

WEDNESDAY SUPPLEMENT

17th June 2020

Welcome to this week's Wednesday Supplement.

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100 SUBSCRIBERS

I am pleased to announce that our circulation list for the Sunday and Wednesday Supplements has now passed 100 households by email and 20 by paper copy (and of course many more individuals). Thank you to all those who have prompted friends and relatives near and far to give permission to be included. I suspect that are still people out there with connections to our church who are not receiving mailings. Please prompt friends and acquaintances to get in touch and be added to the list. It's an investment in our future as a church.

THE HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Prompted by hopes for a return to more normal times, **Josh Seligman** looks at St Paul's idea of hope in the glory of God

These days, I've been acutely aware of some things I hope for, such as being with family again, worshipping God corporately in person again and seeing the nations filled with righteousness and justice.

Perhaps this is why I've been struck by the Apostle Paul's words on hope: 'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope' (Rom. 5:1-3).

In other words, we can look forward to 'the hope of the glory of God,' which can develop in us though our sufferings.

But what is this glory of God?

Paul describes it a few chapters after the verse I quoted above as 'the glory that will be revealed in us' (Rom. 8:18), meaning it is something within us that will one day emerge for others to see. Then he writes that God has destined those who love him to be 'conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be firstborn among many [siblings]', and indicates that this act of

conforming them to Christ is God's glorifying them (v. 29). Thus, the glory of God is our becoming Christlike.

In other words, God the Father wants us to become like God the Son. Not only that; the creation longs for this transformation because it will mean that God's purposes for humanity and the creation are fulfilled and released from death's curse (Rom. 8:18-21).



Hope Valley, Peak District, UK. Photo by Josh Seligman

Further, we ourselves long for it: Paul writes that we 'groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23). This last part about 'the redemption of our bodies' means that becoming Christlike involves even our physical nature: like Christ, we will be raised from death with glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:35-57).

The cause-and-effect relationship between suffering, perseverance and character is quite evident: our trials prompt us to settle in for the long haul, and sticking it out makes us stronger.

But what does this have to do with hope?

I believe character produces hope because, as we respond to our sufferings in Christ, we can recognise that our character is being shaped intentionally. There is a larger purpose behind our pain; we are going somewhere with all this; what has been intended for evil, God is steering towards a good end (Gen. 50:20).

In these times, our hopes for healing on various levels (physical healing from coronavirus; relational healing among peoples divided by race) can point us to the

hope of the glory of God to be revealed in us when Christ returns, destroying death and making everything new (Rev. 21:1-5).

Not only that, but the hope of the glory of God can energise us to live in the mysterious reality that Christ is already among us, in whose wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5) and in whom all social divisions are replaced by a new creation (Gal. 3:28; 6:15).

MUSINGS OF A MILLENNIAL MOTHER

Meg Johnson (Broughton Mills), co-founder of Extinction Rebellion Furness, talks about what motivates her to act for a better world.

“Anything that invites people to act from a place of service in the smallest of ways is going to have an effect on the cosmos. Because what affects one, affects everyone. From the point of view of the connected self, everything we do matters. The devaluation of small, nurturing acts comes from the mindset of patriarchal civilisation and the logic of separation ... In the logic of connection, by contrast, everything we do is in alignment: spirit and matter, money and the sacred.” (Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economics*)

I sat down today to write and thought to myself: how do I capture the sheer magnitude of what is happening around the world? How do I explain my thoughts, that everything we do or do not do has an effect on many other humans, creatures and the world? How do I capture my feelings and experiences as a ‘snowflake millennial’ and share them with the whole community, in a way that will not offend or jar, but help resonate in positive self-reflection? That will help others to navigate changes that could be painful at first but benefit us all? The truth is, I most likely can’t. But here I go: and start at the beginning.

These past three years to me have been a steep learning curve, full of awakenings, dismantlings and rebirths. I was in no way prepared to receive the flood of self-learning (and unlearning) that motherhood brings. To have every aspect of my soul torn down and built anew through the growth of something so precious, such that it can change one’s entire existence through the simple realisation that you are entirely responsible for its very being. The birth of my first child awoke me to a wider world than I previously inhabited. This new world had more people in, more dangers in it, bigger and more affective consequences in it. It became an entirely unselfish place from the moment she entered it. And so, a mother was born, and activism became my mode of transport.

The future became so much more important than my own quaint bubble of farming life in The Mills. My child might leave this place and what world would she find? What had I done to secure that that meeting would be a positive or at least well-prepared one? I think Attenborough’s words rang in many an ear when he said, *“How could I look my grandchildren in the eye and say I knew what was happening to the world and did nothing?”* It was this realisation that energised me to take a stand every time I held my daughters gaze and it was this realisation that spurred me to co-found Extinction Rebellion Furness and to join in the environmental protests last September at Manchester’s Northern Uprising and London’s shutdown last October. For too long we have allowed the exploitation of people and planet to be justified by short-term goals of economic profit: profit only enjoyed by the few, off the back of the many. This was no longer a world and I could allow my children’s future to be invested in.

The concept of protecting the planet is relatively accepted, even if some still don’t actively participate in changes needed to allow such protection to come to fruition. These include: stopping over-consumption of materialistic luxuries; refusing unsustainably-sourced products; halting excessive travel; and stopping the destruction of ecologically-important habitats.



The understanding that social justice is equally important to the survival and longevity of our shared environment is less confidently regarded. After all, from a mother's perspective, what world is worth saving if it still systematically oppresses one people to benefit another? This was a turning point for me. One that has not come easily and one that I see as a journey, not a destination. The protection of the planet is sometimes seen as external work: work we grow from the outside and absorb into our everyday. But social justice undeniably begins with an internal recognition that we are all in some way complicit in those injustices we recognise as unfair. It is here that the survival of planet and people become intrinsically intertwined.

The photograph I've shared is of myself introducing my daughter to a tribal representative of an Amazonian people, at a time when the destruction of our planet's important habitat was in the popular media. The plight of the Amazon rainforest is unchanged, but sadly media interest in its destruction is less acute.

My smile in this photograph reflects the ignorance that white privilege brings as well as the western privilege that created the threat to his home in the first place. It took 30 seconds of polite conversation, leading to an automatic British apology, to make me realise how genuinely sorry I was. Their home and culture has been threatened for so long by our shared history (as colonist and colonised) and it has taken a sense of the collapse of my own society for me to acknowledge my part in it.

It is our privilege to buy products that ultimately fund the burning of his lands: not the reverse. It is this same privilege built upon profiteering in stolen lands, through excessive corruption and inconceivable violence, that has also fed 60% of planetary species into the western consumption machine. Our western society plays a disproportionate role in poisoning the air we all breathe, the water we all drink and pillaging the ground where we all walk. I've given birth on a rapidly sinking ship and I'm only just beginning to learn how to swim.

As much as this may read as pessimist's report of life looking out from a collapsing ivory castle, there is great hope to be had amid the existential threat of climate change. We see it also in the current global uprising of BAME communities and those who support them: we no longer hide from ourselves and we can begin healing the legacy of our past. We can learn from the areas of our history that have left scars, and use that understanding to help build a humble, respectful and regenerative future.

The Five Anglican Marks of Mission to which a recent *Supplement* referred almost entirely structure the direction of our work as Christians in this healing process. It's a process that I strongly believe begins with a deep, meditative process of self-reflection. Here's a reminder of the Five Marks of Mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

As a mother, it is my duty to do my best by my children. Egotism and fear should not be barriers to searching inside myself for much-needed change or, externally, being a part of a movement for good. As Christians and as simple creatures of this shared earth, it is a basic necessity that we all do the same.

HOPE IN THE PRESENT

"Hope is realistic about the dangers and troubles that may be ahead, and gives the strength to endure them."

So wrote Mark Russ, the "Jolly Quaker", in his blog on Monday. He's absolutely right. When hope is really just wishful thinking or lack of realism, it sets us up for damaging disappointment and leaves us unprepared for things that may go wrong. True hope is like true prayer: it doesn't involve the expectation that God or anyone else will do all the work for us. It does not inhibit action on our own behalf. True hope and prayer stimulate and strengthen us. There was a great article on what hope should look like in *Psychology Today* from July 2018. It's not written from a Christian perspective, but the points that it raises will resonate with every faithful person:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201807/7-downsides-hope>

Christian hope, as St Paul writes, is borne out a real connection with both the world and its problems and with God and his promises. Josh has written about the way in which God uses our perseverance in suffering to "steer[us] towards a good end." It is through actually living that we attain to hope, not by shutting out bad things, or the things we disagree with, and 'hoping' that everything will turn out as we would like.

With (broadly) falling infection rates and lockdown easing in all sorts of ways, it's an important time to reflect on questions of hope, as they affect our society. Few would deny that we have endured through a

period of suffering. How has it formed our character and given us hope for a better world?

An enforced fast

Giving up contact with other people has been very hard, and has given most of us far more solitude than we really needed. There is tuition in hope to be found in the things we have had to give up, however. The most striking to me was the virtual cessation of air travel and the very substantial reduction in other transport use. Coupled with a reduction in energy generation by fuel combustion, the result was an extraordinary drop in air pollution and a consequent drop in the number of premature deaths due to air pollution. Did you see the 'before' and 'after' pictures of the skyline in some of the world's cities? It was a truly extraordinary sight, speaking of cleansing and life, revealing the creation in all its beauty, without the miasma with which human activity previously veiled it.

You probably also saw film and pictures of wild animals venturing into urban areas and other beneficial effects of lockdown for wildlife. Where our son lives, under the Luton airport flightpath, people have rejoiced to experience the birdsong and silent skies.

A range of factors associated with lockdown have also allowed Great Britain to enjoy its longest period of coal-free power generation since the 1880s: over 2 months reliant chiefly on nuclear and renewables, with a bit of gas thrown in.

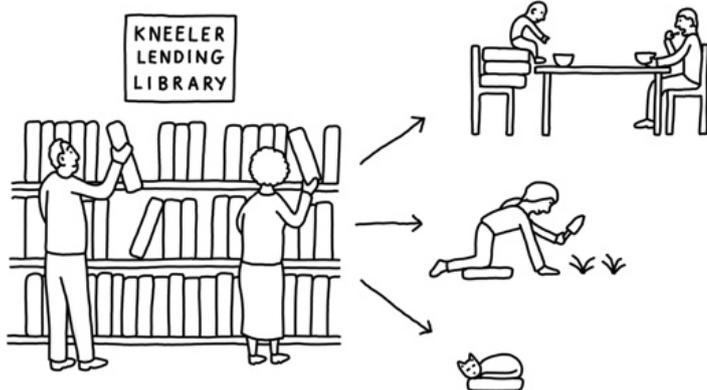
A return to normality will of course bring a recovery in industrial energy use and there is concern that avoiding of public transport will lead to an increase in pollution by cars. The lockdown has given us a brief taste of what life might be like without some of our worst excesses. It has shown what is possible and hinted at what the benefits of reduction might be. If only we were to achieve those benefits without having to endure a lockdown! Might this be the nudge we need to make changes in our lives, as well as campaigning for bigger changes at a societal level. Now is the time to consider:

- Working from home whenever possible
- Reducing personal travel, particularly by air
- Avoiding foods with 'high food miles' (especially vegetables which have been flown in out of season) and consciously seeking out UK or even local produce wherever we can
- Changing to a 'green energy' tariff
- Reducing energy usage at home

THE KNEELERS

HOW THEY ARE BEING USED DURING THE PANDEMIC

SOME WERE LENT OUT BEFORE THE START OF LOCKDOWN



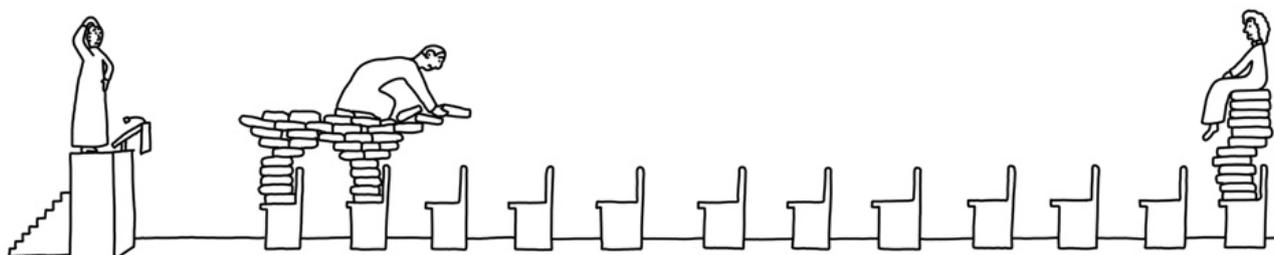
A FEW WERE PILFERED
(VERY TRICKY TO DETECT)



PENITENT KNEELER THIEF RETURNS STASH, HAVING BEEN CONVERTED BY EMBROIDERED MESSAGES



THE CLERGY USE THE REMAINDER FOR (SOCIALLY-DISTANCED) TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISES



Retail therapy

The re-opening of shops this week is an opportunity to reflect on our consumer culture. Consumption is like money: it is the root of all kinds of evil; not evil of itself, but it becomes evil when it is excessive, selfish or conducted without thought for others.

We can all shop better by consuming less; by choosing sustainable, seasonal food produced to high standards and sourced locally; by favouring high-quality, robust goods over cheap, disposable items from low-wage economies; and by concentrating on what we need rather than what we want. It's also important to look at packaging and in particular to avoid buying things that come in bags, wrap and cartons that cannot even go in the plastic recycling.

There is also fresh impetus from the government for the relaxation of Sunday trading laws. I am not personally troubled by people shopping on Sunday. The sabbath is a day for rest and was created for human beings, not the other way round (Mark 2:28). But here is the point: if I shop, someone else is having to work. It may be that they receive their rest, their opportunity to pray, worship or reflect if they want it – but they may not. That is the issue. Is our society providing everyone (especially the low-waged) with adequate sabbath? I'm not at all convinced that it is, and until it does, we should think very carefully before further sacrifice of Sunday on the altar of economic activity.

Caring for others

A time of trial has helped us to focus on assisting those who are vulnerable for whatever reason. Across our community and nation, people have stepped up to this challenge, proving just how much innate good there is in human beings, waiting to be brought forth.

A notable lesson in caring came this week in the successful campaign by footballer Marcus Rashford, to persuade the government to reverse its decision not to support children entitled to free school meals over the summer. As true people of hope, we can both rejoice in this, but also ask ourselves what will happen the next holiday, or why it is necessary to support people in this way at all? Why are so many people in such a large and successful economy unable to feed themselves adequately from their own resources? This in fact was the starting point of Rashford's campaign: not just a summer of meal vouchers, but an end to child poverty. That is a proper subject of hope. And it is one in which we could realistically hope to make a profound difference which would benefit everyone.

PRAYERS

Let us pray for discernment and courage to examine all those aspects of our lives which have the potential to impact positively or negatively upon other people, or upon the environment:

- Our purchasing
- Our travelling
- Our use of fuel and power
- The choices we make
- The way in which our rubbish is dealt with
- Our giving and volunteering
- Our campaigning and the issues we support

Enable us to see where equity lies, that all may share in the fruits of creation. And help us to appreciate and understand the beauty and the fragility of your creation, and the responsibility for it, which you entrusted to us in the time of our innocence.

Help us to avoid selfishness in all its forms and inspire us with wisdom, as we grapple with different ways of understanding what is 'good' and how to achieve it. Bring us to measured and respectful debate about what our aims as a society should be, and the routes by which we should travel together toward those aims.

In all of this, keep us mindful of your commandments that we love you, and love one another – even our enemies – as we should wish to be loved ourselves. Fill us with compassion and forgiveness. Equip us with your Holy Spirit to live each day to your praise and glory, following in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who went through the land bringing healing and wholeness to all who believed in him, and then gave his life for salvation of all.

Let us bring before the Lord today all those known to us who suffer in sorrow, sickness, need or any other adversity. May those in difficulty know your presence, your healing and hope, and may we know how to bring that hope to them.

We remember all who have died in the faith and fear of God, commending them to your gracious keeping and thanking you for the memories we cherish. May all those whom we love and see no longer rest in peace and rise in glory.

Amen.