

WEDNESDAY SUPPLEMENT

3rd June 2020

Welcome to this week's Wednesday Supplement.

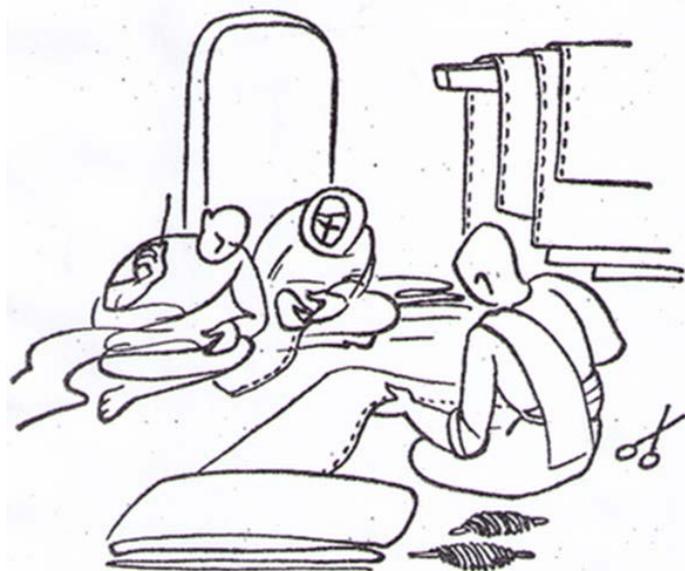
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HOLY TENTMAKING

Josh Seligman reflects on the profession of the Apostle Paul and our calling to bring Christ into all we do, whether at work or play.

As many people in this country slowly transition back to work, I've been thinking about how we as Christians are called to bring Christ into whatever work we do, whether paid or unpaid.

The Apostle Paul serves as a model. When we consider Paul's work, we usually think of how God used him as an evangelist and pastor. However, to support himself financially, Paul made tents, and God even used this work to witness to Christ, as I will explain.



At one stage, the book of Acts says, 'God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them' (19:11).

Handkerchiefs and aprons were used by tradespeople in those days for wiping sweat off their faces and protecting their clothes while working (the same is true today). Likely, Paul used these items, suggesting that

God transformed even Paul's tentmaking objects to heal people, resulting in many people turning to Christ.

How did these miracles happen? I believe it was Paul's relationship with Christ that transformed his tentmaking—indeed, every aspect of his life. Everything he did, from preaching to travelling to tentmaking, belonged to Christ. As Paul writes to servants (and which can be applied to workers of any kind), 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving' (Col. 3:23–24).

Through serving Christ in everything, Paul shows us that whatever the work we do, whether tentmaking, building, farming, medical or care working, administering, teaching, mentoring, parenting or anything else, that work is holy if we do it for Christ.

As a result, like Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons, God may use our work to point people to Christ. This may be in the form of 'extraordinary miracles', or maybe more ordinary ones. For example, in my own work as a proofreader/editor, I hope my comments to my clients that encourage and challenge their writing also lay small stones on the path to Christ. I hope my correspondence with my colleagues or my responses to challenges reflect Christ's mercy. I hope that through my witness, somehow and maybe without my knowing, people will draw closer to Christ and believe in him.

Those examples are specific to my work, but they may help you to consider possibilities that could come from your work. Any such miracle does not come from our own design or ability, but from our relationship with Christ; we enable him to work through us as he wills by serving him with all our heart.

As shown in Paul's life, our calling is to belong to Christ to the point that everything we do—even the most seemingly insignificant act—also belongs to Christ, thus making it holy work.

If you enjoyed this article, you may be interested to look at some materials which the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity produced a few years ago,

entitled 'Life on the Frontline'. The premise of this resource is that we each have a place or places where we spend significant time out of the home or church context, in which we meet people who don't know Jesus. The metaphor of the frontline has been somewhat overused in the intervening years, but the material remains good:

<https://www.licc.org.uk/ourresources/lifeonthefrontline/>

RE-OPENING CHURCHES

As the lockdown is relaxed in stages, there are inevitably frustrations: I am sure you have some of your own. For our us, with close family in Portsmouth, St Albans, Sheffield and Liverpool, recent relaxations mean that we can at last see relatives: but only in the garden and not overnight. Easier for those in the Sheffield and Liverpool than on the South Coast! I am sure that everyone is anxious to see loved ones, but also that our actions do not contribute to the continuing very high levels of virus transmission.

Amid all of these competing considerations, we need to prepare for the day when churches re-open. This is likely to happen in stages, but there is no indication from government as to when or how. Regardless of any official advice, the risks we will need to guard against include proximity indoors and cross-infection from surfaces. Signage about social distancing and touching surfaces; use of hand sanitiser and similar precautions are likely to be necessary.

We do not yet know in what order church activities will recommence. Some idea of the national church's expectation can be gained from this sentence in the national risk assessment document: "*A further version of this [document] will be produced when small services such as weddings and funerals are allowed, then for private prayer, then for some form of public worship.*"

The Church of England has been guided by its national adviser on medical ethics, health and social care, the Revd Dr Brendan McCarthy. On Covid-19 questions, Dr McCarthy has been working with Revd Prof Gina Radford, a former Deputy Chief Medical Officer (with whom I trained); and also with the Bishop of Hertford, Rt Revd Dr Michael Beasley, an epidemiologist by training (whom I know well from St Albans and SPCK). If we sometimes feel that the church is being very cautious, then it is worth reflecting that this caution proceeds from the advice of some very suitably-qualified clergy, who I know personally to be sensible, practical people, strongly committed to public worship. As with the government, advice is not the same as the direction leaders take, but the underlying advice in this case comes from people I trust to get the balance right.

PAYING FOR THE CHURCH

On Tuesday this week, clergy and treasurers across the Diocese joined an interesting webinar presented by Ric Jaques and Sophie Hodge, respectively Head of Finance and Stewardship Enabler for the Diocese of Carlisle.

Ric began by outlining the financial position of churches resulting from the Coronavirus lockdown. It rather depends on how a church derives the majority of its income. For churches largely funded by Standing Orders from regular givers (as has long been recognised as the ideal) the financial impact may have been small. For churches that depend on giving during services, via plate or envelope; upon room bookings; or upon significant summer fundraising events, the impact has been very serious indeed.

The total receipt from parishes, via the Parish Offer, has already fallen by £100,000 against what was expected, and will decline further. Like any sensible organisation, the Diocese has reserves for a rainy day – but of course using reserves reduces their capacity to generate income in the future, by way of interest.

In response, the Diocese has furloughed half of its staff; frozen recruitment to new posts which are not funded externally; and consulted on voluntary redundancy. (In our household, we have contributed to the saving through Charlotte going onto short hours.) All this is very sensible, but also very worrying: we depend on the Diocese for all manner of administrative functions; to support and develop church schools; for clergy salaries and pensions; for training; for a host of missional initiatives; and of course for Bishops! If parishes become less able to fund the Diocese, the level and quality of all these provisions is likely to be affected.

The National Church, in the shape of the Church Commissioners, will be making additional funds available from national investments, but this cannot address the full extent of the shortfall in every Diocese.

Ric and his colleagues will be consulting widely on ways to introduce economies and aim to balance the budget again in as few years' time as possible.

Part of achieving this is, of course, ensuring that parishes are financially healthy and able to make their contributions by way of Parish Share.

Sophie Hodge began her talk on action in parishes by asking whether it was appropriate for the church to be thinking about its own needs during a public health crisis? Sophie's views, which contain some interesting theology for us to ponder, is that:

- (a) While church buildings have been closed, the ministry of the church has continued; the costs associated with that ministry have essentially continued; and indeed most of the costs associated with maintain ancient buildings will continue at a similar level.
- (b) Within the church, giving is not (or should not) be a simple commercial transaction: it is about the same self-giving generosity that was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry. Our challenge is both to be generous and to ensure that our collective expenditure is generous: outwardly serving others, rather than gathering treasure internally.
- (c) In Sophie's favourite passage from scripture, 2 Corinthians 8, describes the generosity of the Macedonian church. Called to join in the collection for the poor of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-5), the Macedonians responded with "rich generosity" even though they were "in the midst of very severe trial" and themselves afflicted by "extreme poverty".

Sophie argues that the present time is one of 'severe trial' for the church in certain respects. It is hard to disagree.

What should we be doing?

All parishes need to ensure that we are in a position to keep up our Parish Offer. By doing so, we not only support ourselves, but other parishes whose financial circumstances are not so fortunate. It goes without saying that, just as before the crisis, we should prioritise Standing Orders (and of course Gift Aid) over other means of giving: it is cost-free, reliable and predictable.

Over time, fixed sums (however given) buy less, due to inflation. In rough terms, every pound given by a standing order in 2000 is worth just 59p today, relative to what that pound would have purchased in 2000. Similarly, inflation has reduced the spending power of £1 in 2010 to 77p today. If I had set up a standing order of £20 per month in 2010, for example, it would now only have the spending power of £15.50, relatively. (These examples have been calculated online, using data from the ONS CPI inflation tables.)

The upshot of this is that we need to revise our standing orders upwards on a regular basis (if our own circumstances permit) in order to keep pace with inflation. Otherwise, in real terms, we are giving less and less over time.

We also need to recognise another change. For better or worse, our society is moving toward being free of

cash and cheques. None of my bank accounts offers a cheque book any more. And I know many people, of all ages, who no longer carry cash. We can see this in the statistics. In 2010, cash transactions in the UK economy were valued at over £20bn annually, while about £7bn was transacted by debit cards. Today the figures are roughly reversed. In my previous church, we were forced to introduce card readers because almost nobody had cash for the plate on Sunday. Giving from tourists, in particular, had collapsed. Security, convenience and other reasons were encouraging people away from cash before the Covid-19 outbreak (my former clients, VISA, were delighted, of course!), More recently, the risk of cross-infection has mitigated against cash. Regional and age-based variations in cash use are beginning to diminish, even here in the Northwest, which has historically held out against contactless payments to a degree noticeable among all the regions of the UK.

The Church of England aims to have at least 50% of its parishes accepting digital payments over the next year, through a combination of contactless and online payments. Whatever our views on this change, it is the way the world is moving and we will have to keep pace with it. Look out for this facility coming soon. In St Cuthbert's, you can already make contactless donations.

PRAYER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Charlotte Tudway reports on prayer for young people.

One of the advantages of the lockdown is that distance is now irrelevant. It is possible to attend virtual meetings from home without any travel, getting together with participants all over the county, country or even the world.

This week, I was able to join other members of our Deanery at their fortnightly prayer meeting for children and youth in our area. Such a meeting would normally be impossible for me during the working week.

It was refreshing and uplifting to spend half an hour discussing issues relating to children and young people in our communities; to hear the successes and challenges that colleagues across the Deanery and our ecumenical partnerships are experiencing; and to think about how to capitalise on some of these positive experiences as the lockdown restrictions begin to be relaxed.

Having shared our highs and lows, we spent some time in prayer together.

The next Deanery prayer meeting for children and youth will take place via Zoom on Tuesday 16th June at 2.30pm. If you would like to attend (and are not already on the invitation list), just let Stephen or Charlotte know and we will make sure you receive the link to join.

REMEMBRANCE

The Church of England is preparing liturgical resources for use in remembering those who have died during the coronavirus outbreak. It is likely that these will be available and recommended for use during the season of remembrance this year. We cannot yet know how far social distancing and other restrictions will impact upon services in November, or when a public act of mourning and remembrance will be most appropriate.

As previously mentioned, St Paul's Cathedral has started an online book of remembrance:

<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.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

The family and friends of those who have died recently, including Rosemary Reid RIP, whose funeral is presently expected to be held at St Mary's, Broughton, at 2pm or shortly thereafter, next Monday 8th June.

PRAYER FOR THIS EVENING

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. **Amen.**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, **who made heaven and earth.**

A period of silence for reflection on the past day.

**Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

O God, make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold;
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.

Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me,
for you are my strength.

Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

(Psalm 31:1-5)

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand
of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all
your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

(1 Peter 5.6,7)

O Lord, from whom all good things come:
grant to us your humble servants,
that by your holy inspiration
we may think those things that are good,
and by your merciful guiding may perform the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

In peace we will lie down and sleep;
for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Abide with us, Lord Jesus,
for the night is at hand and the day is now past.

As the night watch looks for the morning,
so do we look for you, O Christ.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face shine upon us
and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.
Amen.