

Glastonbury Together in prayer

A news sheet for members of Glastonbury churches during the crisis caused by Covid 19



The King of Creation

The concept of Christ the King has a long history having been discussed in the 4th century and later it formed part of the Wesley hymn “Rejoice the Lord is King” discussed in the last issue. The significance of the title was increased in the aftermath of an earlier crisis - World war I. Writing in the aftermath that War, Pope Pius XI noted in an encyclical that while there had been a cessation of hostilities, there was no true peace. He deplored the rise of class divisions and unbridled nationalism, and held that true peace can only be found under the Kingship of Christ as “Prince of Peace”.

The titles “Christ” and “King” are not used together in the Gospels but “Christ” is itself a royal title. In the Greek text, the Christ is explicitly identified as king (βασιλεύς) several times. In Pauls first letter to Timothy and the book of Revelation the phrase “King of kings, Lord of lords” is used.

Together with a later encyclical Pope Pius XI established a feast to celebrate the Kingship of Christ in 1925 to remind Christians that their allegiance is to their spiritual leader in heaven as opposed to any earthly supremacy. The feast was originally set for the Sunday before All Saints day where some still celebrate it today. In 1969 Pope Paul VI retitled the feast to “Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe”, which might be read as King of Creation a phrase used in a popular hymn. At the same time he moved the feast to the last Sunday of the Christian calendar assigning it to highest rank of “solemnity”. It is also observed by many other Christians denominations today having been included in the “Revised common lectionary”.

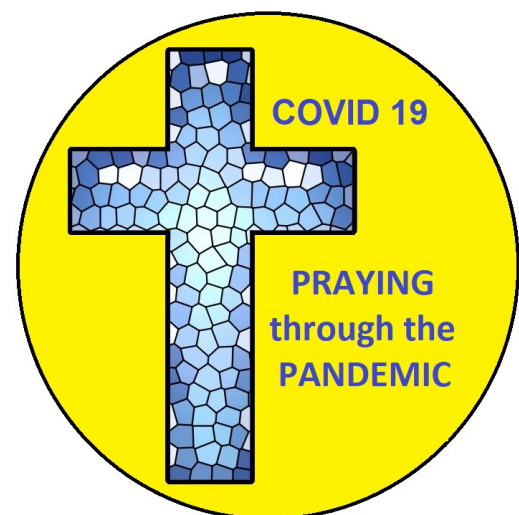
Praying during the crisis

At the beginning of the crisis in March there was a call to light a candle and pray for those affected by the pandemic. With days getting lighter and also providing more safety a poster was produced with the picture of a candle. It used the words “praying for you, praying for everyone” and the hash tag #candleofhope. These posters are still on display in Glastonbury and are a reminder that we are continuing to pray. Taking this concept further to make it

personal, local Methodists, inspired by the words of an Anglican preaching at a service, have produced a badge that can be worn telling the world that you are one of those who is praying through the Pandemic. Whilst these were made as an initiative by Methodists they are being distributed more widely so if you would like one for yourself, or even more than one so that you can let others have them, please ask and an effort will be made to get some to you.

Future worship

What should we be looking for in the future for worship in our churches? Vaccines are being produced but how long will it be before we can develop a new “normal” without concern over the virus? The Olympic games were postponed for a year and are now talking about going ahead in 2021 with those attending being vaccinated. The passion play held in Oberammergau every ten years was postponed for two years. But how long will it be before our churches can hold full services? Specialists are saying it is unlikely that the roll out of a successful vaccine will be before summer 2021 and that it will be a year from now before this means restrictions can be removed completely. So can we expect Christmas 2021 to be the first major Christian festival back in our churches? What type of worship do we want – we have developed new forms of worship so do we go back to before or develop a “new normal”? We have time to discuss.



Morality of dying

A moral maze discussion

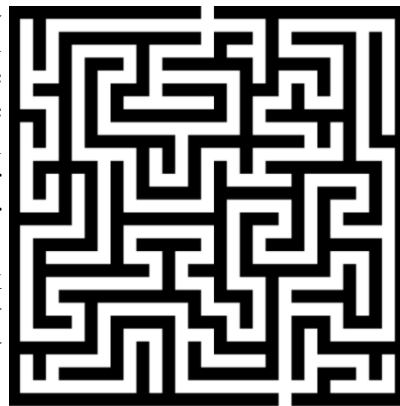
The BBC recently broadcast an issue of the Moral Maze in which the morality of dying was discussed in the context of the present crisis brought on by the covid virus. What does the pandemic tell us of our attitude to death? The Prime Minister is reported as saying that a sharp rise in the death toll is a medical and moral disaster to be avoided. In previous generations, when life expectancy was half what it is now, the population would find nothing unusual in a disease that mainly kills the sick and those over the average age. Indeed in earlier times life on earth was seen as a preparation for death which is the gateway to eternal life. In the creed Christians profess that they believe in the resurrection of the body but have we too been caught up in the secular views of our time?

The lockdowns that have been used in an attempt to control the spread of the virus have an effect on other areas of our health system, mental health can be worse and some illnesses will fail to be diagnosed. To counter this it is argued that if the virus was left unchecked the health services would be overloaded and there would be even more illnesses left undiagnosed as a result.

Has a changed attitude to death distorted our decision making? If we are anxious we are more risk averse. The risks we face, however, are not equal across society as the statistics for cancer and heart disease demonstrate. Risk assessment needs to be on a balanced multidisciplinary basis if we are to consider all the issues including the quality of life.

Are we living and dying well in our society today and have we forgotten what ordinary dying looks like as a biological process? For example a woman in her 90s would have lived twice the life expectancy when she was born. For the first half of her life she would have been used to people dying at home, but her children in their 60s would have little or no experience of death.

We do have a duty to look after the sick but we all must die at a time known only to God. If we believe the creed why would we be afraid of death?



Praise to the Lord

“Praise to the Lord the King of Creation” is a very popular and well known hymn. It was written in German by Joachim Neander who lived in 17th century Bremen. The hymn was translated in the 19th century by Catherine Winkworth who is known for her polished translations of German hymns. It was published in English after the translation but its popularity had to wait until the middle of the 20th century when the number of hymnals featuring the hymn increased dramatically.

The words of the hymn may to some seem old fashioned using as it does the old singular forms of thy and thee that are not used much in modern speech. This should not put anyone off however as the message is powerful, telling us good reasons why we should praise the Lord. From health and salvation in the first verse we move to being a defender and befriender in the second surely characteristics we need in our current time of crisis. In the third verse we praise the Lord for fitting us to our daily tasks by spreading his grace over us. In the last verse the words call for all that have life and breath to praise and adore Him. This is a fitting end after hearing of the light and mercy shown when sin abounds in the fourth verse, the mercy of God’s forgiveness is a blessing to us all.

A look at the lectionary - Christ the King

On the feast of Christ the King the three lectionaries take an old testament reading from the book of Ezekiel chapter 34. This chapter uses the concept of God's people as sheep, something we are familiar with. At the start of the chapter Ezekiel is asked to condemn the leaders of Israel who are not being good shepherds and are ignoring the needs of God’s flock. The lectionary readings come from the middle where God tells Ezekiel that He will be the Good Shepherd and will look after the people himself. The verses used for the reading vary between the lectionaries but all three include the verses where we learn that God will look after his sheep, search for the lost and help the weak. It is only the revised common lectionary however that goes as far as verses 23 - 24 which foretell Christ coming from the house of David to take

care of the flock and be their leader. The end of the chapter prophesies a bright future for the people of Israel who will be taken good care of by the Lord.

The Gospel reading set in all three lectionaries for this feast follows on from the previous week looking at the sayings of Jesus in Mathew 25. It is relevant for the feast of Christ the King as it talks about the Son of Man coming into glory, on his royal throne, and judging the people. The judgement gives it a certain relevance to our time of crisis talking as it does about those who help others being those who will be welcome in the Kingdom of God. The hungry to be fed, strangers to be welcomed, and the sick to be cared for are as present today as they were at the time the Gospel was written and it is our Christian vocation to work to help them.