

WEDNESDAY SUPPLEMENT

10th June 2020

Welcome to this week's Wednesday Supplement.

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UPDATE ON CLOSURES

Last week I offered as my best guess the suggestion that churches would reopen first for “*small services such as weddings and funerals ... then for private prayer, then for some form of public worship.*” There are now some (small) changes to announce.

Individual private prayer in church

On Saturday, the government announced that churches would be permitted to open for individual private prayer from 15th June. The announcement came earlier than the national church had been led to believe and without any detail as to what will be permitted and under what conditions. The Church of England had draft risk assessments and planning documents ready and published in anticipation of this development, but we will have to wait for the detail of government policy. The present emphasis is on appropriate signage, the availability of hand sanitiser, and the regular disinfection of contact points such as door handles, chair/pew backs etc.. I have emailed our churchwardens to consult them on the recommendations we should make to the two PCCs as to reopening.

Those churches that reopen will likely require a rota of volunteers to go in regularly and wipe down key points that visitors are likely to have touched. We may, in the larger churches, wish to provide prayer stations (that do not require visitors to touch things that others have touched).

Even if our churches can reopen on 15th June, only individual prayer will be permitted. It will not be possible for small groups to meet for prayer indoors (as indeed six now can outside) or for prayer or worship to be *led* in the building. Nevertheless, it seems to me that reopening is a significant step and we must give thought not only to the safety of visitors but also ways in which we might support and encourage prayer and meditation in our sacred places.

It's also worth noting that 15th June is only a few days away and there is still no sign of the detail which will

enable us to implement the announced policy. Please therefore be understanding if delays occur.

Limited funerals permitted in church

Changes to the rules on baptisms, weddings and funerals did not seem likely until Phase 3 of the government's plan (early to mid-July), when some limited permission for public worship (subject to social distancing) has been mooted alongside shops opening.

I received notice last night that funerals may be held in church again from 15th June. The new rule effectively reflects the situation in crematoria and amounts to the Bishops having relaxed their more stringent rules, bringing the church back into line with the detail of the government's legislation (which allowed funerals in church from the outset).

In consequence, it will now be possible for members of the deceased's household, close family members or (if the above are unable to attend) close friends, to be in church for a funeral. Social distancing of at least 2m between households will be required. It will be necessary to disinfect surfaces after the service so, again, there may be significant clergy or volunteer time to expend upon delivering this change safely. The guidance continues to indicate that organists, vergers, sidespeople etc. should not attend funerals.

Given the continuing limitations, it may be that we are better continuing with services in churchyards for the time being, keeping the option of going inside if the weather is unfavourable. I will work with families, our very sensible funeral directors and churchwardens, to make funerals work in the best way possible.

Sadly not outdoor services for six...

You may have seen in the news that a church in my old Diocese, St Mark's in Bedford, has been conducting outdoor services for up to six people (priest and five pre-booked members of the congregation) within the limitations of the June relaxation of outdoor activities. A group of six people from different households and the sharing of food (eg. Boris BBQ!) is technically permissible and would cover Communion. However, since the cessation of public worship has been the subject of guidance from Bishops as well as government

legislation, I thought it sensible to consult our Diocesan hierarchy via the Archdeacon before making any arrangements of this kind. I regret to say that I have not “at this stage” received a positive response, but I will continue to keep this possibility in view.

CORPUS CHRISTI

Tomorrow, 11th June, is a Festival: the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion (or *Corpus Christi*, as it is known traditionally and in the Roman Catholic church). I thought this might be an occasion to explore the celebration of Holy Communion in our worship.

In the Bible

It’s worth reminding ourselves where the Eucharist comes from. Writing to the Church in Corinth about their factionalism and individualism, St Paul says this:

20 When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. 21 For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ 25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11:20-26)

These recorded words of Jesus are known as the ‘words of institution’, that is, the words by which the celebration of the Eucharist was instituted.

The genuine letters of Paul were almost certainly written many years before the Gospels. First Corinthians is almost universally agreed to have been written by Paul himself and to have been penned in the early to mid-50s AD, shortly after the foundation of the church in Corinth. This account is therefore our earliest account of both the last supper, and the ‘service’ which commemorated it. It is possible, but not certain, that Paul’s letters were among the sources used by the writers of the Gospels. We cannot be sure about this, but we can be sure that from a very early stage, Christians were eating a supper together, in order to remember the Last Supper.

The Last Supper is described in all four Gospels, but the words of institution appear (in different ways) only in Matthew (26:17-30), Mark (14:12-26) and Luke (22:7-39). John does not explicitly refer to the meal in his much longer account of Jesus’ farewell discourse (John 13:1-17:26). The ‘Bread of Life Discourse’ earlier in John’s Gospel does however resonate with the words of institution, suggesting that John was aware of the Eucharistic tradition (John 6:58-59).



Above: Jesus with the Eucharist at the Last Supper, Joan de Joanes (1507-1579).

What should we call this service?

Let’s clear up some terminology. The expressions ‘Lord’s Supper’, ‘Holy Communion’ and ‘Eucharist’ all mean the same thing. The word Eucharist derives from the Greek *eukharistia*, meaning ‘thanksgiving’.

All three terms are used interchangeably within the Church of England. Elsewhere, the first two have been preferred by Protestant and Evangelical Churches, but even this is not universal. Baptists and Pentecostals tend to prefer ‘The Lord’s Supper’, but I worked closely with Baptists in my last parish and their minister always advertised his monthly ‘Holy Communion’ service. It’s exceedingly important for unity within and between denominations that we are tolerant and aware of the nuances of language. Intention before form!

As we have seen, the expression ‘Lord’s Supper’ has the authority of St Paul (1 Cor 11:20) behind it. So, in fact, does the term ‘Eucharist’. The word in 1 Cor 11:24 translated ‘he had given thanks’ is the verb form of *eukharistia*. It draws to our attention a key practice of giving thanks which existed in Jewish table-fellowship in Jesus’ time and indeed to this day. The word was adopted by most of the early (Greek-speaking) Christian authors in their letters and other works. In consequence, it is fairly universally understood.

We probably all have our personal preferences as to terminology: Holy Communion tends to be most commonly used in the Church of England and is

probably most accessible to non-churchgoers. For me, 'Eucharist' also has value, because it keeps us in touch with the Greek language roots of Christianity. It is also understood (without further translation) by our Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran brothers and sisters all over the world.

Other names for the service are used. The term 'Mass' is common in Anglo-Catholic parishes (it was used interchangeably with 'Holy Communion' in my last parish). The term refers to the Latin sending-out or dismissal at the end of the service ("Go in peace..."), which is a rather helpful theological point.

Sacrament and ordinance

The Eucharist, alongside Baptism, is considered a 'sacrament' in the Church of England: an outward sign of an inward grace. That is to say, that participation in the visible (and physical) symbols of the service also involves a genuine (but mysterious and metaphysical) blessing of the participant by God. Significant in this thinking is the fact that Holy Communion and Baptism can be said to be 'divine ordinances', in that they are endorsed by Jesus' personal participation or express command. They are said to be 'dominical' sacraments ('of the Lord'), to distinguish them from the other five sacraments of Roman Catholicism: Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony, Holy Orders (ordination) and Anointing the Sick, which were not performed by Jesus.

Some denominations do not consider that Jesus taught that the act of baptism or communion has any metaphysical effect. They prefer to refer to these services as 'ordinances' rather than 'sacraments': that is, 'orders' of the Lord, which indeed they are.

Reformation

The nature of Holy Communion was one of a number of issues in the Reformation, during which the Church of England came into being. It is in that light that we should read Article 28 of The Articles of Religion (the 'Thirty-Nine Articles'). The Articles formed the basis of Church of England doctrine. They are not however comprehensive statement of belief, but primarily a rebuttal of certain practices then (at least) taught by the Roman Catholic Church:

Article XXVIII: Of the Lord's Supper

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we

break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.

The modern reader will immediately see some of the ways in which parts of the Church of England has reverted to a more universal position. A great many priests do engage in a degree of 'lifting up' of the sacrament; and reservation is no longer at all unusual. In more conservative Anglo-Catholic parishes, the sacrament may be 'carried about' and 'worshipped' in processions, and services like the Benediction.



Above: The Corpus Christi Procession in Seville Cathedral, Genaro Perez Villaamil (1807-1854).

Presence

An issue which has in the past divided Christians of different denominations is the way we understand God to be present in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Different interpretations of the holy mystery have been developed and adopted by different denominations.

The principal distinction is between doctrines of the Eucharist which acknowledge the 'Real Presence' of Christ in the Eucharist, and those which simply hold that the Eucharist is a symbolic reminder of the Last Supper and Jesus' sacrifice. This latter position usually involves the belief that the Eucharist is not sacramental: it is merely a physical act of commemoration. This is sometimes known as 'memorialism'. It is not a position which is technically open to members of the Church of England. Article 28 (above) states that "*the Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves ... but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption ...*". But again, Anglicanism being the broad and provisional church that it is, I have met a fair few Anglicans who take a memorialist view. In formal terms, very few churches take this approach: among the Reformed Churches, it is really limited to those in the Zwinglian and Anabaptist traditions (Calvin, for example, taught Real Presence). Jehovah's Witnesses teach a memorialist doctrine, but they cannot be regarded as Creedal Christians for many other reasons.

Within doctrines that acknowledge the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a further division may be made into those which acknowledge a mysterious physical presence, and those which acknowledge only a spiritual ('pneumatic') presence. The Catholic position, that of transubstantiation, at the upper end of doctrines of physical presence, is expressly excluded by Article 28. Again, Anglicans being what they are, I have met a fair few who believe in transubstantiation. The basis of transubstantiation is that the substantial nature of the bread and wine is changed into the body and blood of Christ at consecration, even though the outward physical 'accidents' of chemistry, appearance etc. remain those of bread and wine.

Anglicans may hold a range of views within the spectrum of Real Presence.

My own view is that God's grace is real and that, in Jesus Christ, the metaphysical God and the physical man were both fully present on earth. How this is possible is, like the question of the Trinity last week, a holy mystery. Accepting the possibility of holy mystery, we need not enquire into the nature of the Real Presence, nor attempt to shoehorn the grace of God into the constraints of the physical world. John Donne's

famous poem puts it this way: "*He was the Word that spake it; He took the bread and brake it; and what that Word did make it; I do believe and take it.*"

This position is generally described, not particularly attractively or succinctly, as 'Pious Silence': more fully, a belief in "Objective reality, but pious silence about technicalities". I believe that what appears to be a refusal to engage with the question is actually a faithful (and humble) acknowledgement of the mystery of God, the Trinity and the Incarnation, all of which lie at the heart of Christian Faith. Moreover, this position has a good ecumenical pedigree, being acceptable to (among others) Eastern Orthodox Churches and Methodists. Theology seems to me to be one of those areas where it may be a virtue to admit not only that we do not know the answer, but that we *cannot* know the answer.

History

The passage from I Corinthians hints at an important historical observation, that the earliest Eucharistic celebrations occurred in the context of an evening meal at which the food was substantial and varied, rather than being limited to the symbolic bread and wine. All across the Greek-speaking ancient world, the tradition of the *symposium* was observed: a meal to which guests would be invited and at which (depending upon the host and guests) the business of eating and drinking might be accompanied by philosophical discussion or less high-minded entertainments. The early Christians, unsurprisingly, seem to have obeyed the Lord's ordinance in the context of the contemporary social practice of the *symposium*. It was particularly natural to do so in those first centuries of persecution, when the church met in private homes.

Gradually, as Christianity became widely accepted, more or less public worship evolved, taking place on Sunday morning. The Eucharist still needed to be celebrated at these much larger gatherings, when a full meal would have been difficult to organise, and got in the way of the liturgy and Word. So the highly symbolic version of the Passover meal that we know today came into being. For some centuries, the legacy of the symposium survived in *agape* meals and other smaller Christian gatherings in the evening.

How often should we celebrate Holy Communion?

We observed above the distinction between sacraments and ordinances. There are some denominations who do not consider that Jesus intended baptism and communion to be permanent ordinances. These are by no means extreme views:

Quakers and the Salvation Army, for example, do not recognise that the baptism and communion are necessary. Salvationists are, however, permitted to attend and even participate in sacramental services offered by other denominations. We have a good friend from the Salvation Army who leads a choir in one of our previous parishes and attends Holy Communion on a Sunday at least as often as he attends Salvation Army worship, although he only receives a blessing.

Nevertheless, the earliest evidence does strongly suggest that Jesus anticipated a repeated recollection of his sacrifice through re-creation of the key elements of the Last Supper: see 1 Corinthians 11:24-26 above. The celebration of the sacrament, with its physical feeding and metaphysical grace, encapsulates the two aspects of the incarnation which are at the heart of Christian faith. Sharing food and drink has also for thousands of years symbolised, and been at the heart of, human community. The Eucharist also embodies both the idea of the church as one united Body of Christ and also the principle of love of neighbour which Jesus so clearly taught. Across the Church of England a range of practice from daily to monthly celebration of the Eucharist is seen, although the law requires each parish to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday and Principal Holy Day.

Ecumenism

The case of our Salvation Army friend is one of numerous instances in which my faith and appreciation of diversity in the Christian Church has been enhanced by the example of other denominations. The emphasis on ecumenical partnership is one of the things that attracted me to the Diocese of Carlisle.

I am very proud of the fact that the Church of England extends a broad welcome to the Lord's Supper. Canon B15A provides that there may be admitted to Holy Communion all *"baptized persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and who are in good standing in their own Church."* Of course, the alternative invitation to receive God's Blessing at the altar rail is as wide as God's mercy – and we should help visitors who are unaccustomed to church to feel comfortable in receiving a blessing during the administration of Communion. It is my experience that some people remain in their seats not out of belief or scepticism, but from feelings of discomfort or unworthiness, or because they don't consider that they 'belong to' or are 'members' of the church.

RACISM AND THE LEGACY OF THE SLAVE TRADE

Archdeacon Vernon wrote today that the *"first major news item to break through wall-to-wall COVID-19 [coverage] has swept the western world: the death of George Floyd and the subsequent response. For many of us it is difficult to know how best to react to all of this. The toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol leads us inevitably to reflect on the many hundreds of memorials, stained glass windows, and indeed whole church buildings that memorialise slavers and the profits of slavery."*



My family comes originally from Bristol, so I have always taken an interest in the city's wrestling with its slave-trading and slave-owning legacy. The fact that it has so long wrestled is a credit to the City. A great many of those who endowed Bristol charitably derived their wealth from commercial practices which are now almost universally regarded as repugnant.

As Christians, we might be said to have a special insight into problems created by the 'good' legacy of those who held 'bad' views. When the New Testament was written, there was little question over the morality of slave-owning. The ancient economy depended to an enormous extent upon slavery. Hence both Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22 enjoin slaves to be obedient, even as Galatians 3:28 declares that there is *"no longer slave or free ... for all are one in Christ Jesus"*.

This does not necessarily make it any easier to pronounce authoritatively on events such as the toppling of Edward Colston's statue and its unceremonious deposit in the River Avon. It's good to read this morning that the Mayor of Bristol is going to have the statue retrieved and appoint a commission of historians and academics to consider in measured way what ought to be done with it. This statue has been the subject of a popular campaign for textual revision or removal to a museum or other less celebratory context. It was not surprising that it should become a focus of protest. (The statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College, Oxford, has been just as controversial – and

was when we were in Oxford in the early 1990s – but it is much higher up and attached to private, rather than public, property).

There can be no question that the removal of Colston's statue was an act of vandalism and criminal damage; that his statue celebrates a significant benefactor of the City; and that this benefaction was made possible by participation in what is now recognised to be a wicked and inhuman exploitation of others. Worse, that exploitation has left a legacy of prejudice that has real and damaging consequences for sections of our own society (and many fellow Christians) to this day.

Acts of criminality or civil disobedience have often accompanied great reforms that we now take for granted: an obvious example being the violence perpetrated by and against suffragettes in the early twentieth century. Views change over time. As the Chief Executive of the Wolfson Foundation tweeted this week, *"In UK society it is no longer deemed acceptable to argue that philanthropy can cover the iniquities of how funds were first generated."*

We face a conundrum, as to whether our history (including its shameful aspects) is best understood with or without the public memorials of those who profited from slavery. The Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer, seeking to acknowledge both the conundrum and the criminal damage was, predictably, decried from both the left and right of the political spectrum. We need to have a measured debate about these issues. The history of our country has both good and bad aspects (as does every group of people) and as a nation we ought to be comfortable with full and honest self-awareness. The fruits of the slave trade and slave ownership are everywhere to be found in the United Kingdom, not always obviously, and even in churches. The problem is most acute in public commemorations such as statues, but attention will sooner or later turn to those myriad things which were originally paid for with wealth acquired through slavery. Indeed, in Bristol, a Primary School originally founded by Colston has recently changed its name so that it no longer commemorates him directly.

I can give a similar example from the history of my own family. Before my own branch of the family left for Bristol, the family had first settled in the tiny Cathedral City of Wells. The cousins who remained in Wells acquired property, sugar plantations and slaves in Antigua, becoming very wealthy. They served as MPs for Wells and purchased significant amounts of land in and around the city and its outlying villages. Several historic buildings in Wells (including part of what is now

the Cathedral School) were built with their money. Some of the stained glass in St Cuthbert's Parish Church commemorates the contribution of members of the family. All these contributions were, ultimately, made possible by the proceeds of slavery. They are not my direct ancestors, but what if they were? What would be my answer to those who desired the removal of the commemoration of generosity, where what has been given was, by the standards of today, ill-gotten?

PRAYERS

Let us in our prayers today ask for the courage to recognise the enormous complexity which human activity has created over thousands of years, increasingly so in recent centuries. Make us generous and critical friends of our own present, that through our lives and example, we might better witness to the perfection our Your Kingdom to come.

Help us, Lord, to discern our own responsibility to engage with the legacy of the past, with its positive and negative aspects; and to recognise how others may view it differently to us. Give us the wisdom and will to change can be changed, accept what cannot, and to bring good out of all things.

Make us one in unity and Godly love, within our community, within our church, within our nation and within the whole human family that You have made (without exception) in Your image. As you call us to love our enemies, help us also to love fully those among our friends whose opinions and experiences differ from our own. May we delight in difference and be enriched by engagement with it.

We also give thanks for institution of the Holy Communion. Open to us, we pray, a little of your holy mystery, that we might be nourished by the Eucharist, however we have come to understand it. We pray for the universal sharing of this sacrament of Your love, among all who profess Your Holy Name.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament
you have given us the memorial of your passion:
grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries
of your body and blood
that we may know within ourselves
and show forth in our lives
the fruits of your redemption;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.