

WEDNESDAY SUPPLEMENT

27th May 2020

For the last time in a Wednesday Supplement:

Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed!**

Welcome to this week's Wednesday Supplement.

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RELIGION AND POLITICS

Over the weekend, a number of Church of England Bishops, including the Bishop of Penrith, issued some trenchant (perhaps unprecedented) criticism of the Prime Minister, following his attempted defence of Dominic Cummings at a press conference on Sunday.

The Bishop of Worcester said that the defence of Cummings was “*risible*”, while the Bishop of Ripon recounted the occasions on which she had not been able to visit her father undergoing radiotherapy and observed that this was “*a fraction*” of what other families had gone through as a result of properly observing the lockdown. The Bishops of Manchester, Durham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Reading and Truro all spoke in a similar vein. Several of the Bishops, including the Bishop of Ripon, received death threats.

The Bishops were correct to point out that Boris Johnson's statement on Sunday was not transparent. He said that he had received an explanation from Mr Cummings and was satisfied by it. But we are entitled to judge things for ourselves when it is important to do so. Of course we do sometimes just trust the word of others (because we trust *them*), but it is right that we have the full facts (and law) before us when there is reason to believe that what has occurred is not right. To demand this does not imply mistrust or criticism of the intermediary whom we wish to second guess (in this case, the Prime Minister), it is simply that we have sufficient grounds to suppose that something is wrong and we want to decide for ourselves.

As things turned out, the criticism of the Prime Minister's statement was justified: when Mr Cummings spoke on Monday evening, it became clear that he had in fact taken actions during the lockdown that most people would have regarded as forbidden. He had returned to work at Downing Street after tending his wife, who had suspected symptoms; he had then driven

from London to Durham (where his son, who was potentially infected, was taken to hospital); and while in Durham he had driven 30 miles to Castle Barnard on his wife's birthday, ostensibly to test whether his eyesight (which had been affected by suspected Covid-19) was sufficiently recovered to attempt the return journey to London. None of this was mentioned in a *Spectator* article which he wrote with his wife. It has subsequently transpired that an blog post in which he said he had warned of the dangers of Coronavirus a year before, had been altered by him to add that reference, upon returning to London. His defence to all this was that he had acted reasonably within the exceptions provided for in the law, having regard to the need to care for his wife and child.

In legal terms, Mr Cummings had a case to answer, which was glossed over in the Prime Minister's statement. The proof of the pudding has therefore been that the Bishops' critique of the Prime Minister's statement, to the effect that it was not open and transparent and took the public for fools, was justified.

But was it the *Bishops* place to point any of this out?

The press was more than capable of taking on this task: indeed, even the strongly pro-Conservative *Daily Mail* asked the front-page question “*What planet are they on?*” of Messrs Johnson and Cummings on Monday morning. I would say, having watched Mr Johnson's statement, that any member of the public could see that they were being told *not worry about the truth*, rather than being told *what the truth was*.

It's a good occasion on which to ask whether Christians should get involved in politics. Clearly, many already are. Clergy routinely stand for election locally and nationally. A notable example is that of Tim Farron, MP for our neighbouring constituency of Westmorland and Lonsdale (which of course included Broughton until the boundary change of 2010). At SPCK, we published Mr Farron's book *A Better Ambition: Confessions of a Faithful Liberal*, last year. You probably remember how his General Election campaign in 2017 was marked by persistent questioning over his attitude to homosexuality. He later expressed regret at agreeing with the press that homosexual sex was not a sin.

As Christians, we do not have to agree with Mr Farron's position on homosexuality, or indeed with his centre-left, liberal political position, in order to see that he is a well-regarded constituency MP whose faith deeply informs his desire to work for the public good. He has been open about that faith, and the views to which it leads him, and his constituents have continually elected him. There will be opponents who disagree with him politically, morally and theologically, but I doubt whether they question his commitment, or the connection between his faith and his public life.

If it is appropriate for a Christian to be a Member of Parliament, and aligned with a particular political party, can it be inappropriate for other Christians to speak about political *matters*?

Render unto Caesar

For most people, the Bible passage of first resort on the question of the relationship between Christianity, government and society is Matthew 22:21, "*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.*" (// Mark 12:17 // Luke 20:25)

As Luke's Gospel makes quite explicit, Jesus was facing a hostile audience: their intention was to entrap him into admitting the illegal position of some zealots, that taxes should not be paid to the Roman occupiers. The only alternative seemed to be to *endorse* payment of taxes and thus align himself with an unpopular political position. The purpose of the story is Christological: to show us that Jesus, the Messiah, is not of the military stamp desired by many, who would throw off the yoke of Roman occupation. It isn't necessarily a teaching about separation of church and state.

If the episode about that separation, and establishes a morality which is primarily about individual rather than collective responsibility, then we need to understand the teaching in the context of its time. In Jesus' day, public authorities had little or no role in public welfare: they did not collect rubbish, fund social care, hospitals, schools or a police service, for example. Taxes [aid for occasional public works (not all of which were for the public good) and the army who kept the peace. In this context, it was reasonable to expect individuals to take the moral lead and let the state alone as far as possible.

We of course have reached a very different conception of the state, in which it has at least the potential to aggregate and coordinate huge resources for the benefit of all. Whatever our political persuasion, we can agree that the modern state is imperfect, but more humane – more Christian – than that of ancient Rome. The point is, that we have arrived at a position where

we cannot wash our hands of the state, because we have delegated to it much of our collective responsibility, especially for children, the elderly, and the sick – and indeed for a host of other public goods that we regard as necessary. In a modern democracy, we cannot separate ourselves from the state: its sin is our sin; its officers are our representatives.

The Old Testament

The idea that the nation as a whole can develop along sinful lines is not new: Isaiah 1:4 speaks of exactly that. Addressing everyone in the nation, the prophet calls us to "*learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*" We should remember that the categories of those in need are particular to Isaiah's time and may require amendment and expansion in today's complex society.

I was struck during Morning Prayer on Sunday by these lines from Isaiah 65:21-22, that were set for the day:

*"They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands."*

There is a very distinct flavour social justice here, in the idea of those who have built inhabiting for themselves that on which they have worked.

These ideas are not unique to Isaiah. Have a look at Psalm 82:3, Jeremiah 22:15-16 and Micah 6:8, for example. Indeed, the prophets Amos and Micah are closely concerned with the ills of their society.

Mission

Few Christians would question the proposition that fighting injustice is central to our calling. Indeed, the fourth Mark of Mission is to "*transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.*" Historically, Christians have been at the forefront of opposing torture, persecution, poverty and a hundred and one other ills that afflict the world. In our own nation, Christians were among the first to introduce schools, hospitals and, more recently, foodbanks.

We tend not to characterise opposition to torture or hunger as political, but of course it is. There are countries in the world where torture, oppression and the violation of individual liberties are state policy. The modern Western conception of what is owed to individuals is a Christian invention, as Tom Holland's recent book, *Dominion*, argues. Nations without this

Christian underpinning say that the western conception of society is a choice, not the 'right' or only answer. The approach of ancient Rome to the question how should a society be structured was another possible answer, which Holland argues was reshaped by Christianity to be closer to what is 'right'.

Opposition to torture is a political position that we do not regard as out of the sphere of Christian activity because torture is so evidently repugnant to our values. A good life for all is more controversial and difficult, but it is no less important to seek it. Hunger is equally repugnant to Christian values. Jesus talks about relieving hunger specifically (but doesn't mention torture). Most Christians work or give in some way that addresses the evil of hunger or food poverty. We can do that by individual or charitable giving, but we can also do it (perhaps more effectively) by seeking to "transform unjust structures of society". The Trussell Trust is an example of a charity, founded by Christians, which seeks to do both.

Preaching Christ or preaching politics?

In October last year, Tom Holland gave an interview in connection with his book, in which he said, "I see no point in bishops ... recycling the kind of stuff you can get from any soft-left liberal ... If I want that, I'll get it from a Liberal Democrat councillor." In his view, Christians should simply be preaching their Gospel of "this strange singularity where someone who is a God and a man sets everything on its head. To say it's supernatural is to downplay it."

We might agree with Holland about the fundamental importance of preaching Christ crucified, who offers salvation and eternal life to those who believe. Brought up by an atheist father and an Anglican mother, it is not surprising that he has got the fundamentals right.

However, the message of Christianity, from the mystery of the Trinity down to the teachings of the prophets, is fundamentally relational. It isn't just about how you or I, in our private bubble of faith, ensure that we are right with God. It is about how we interact with others. The summary of the law is Love God and Love Neighbour. We are called to model the sacrificial love of Christ. Parables like the Good Samaritan show that loving our neighbour is not just about loving those in our church community, but loving everyone, including those who are our 'enemies'. The Christian message is particularly clear in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Here, the saved and the damned are sorted according to the actions to which faith has moved them. The proper objects of our love

in this parable are not identified by proximity to us, but by need (poverty, imprisonment etc.).

Christianity doesn't necessarily result in "soft left" party political positions, although it may do. It should however result in an approach to any 'political' question which asks, 'how are the poor served by this?' or 'am I doing all that I can to help those in need?' To Holland, I would therefore respond that it is not a case of 'either/or', but 'both/and'. Bishops should be preaching Christ crucified, but they would only have preached half the Gospel if they stopped at 'Love God' without explaining how we should 'Love our Neighbour as ourselves'. Whether you agree with the Bishops or the Prime Minister, questions of honesty and obedience, and public example, seem to me to fall within the sphere of what Christians might legitimately comment upon.

ST PAUL'S REMEMBRANCE

St Paul's Cathedral has started an online book of remembrance to commemorate the lives of all those who have died in the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak. It can be found at the address below:

<https://www.rememberme2020.uk/>

Anyone can register and upload details of a friend or family member.

As well as creating an online book of remembrance, the project includes dedicating the new internal portico of the Cathedral as a national memorial to those who have died. More details on the website.



LOCKDOWN CHILDREN & FAMILIES WORK

*This week, Deanery Children & Families Minister, **Hannah Fishwick** discusses the work that she has been doing during the lockdown.*

The night of Monday 16th March will be forever stuck in my mind. I remember sitting in the car park of our parish centre checking my emails before a PCC meeting. I opened an email from the minister which said “the PM has just advised against all non-essential travel and contact with others, so we will have to cancel the PCC meeting this evening”. I was already there, so it was with hesitation that I walked up the stairs and joined a few others who had not yet read the email. It was a weird feeling. And to some extent, that feeling has not gone away. One day, I’m in a primary school leading a lunch club being told that I won’t be able to visit again, and the next day schools are ordered to shut and to provide home learning opportunities.

Weird words and phrases like quarantine, self-isolation, immunosuppressed, lockdown, social distancing became commonplace in the space of a few short days. That’s the Year 6 spellings sorted for a week at least! It hasn’t just been words that seem to have appeared and made themselves at home, it’s attitudes too. Feelings of fear, anxiety, loss of sense of control and freedom have cosied up on our sofas without invitation and with no indication of how long they are staying. ‘Ay, there’s the rub’. When will they leave? When will it all end? Will it ever end? It’s only now, almost 10 weeks later, that we are seeing a possible end in sight, or at least a rest stop.

So, what has the church done in this time? Well, most put their trainers on, sprinted after and jumped on the speeding train of social media. Church buildings may have had to close but churches certainly haven’t. But where are all those who were in the buildings? They are in their houses and on the pavements of our communities. Putting crosses on their walls and God’s rainbows in their windows. They are donating food to the food bank and waving to loved ones from the garden. They are more present both offline and online.

I have been so impressed with how churches have felt the tug of necessity and with minor hesitation set aside their nerves and fears related to technology and put their faces out there in the world. I, for one, am no different. I actually tried my hand at professional acting, so you would think that getting in front of the camera would come naturally. Nope.

So, I can’t work in the church, I can’t work from the office and I can’t go into schools. Thankfully, I’m not furloughed, so how do I do my job? The first thing to think about was virtual church. The national church services were a great resource but not all that child-friendly. After it was decided that we would give Zoom a whirl, I considered what elements of Junior Church would work well over a video conferencing medium. We settled on:

1. A fun starting activity linked to theme of the main lectionary reading
2. Scriptural input (bible reading, YouTube video)
3. Discussion questions
4. Interactive prayer
5. Song

This skeleton structure has more or less stayed the same, but a few key lessons have been learned:

- Keep the pace fast!
- Using videos to convey the bible reading rather than simply reading it is more engaging
- When it comes to discussion questions, invite children to respond in one of three ways: talk to their adult; type in their comments or answers in the chat function; or raise their hand, unmute themselves and share aloud with the group.
- Getting them up and doing something will increase engagement rather than losing it.
- Using a song to bridge the transition between Junior Church (10am – 10.30am) and main church (10.30am – 11.15am) (which occurs in the same ‘meeting’) provides a welcoming window and a clean start.
- Obviously, other Zoom etiquette applies (all on mute unless speaking, sitting comfortably in a light space) and we have had to write risk assessments specifically for Zoom (including correct DBS checked adult to child ratio).

It’s worth mentioning that some families do not find it easy to engage with group Zoom meetings and so I have been meeting with them one to one on alternate weeks via Zoom for half an hour before Sunday worship, for games and a catch up. As with everything, there is no one size fits all approach!

Moving on from Junior Church: toddlers find it even harder to engage with real people through screens so Zoom meetings were not an option for the toddler group that I run. (It was not a popular choice after a quick Facebook poll.) What families wanted were ideas for activities and crafts to do with their children. So each week I share a craft activity and theme for families. In our toddler group, we have a time called Prayer Patrol (it’s a play on Paw Patrol, the children’s TV programme) so during lockdown, when I found few

faith resources for toddlers on the fringe of church I decided to re-establish Prayer Patrol on Facebook Live. Facebook rewards you for using their inventions, so a live video will be shown to more people than if you pre-record a video and post it. (Don't ask me how!) So for the last few weeks I have been 'going live' following this simple 5 minute plan:

- 'Good Morning' song to welcome everyone
- Shout-outs to specific children for birthdays or hellos
- (Making a show out of) picking a cap out of a bag
- Singing the Prayer Patrol song (sung to the tune of Paw Patrol theme tune)
- Saying a short prayer and inviting the children to shout 'Amen' at the end into a pretend microphone (my hairbrush)
- Final shout outs (if any received live)
- Finish with 'Good Morning' song again

More than anything else I have done online for toddlers and their families, the shout outs have made the biggest difference. Children love hearing their own names. Simple. It's personal, it's specific and with a video, they can watch it over and over again. (Children are liturgical creatures, after all!)

So, from one end of my spectrum to the other: Years 5 and 6. Pre-lockdown, I ran a youth club called Vision but how do you just hang-out online? You can't really. A free for all on a video conference would be chaotic. When I first considered the possibility, my fears ranged from, 'what if everyone talks at once and it's chaotic?' to 'but what if no one talks and it's boring?' I have learnt to over-plan and adjust as necessary during the session. We meet over Zoom for an hour every week. The first half an hour consists of three or four games. Good games to play are scavenger hunts, 'Would you rather...?', reverse charades, Twenty Questions, 'What's in the box?' and one word stories. For the next 15 minutes, we watch a video on a specific topic of faith, discuss it and pray and I use the final 15 minutes to invite them to do 'show and tell' (this gives lots of freedom for the children to share as much or as little as they want and to ask each other questions) or to play a game of their choice.

Oh, and points and prizes! At the beginning of lockdown, we were wary of cross contamination and didn't send anything via the post, but things have relaxed now. Points are awarded throughout the games section and, although I haven't yet, points could also be used for positive behaviour reinforcement. The highest scorer receives an envelope of prizes; flat things are good to post, like sweet bars, flat chocolate bars, colouring in, bookmarks, key rings, snap bracelets, tattoos, stickers, origami crafts.

The world of YouTube is amazing and normally you won't struggle to find an appropriate video to show during collective worship or Junior Church but now, as a children's minister, I don't have direct access to children. Everything (well, most things) they watch are screened (excuse the pun) by the adults they live with and if parents don't deem the video worthy, they won't show it to their children. Parents and carers are now the gatekeepers so, rightly or wrongly, it's now them we have to appeal to and engage first and foremost.

In Junior Church, it's normal for the parents of the children to have a faith and so it's more likely they will read the word and pray during the week but what about those children who only heard the word in school? Those children who are never read a bible story, never prayed with, or never reminded about the glory of God? Even if I share a bible story cartoon with their parents, will they show their children and discuss it afterwards? I wasn't sure so I set about making vlog-style 5-minute YouTube videos myself, beginning with something secular (funny, silly, interesting) and moving the conversation towards something spiritual with a practical challenge at the end. Primary schools seem quite keen to send them to their pupils and encourage them to take part in the challenges at the end. They aren't a typical collective worship but we need to consider whether children would sit down and watch and listen for 15 minutes as they have to in school.

I spread this output as widely as I can on social media and use them as my connection with primary schools and Junior Church. Are they a perfect solution? No, of course not! Does such a solution exist? Definitely not, but this lockdown has forced me to set aside my preferences and just try. During this time God has forced a lot of us to set down many of our daily responsibilities and has invited us to pick up new ones. It's been sudden, sometimes uncomfortable, and always uncertain, but we've tried and that's all we can do. Try well, fail well, and keep learning.

If you would like to investigate the vlog style videos, please go online and find the YouTube channel, Faith 4 Furness Families.

If you would like more information or to know how to get involved with anything I have mentioned please email children@ulverstonparishchurch.org

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

The family and friends of those who have died recently, including Revd Brian Findlay RIP (Hallthwaites) and William Watson RIP (Kirkby). William's funeral will take place, subject to social distancing rules, at Thorncliffe, next Tuesday at 11am.

TAIZE WORSHIP

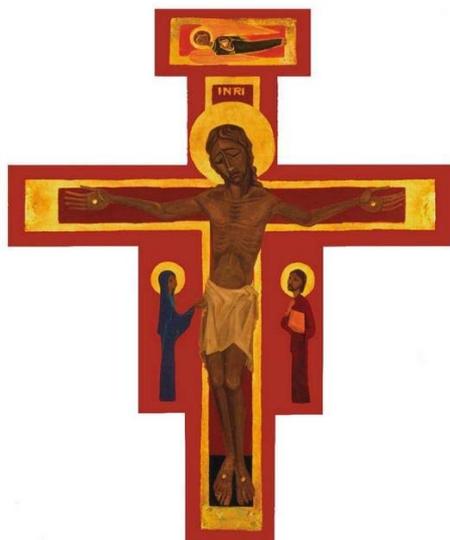
I hope that some of the various options in previous Wednesday Supplements have commended themselves to you, and that you have retained them for future use.

One great sadness of the lockdown has been the temporary cessation of our Taize services in Kirkby at 6pm on the Third Sunday of the month. The Taize Community and its worship have always been strongly ecumenical and one of the most delightful features of our service has been the mixed congregation drawn from Anglicans, Methodists, Church of Christ (Wall End) and further afield. It is good to be reminded that all Christians, whatever our differences of doctrine or style, are brothers and sisters in one holy, catholic and apostolic church, which is the Body of Christ on earth.

It is possible to recreate some of the Taize style of worship at home, using the community's own Facebook feed, or YouTube, to supply music. There are some suggestions below. The community's worship can be viewed each day at 7.30pm, and the recordings are also available, at <https://www.facebook.com/taize>

A Taize order of service for the week can be found at https://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html and suggested Bible readings for the day at:

https://www.taize.fr/en_article1854.html



Here is an order of service with suggested song links to try on YouTube. They are from the London Fox Taize Choir and the full playlist can be found at:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_IDMtIbHdtBgUYm-hrAWcp_rfuI6nljOKo

There is an enormous amount of Taize music on YouTube if you are in the mood to explore. Just search for "taize".

Opening songs

<http://youtu.be/yjZsXCZx8f4>
<http://youtu.be/KLWHAYVuo0>
http://youtu.be/t9i75gz_Vx8
http://youtu.be/W_R_OPoF4UA

Psalm

A short Psalm or short section of a Psalm is read, eg:

Psalm 100 or Psalm 105:1-2

Reading

A short Bible reading (see left for link to daily suggestions).

Song

<http://youtu.be/xDqk-DMS4Mk>

Silence

Spend some time in silent meditation or prayer. You don't need to use a particular technique, or find words. Simply sit and allow God to speak through what you have heard.

Prayers or litany of praise

Intercessions at Taize are not lengthy and are sometimes very short. They are often followed by a short response.

Our father

Say or sing the Lord's Prayer.

<http://youtu.be/z23BqyrnkSc>

Closing songs

<http://youtu.be/fhO69b5ZIZ4>
http://youtu.be/EEgKR2_qXCk
<http://youtu.be/LjvrAHZITU8>
<http://youtu.be/3M9bX4lgzC0>