

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley
Extraordinary Times
a magazine to help us through COVID-19
Issue 47 **February 21st 2021**

From the minister...

As the vaccination programme continues apace across our nation, it feels like we are now playing a waiting game. We can see hope on the horizon, but it is still some way off. We can't really make any plans or travel anywhere – the weather is poor so we don't even feel like going out in our local area. And heaven knows we've explored every avenue and alleyway around where we live, so it's starting to get properly boring now.

Everyone seems to have started speculating on when lockdown will lift. Some people want it now, others are urging caution. The Government are being blamed for not lifting lockdown, whilst simultaneously being blamed for not imposing it hard enough. We're all getting a bit fed up, and straining at the leash for our freedom. Some of us want to book holidays, some of us want to go shopping, some of us just want to go to the pub. Many of us have really had enough of home education now, and just want the children to go back to school. In many cases, the kids are as desperate for this than the parents.

As I write we are anticipating a big announcement on Monday Feb 22nd about the way forward, at which point things might become a bit clearer (said Ralph, the eternal optimist). Our church leadership team and I will be watching this announcement carefully, and hopefully we will soon have further news to share with you about arrangements for future Sunday services at St Pauls.

Our current situation is that whilst churches are permitted to open for worship, all of our circuit churches have felt that they haven't wanted to risk meeting together on Sundays since the latest national lockdown was imposed at the beginning of the year. But as more and more people have received their first vaccinations (and some their second!), a renewed sense of confidence is developing. We aim to cautiously move forward together and do the best we can for the good of our worshipping community. I just want you to know that plans are afoot, and that Easter should prove to be a pivotal time for our Sunday services.

Frustrating as it can be to play the waiting game, God's Word has lots to say to encourage us along the way, and reassure us that we are not alone. For instance, here are some from the book of Psalms:

Psalms 27:14

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Psalms 33:20

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

Psalms 40:1

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.

Psalms 119:166

I wait for your salvation, Lord, and I follow your commands.

Psalms 130:5-6

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than
watchmen wait for the morning.

Stand firm; your deliverance is coming.

God bless *Ralph*

What's On

Sundays 10:45am online worship with Rev Ralph Ward

Wednesdays 2pm Rev Ralph's Bible study

Find these live on [Trinity's Facebook page](#) and [St Paul's Facebook page](#)
with videos available afterwards

Zoom for Kids

Sundays 12noon and Fridays 6pm

If you haven't joined in yet, email ask.stpauls@gmail.com for an invitation

How about Zoom for Adults?

If you'd like to try joining a fellowship group on Zoom please let us know by emailing ask.stpauls@gmail.com. If Zoom is still a mystery to you, don't worry. It's really easy to use and we can help you get started.

In your prayers

Continue in prayer for members of our church community and others you know who need our prayers at this time.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

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

Praying with necessity

by Carolyn Lawrence, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2020-21

I never fail to be inspired and challenged by stories of Methodist Mission Partners in days gone by. Reading the accounts of their adventures and the difficulties and hardships they faced makes me feel like a real wimp in comparison!

I have recently read about the Revd Bernard Jinkin who served for 30 years in Africa. The little booklet he produced in 1963 is called '*In time of need*' and contains testimonies of the amazing answers to prayer he received whilst serving in what is now Zambia. He served in a lonely bush station 50 miles from his nearest colleague and 100 miles from the railway station and his only form of transport was a bicycle.

Bernard documents how he came to depend on prayer and how his total reliance on God developed a deep and intimate relationship with his Lord. He differentiates between 'praying with and without necessity' and suggests that in the affluent world 'we have so much that we have become self-reliant.' He goes on to assert that 'We give lip service to the necessity of putting God first, but in actual practice he is often dragged in as an afterthought.' His stories

demonstrate that prayer for him on the mission field was borne out of dire necessity and complete reliance on God in every area.

I felt deeply challenged by this thought and realise that in my own life, there are few times when I pray out of sheer desperation and utter dependence on God. One of the times that I did pray in desperation was when my daughter was going through an incredibly difficult and long labour. For three days and nights I cried out to God for the safety of herself and the baby and was so relieved and thankful that they were both OK. In another time or place the outcome could have been so different.

Another time I cried out to God was as mission partners in Guyana when we were on a rickety wooden boat crossing the 20 mile wide estuary of the Essequibo River so that I could deliver some training to children and youth workers on the other side. The danger of death was very close that day knowing that if the overfilled and inadequate boat capsized I would most likely be eaten by piranhas or crocodiles before I could drown. Thankfully, God spared us and we lived to tell the tale but my prayer life took on a whole new level!

People often tell me that they don't think they pray very much but I always think that they probably pray more than they think they do. We often have an image of prayer as kneeling at our bedside with hands together and eyes closed listing our requests to God but prayer is much more than asking for the things we need or want.

At its heart I believe that prayer is about our relationship with God and developing that relationship. Bernard Jinkin gives an example of a small child who has fallen off their tricycle running into the house sobbing and throwing themselves into the arms of their parent for comfort and help. I love that image of us running to God and allowing him to comfort and strengthen us as well as to hear about our joys and sorrows in honesty and openness.

We don't even need to use words. Some of my deepest prayer times have been when I have been in such turmoil of heart and mind that I have just cried or groaned or even on occasion wailed before the Lord in desperation of heart. Sometimes because of situations I have faced personally but other times when I have heard stories of suffering in the lives of people around the world. There is a Sting song which contains the line, 'Whenever I say your name, I'm already praying.' As we cry out to Jesus I believe he hears the cry of our heart and draws close to us by his Holy Spirit.

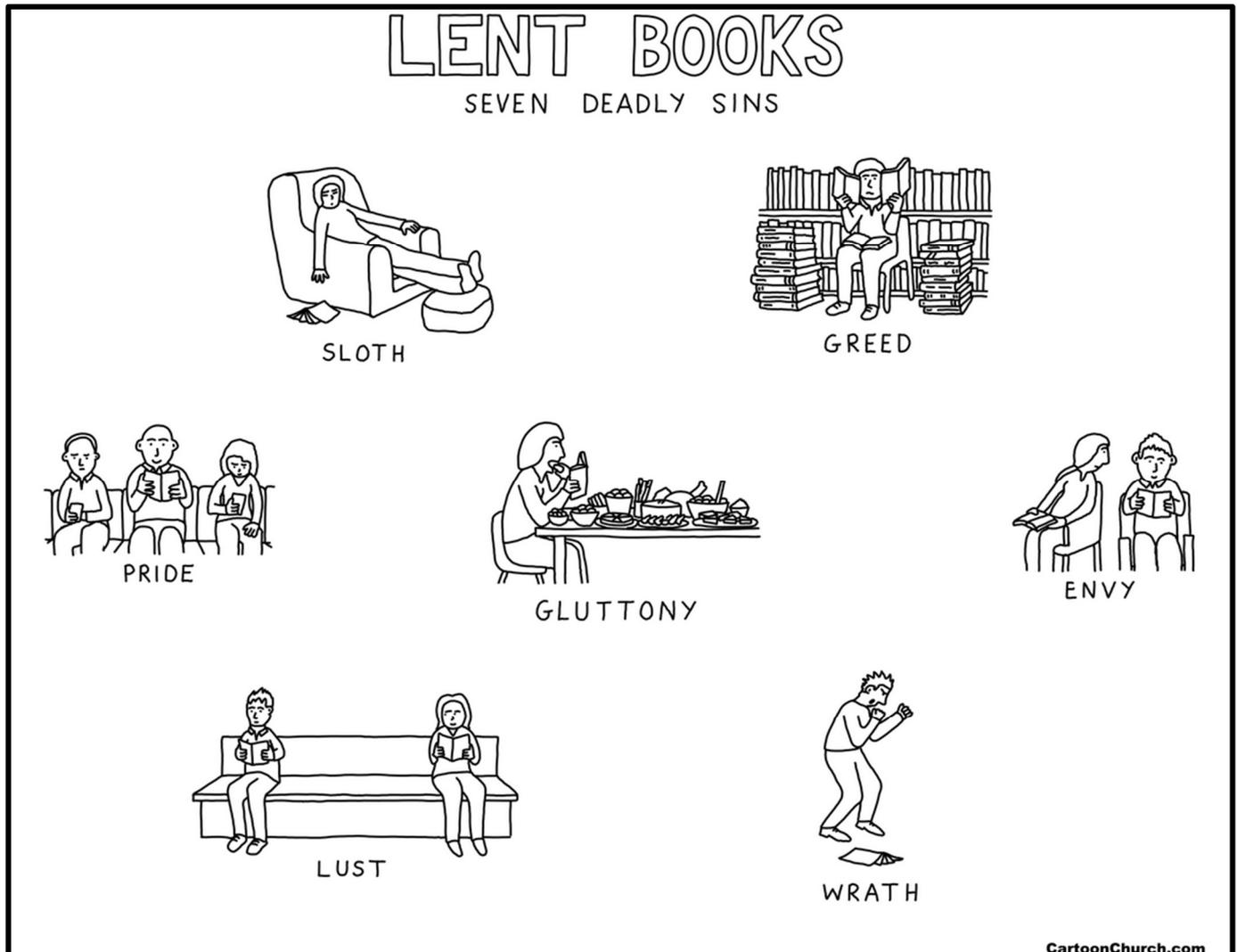
I love the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10 when Mary chooses to lay aside the busyness of the day and simply sit at the feet of Jesus. As an active and driven person this is something I find very difficult but I pray that, for each of us, we will find time particularly in these current challenging days to sit at the feet of Jesus – to tell him what is on our heart and to listen to his response to us. I pray that we will recognize again our total dependence on God for our very breath and that our prayer lives will help us develop an intimacy and deep relationship with God so that we will know and experience his presence and peace with us as we face each day.

The heart and head of a good Methodist

Thanks to Martin B who found this, from the Rev Kenneth Howcroft's address to Conference in 2014, in an old copy of *The Methodist Recorder*.

"I think it was another of my predecessors, Gordon Rupp, who said that John Wesley wanted his Methodists to have their hearts strangely warmed, but if he were to discover that their heads were now strangely empty, he would be revolving in his grave. Please tell me that he is not revolving yet. Is he?"

Self-defeating Lent study?



And finally

An elderly lady was visited by her minister. He asked her "Do you ever think of the hereafter?" "Yes" she said, "I am always thinking of the hereafter. I get upstairs and say to myself 'What am I here after?' I go downstairs then I remember what it was I was here after. (*Thanks to Judy for sending this in*)

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Prayer requests & newsletter items ask.stpauls@gmail.com

St Paul's website www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk

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