

**St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley**  
*Extraordinary Times*  
*a magazine to help us through COVID-19*  
**Issue 28** **October 4<sup>th</sup> 2020**

*From the minister...*

My mother used to have a budgie, to which she gave the imaginative name of "Joey" (must have taken her ages to think that one up). Joey was a permanent fixture in his corner of the living room throughout several years of my childhood, and he seemed contented enough with his situation. In the evenings my mother often used to open the door of his cage for a while (after making sure that all the windows were closed) so that he could have a fly around the room and exercise his wings. In the early days of Joey's captivity he saw this as an opportunity for escape – I suspect that it appeared to him that someone had accidentally left the prison door open, and as such he was busting out of there. So he would fly fast and high, circling the room for an exit point before settling somewhere out of reach (usually the pelmet) where he would hide and scuttle from one end to the other whilst my father attempted to extract him with a rolled up copy of the *Exchange and Mart*.

At this point can I offer my apologies to any Millennials who may be reading this, who have simply no idea what a pelmet is, or the "Exchange and Mart".

Anyway, eventually Joey realised that attempts at escape were futile, and he resolved to see out his life sentence behind bars. He did come to appreciate and respect the hour of exercise and would dutifully return to the doorway of his cage with increasing obedience as the years went by. As Joey got older I observed that when the cage door was opened for him he would often just go and perch on the threshold for a while before returning inside, and in maturity he would sometimes not even bother to come out at all. He eventually came to trust and prefer the limitations of his cage – his world became very small.

Now you could argue that this is a metaphor for life in general, but I bring it to your attention because the current Covid crisis has brought about a similar phenomenon in some of our lives over the course of the last six months. When lockdown first struck, we were all of a sudden imprisoned within our homes. We could only go out for one hour of local exercise per day; and I don't know about your experience, but for many people in society the effect of this was that they desperately wanted to do the things in life that had suddenly been taken away from them – mundane things like going to McDonalds suddenly appeared really important (as evidenced by the ridiculously long queues for the drive-through when the burger chain was finally allowed to reopen for takeaways).

I recall pining for walks on the South Downs or cycling in the Surrey hills (both of which were too far away to be permitted under the early restrictions). But since lockdown has lifted, I've found that I've *stopped* doing some of the things I used to do: for instance, I used to go to Brighton with Adele fairly regularly, but we simply haven't bothered going since lockdown lifted. Mind you, there is more than an element of thinking that, if you want to catch Covid-19, what better place to go for it than Brighton?

This uncertainty, particularly in the face of the continuing pandemic and the challenge of thwarting a "second spike", has made many of us much more cautious about where we go and what we do in public. We've all experienced people getting too close to one another, in the street and in the supermarket – with their masks hanging off, if they've

bothered to put one on at all. There is a sense that, having escaped this wretched virus for so long, it would be particularly tragic to succumb to it now. And we've observed that for whole sections of society, the late Summer period did seem to convince them that Coronavirus was pretty much behind us.

Having held our first tentative church services during September, I'm pleased to announce that from this Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup> we are returning to our normal start time of 10.30am, when I will be leading us in our first post lockdown Communion service. This Sunday also marks a return to the circuit preaching plan for our morning services: we will be welcoming local preachers back to our church for the first time in six months. Please pray for our preachers, who may be feeling cautious and even anxious about returning. Some people who have attended church in September have shared with me that the experience has been filled with trepidation – a bit like Joey the budgie, whose captivity resulted in his reluctance to venture outside any more.

Many of you, I know, still feel too vulnerable to contemplate returning in person to church at this time. That's okay; please note that from this Sunday we will be live streaming our 10.30am services direct from the St Pauls Facebook page. But let us all pray for one another, that we be filled with the confidence of the Holy Spirit to encourage us to step out, in our own time, spread our wings and fly. Don't let the restrictions of the pandemic affect the freedom which Jesus has set within your heart. Here are some scriptures which come to mind as I write this:

*"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,  
whose confidence is in him.  
They will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.  
It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit."  
(Jeremiah 17:7-8)*

*But those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.  
(Isaiah 30:41)*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.  
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves  
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit,  
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,  
there is freedom.  
(2 Corinthians 3:17)*

## Alpha Course Online

I did my final live streamed Wednesday afternoon Bible Study broadcast on Facebook this week, September 30<sup>th</sup>. Thank you to so many people for joining in with this, and for all the wonderful positive feedback that I have received. But this is not the end, rather it is the beginning! From Wednesday October 7<sup>th</sup> the Wednesday afternoon sessions moves to a Wednesday evening at 7.30pm. It will still be coming live from my home, but instead of me sharing studies on my favourite scriptures, we will be commencing an online Alpha course.

This means that for the next eleven weeks I will be bringing you the Alpha talks, and there is an opportunity for you to ask questions by typing them in on the Facebook page for me to answer live. I thoroughly recommend this course, the most widely popular introduction to the Christian Faith available. If you've never done one before, or if it's been a while since you last participated, do join us and encourage your friends and family to do the same. There has never been a less intimidating way of joining an Alpha course than by doing it in the comfort of your own home. The only thing you will miss out on is the free meal that normally accompanies an Alpha course! You can even participate by watching the recording of each session in your own time, if Wednesday evenings are not convenient for you.

Simply go to the St Pauls Facebook page, find the banner which says "Stay Home. Try Alpha Online". Click on it and press the button which says "Join Group". I will approve your request to join and away we go! Please note that the reason you have to join a group is purely to respect your privacy, plus it allows me to post any pictures or text documents which Alpha provides for you to look at each week. If you decide that Alpha is not for you then you are free to leave the group at any time.

May God bless you, *Ralph*

*Ralph's prayer...*

*Father God,*

*We trust in your complete love and care*

*When we are weak and vulnerable*

*Lift us up*

*Cover us with the shadow of your wing*

*You are our fortress, we will never be shaken*

*We will put our trust in God. AMEN*

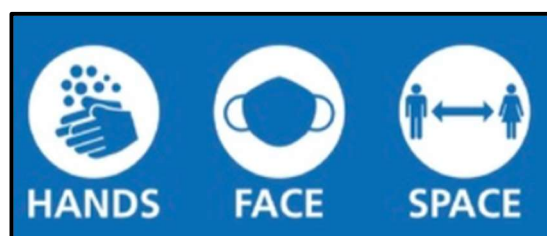
**Send** your prayer requests to [ask.stpauls@gmail.com](mailto:ask.stpauls@gmail.com)

*Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list*

## What's On

<b>Sun 4 Oct</b>	<b>10:30am</b> Worship and Communion at St Paul's with Rev Ralph
<b>Sun 11 Oct</b>	<b>10:30am</b> Remembrance Sunday at St Paul's with Deacon Irene
	<b>3:30pm</b> All-age family worship at St Paul's with Rev Ralph
<b>Sun 18 Oct</b>	<b>10:30am</b> Worship Preacher TBA
<b>Sun 25 Oct</b>	<b>10:30am</b> Worship with Rev Clive McKie
<b>Every Wed</b>	<b>7:30pm</b> Online Alpha course with Rev Ralph

***Please remember***



## Our Harvest offerings

In normal times we would be coming to Harvest Festival this Sunday to sing the familiar harvest hymns and bring our gifts of produce and money in thanks for God's goodness to us. Inevitably this year must be different. Instead of produce, we are asking for donations of money, to be split equally between the *All We Can* appeal for victims of the Beirut explosion and, more locally, *Christians Against Poverty*. If you are in church you will find a place for your donation as you leave the sanctuary for the next three Sundays. If you're not coming to services, please consider making a donation directly to the Beirut Explosion Emergency Appeal on the *All We Can* website <https://www.allwecan.org.uk/give/current-appeals/beirut/> or to *Crawley Christians Against Poverty* at <http://www.crawleybaptistchurch.org.uk/donate>

## NHS Track and Trace



If you come to the church, you will notice this sign on the front door. It is the QR code for the new NHS Track and Trace App. If you've downloaded the app onto your phone, you can use the QR code to show where you've been. However, even if you are using this app, we are still legally required to take your name and contact details as part of the new 'normal'. Don't worry, we will be deleting the information after 3 weeks. *Carol Ofield*



*to Nessa who celebrated her birthday this week*

*As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas  
and colours enough to paint the beautiful things I see.  
( Vincent Van Gogh )*

*I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.  
( L M Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables )*

*The end of the summer is not the end of the world.  
Here's to October! (A.A. Milne)*

## Contacts

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**St Paul's website** [www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk](http://www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk)

*Extraordinary Times* is published weekly 'for the duration'