to this until end November 2020. No singing is allowed.

If you wish to follow the songs / hymns played, you must provide your own hymn books. If you wish to follow any Bible readings, you must provide your own Bible. We are not able to distribute hymn books / Bibles / booklets / etc and they have been removed from use.

Whilst we are not allowed to take an offertory during the service, there will be a table available for monetary offerings. The preferred method of giving after a service is by debit / credit card contactless payment.

No refreshments will be provided. If you wish to have a drink e.g. water, you must bring it in your own bottle.

Social distancing of 2 metres remains in place throughout the premises. Hand sanitizer stations are in place in the main entrance / church and hall which must be used on entrance and exit.

Chairs are in a fixed position to achieve the correct social distancing requirements and must not be moved.

Maximum capacity Of the Church is 18-22 people (dependant on household status). Maximum capacity of the Hall is 12 people. The service will be relayed into the Hall.

Unfortunately, as we are strictly limited to the numbers of people allowed in the building at any one time we must work on a first come first served basis.

If you feel unwell, please stay at home.

Upon arrival you must queue outside before you will be asked to enter the building when you must complete a 'Test and Trace' form which we will keep for 21 days. Whilst the toilets will be available only 1 person is allowed in at any one time.

This is the situation as it stands now, but as we all know, this could be subject to change and we will let you know nearer the time what's happening. [Robert Graham]

WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS

Reading: Romans 5: 6-8 - For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Reflection: What's beautiful about the Christian story is that God loved us before we came to the realisation that we were sinners. Before we turned to accept God's love, God already loved us.

The love of God we see shown in countless Bible stories comes from a broken heart. It is a love for someone that feels like an ache in the pit of the stomach. The kind of love that would do anything, however irrational it may seem to others, to find what is lost. As we shall read in another reflection, it is the love which risks everything for the sake of one who is lost.

Prayer: Loving God, I am sorry for the times when I have not loved others as you love. Thank you that, before I thought of confessing, you had forgiven me. I confess all that is not right in my life today and ask for the forgiveness you so lovingly give. May this love transform my friends' lives also.

Action: This week, how will I lay aside something important to me, so as to better serve my friends?

[From: *Jesus Loves All – A Prayer Journal* by www.thykingdomcome.global] - [Rev Andrew]

SHARING SUNDAY WORSHIP We are sharing our Sunday Service over the telephone. Most weeks we have over 180 callers from across the Leigh & Hindley and Liverpool North Circuits.

If you would like to listen in, at 10.30am on Sunday:

Dial **020 3478 5289** on your telephone,

When it asks for the access code, enter **145 404 825#**.

(this number will be the same each week)

When it asks for your ID, press **#**

FOR THOSE THAT LISTEN TO THE SUNDAY SERVICE AND EVEN TO THE PODCASTS. IF YOU HAVE NOT GOT A SINGING THE FAITH HYMN BOOK AT HOME - SO THAT YOU CAN SING ALONG – PLEASE LET ME KNOW AND I WILL ARRANGE FOR YOU TO RECEIVE ONE

Christine Taylor Mobile: 07801 252625 or email – christine.arran4872@aol.com

PODCASTS

Regular podcasts from Rev Viv can be found on: <https://soundcloud.com/user-476066366> . I send these out daily to those who receive notice sheets by email each week. If you know of anyone who would like to receive them, please let me have their email address and I will include them in the distribution. *Christine Taylor*

FEELING THE EFFECTS OF 'LOCKDOWN' OR WORRIED ABOUT ANOTHER OUTBREAK OF THE VIRUS? If you are on your own, or not, and are feeling the effects of the 'lockdown' then phone your Pastoral Visitor for a chat.

IF YOU ARE not a member of church and need to talk please ring Rev Andrew Bradley or Delia Caswell on the phone numbers at the top of the first page of this news sheet.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE SOMETHING TO THE NEWS SHEET PLEASE CONTACT ME ON EMAIL BY WEDNESDAY OF EACH WEEK: christine.arran4872@aol.com or phone me on Mobile: 07801252625.