West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

Dear Friends Letter to WSAM churches **25th March 2020**

We are living in very strange times, and life is difficult in many ways, but please hold onto the hope we share. The sun is shining as I write, flowers are blooming and trees coming into leaf, and I can hear the birds singing because the roads are quieter. These things certainly don’t compensate for the pain, the grief, and the fear, but they can comfort us to some degree, and point us towards a hopeful future.

The government has told us all to ‘Stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives’, and I’m sure we are all doing so as far as we can. The implications include the complete closure of all our church buildings. In normal times I am aware (living where I do!) that many people pop into church buildings for one reason or another; but sadly we must stop that completely for a while. It clearly contradicts the requirement to stay at home, and it also risks cross-infection where people inevitably touch doors, key safes, furniture etc. So please, just don’t. Of course, being unable to access the building doesn’t in any way mean we are further from, let alone excluded from, God. The World Council of Churches, which has member churches all around the globe, suggests we follow a slightly different slogan:

“Stay at home; pray at home.”

That made me think about daily prayer - how helpful it can be, and how many ways we can approach God. Surely there is a form of daily prayer or contemplation which would be helpful to each of us? So I thought I might make a few suggestions.

Firstly, for those who do have internet access, some prayer resources in different styles:

The URC produces Daily Devotions, and you can sign up to receive them by email, or just read them on the website: https://devotions.urc.org.uk

or, for those who use Facebook, The United Reformed Church page has daily worship resources including Youtube videos;

also on Facebook, or linked from their websites, The Iona Community and The Corrymeela Community offer daily prayers which I often find very helpful;

and finally, for something rather different, you could look at the daily devotional produced by one of our sister churches in the United States: https://www.ucc.org/daily\_devotional

I can’t guarantee you’ll appreciate them all, but it is interesting to look… and of course there are many others.

For those who need or prefer to use physical resources, you may well already have Bible Reading notes from, for example, IBRA or BRF or Scripture Union. You may also have books of prayers on your bookshelves. Now is surely an opportunity to use what we have! And that includes hymnbooks, which are wonderful resources for prayer, and above all Bibles.

On top of all these ways to approach personal prayer, there are also daily prayers and thoughts for the day on various radio stations. The more I think about it, the more I realise we are spoilt for choice! Nothing can stop us approaching God in prayer, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances.

There are other things which will feed us in important ways at the moment, such as music and poetry and laughter. I will just mention a couple which I have enjoyed in the last couple of days, online: Patrick Stewart is reading Shakespearean sonnets on Facebook; and on the BBC Springwatch website there are wonderful film clips, including a bird’s eye view of the coast of Orkney. Don’t waste this time watching depressing rubbish - find the things which really lift your soul!

And for those who like a touch of humour, and have a visual imagination(!) there was a wonderful post on Facebook with the caption ‘Get ready for the return of parents as hairdressers…’ which was illustrated by old photos of children with the worst amateur haircuts you have ever seen - just imagine that, and smile! I suppose at least they’ll grow out!

Church family news:

I am pleased to be able to tell you that Joan W, who had been in hospital for a couple of weeks, is now home and able to enjoy her garden, which is excellent news.

In fact many of you, when I speak on the phone or email, are able to enjoy this glorious weather in your gardens or on your daily exercise walks - long may it continue.

You are all in my prayers. I hope we can stay in contact with each other - remember, we may be physically distanced, but we are spiritually connected.

Blessings

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