



Dear Friends,

It was with mixed feelings that we said goodbye to Judith Bell this week. As you can see, Helen and I, on behalf of the church, gave her a socially distanced planter to take with her. Judith is moving to the Southampton area, and will initially live with her son Tim and family, until she can find a new home for herself. We thank God for all that Judith and Colin meant to us while they lived in Alsager and worshipped at Wesley Place. We pray for Judith as she moves, that she will find a home to suit, and a new church and friends so that she may settle. Her son Chris stays in Alsager, and remains in our thoughts and prayers too. Judith, Chris and family, Tim and family, we ask God's blessing upon you!

487

SINGING THE FAITH



You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

Every week Harriet chooses some hymns to keep the choir singing! She always has this song on the list as a sign of hope. The passage from Isaiah that it comes from is the one of the readings set for this Sunday. It was from that time, so relevant for us at the moment, when the nation of Israel was thinking about returning from exile. Through the prophets like Isaiah, God was preparing them to

Stuart Dauermann (b. 1944)
and Steffi Geiser Rubin

be ready for what came next. And it wasn't to be as simple as getting back to normal. Although in different circumstances, we can learn much from those prophets. Joy wasn't just a happy singing of a fast song that was fun to sing, the reason they were to return from exile with joy was because they were to have heard God's word as much as the ground had received the rain and enabled the crops to grow. The question for us has got to be - What is God's word to us, what are God's purposes, and do we hear them and respond accordingly?

One of my Christmas presents last year was a subscription to BBC History Magazine, and I have loved the variety of material in it. There was a very interesting article recently about pandemics in the past, and the changes that have resulted from them in history.

One of them struck me as having a particularly Biblical theme - people buried their dead, mourned for what they had lost, learnt as much as the science of their day allowed them to, and then, although economic activity gradually returned, there was always a renewed concern for justice. The poorest before the plague always suffered the most during the plague, and when people realised this they showed a renewed interest in relieving that poverty through whatever means were appropriate at the time. For example, one village after the middle ages collected for a house and a wage for an extra member of the clergy because it was recognised that Christian charity could be relied upon to bring comfort and care. That charity continued well into the twentieth century in various forms, ending its purposes as a school for local children.

I think Harriet's had some response to her hymns listed each week, as she says this week there was a call for more modern christian pop music - Hurrah! She has suggested the following:

That's How the God Lord Works
<https://youtu.be/rqPnDMBzM5k>

And all the people said amen
<https://youtu.be/T9ifzzMD7zk>

Our God is an awesome God
<https://youtu.be/aflHUpeBcUo>

Isaiah 55:

*10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,*

*11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

*12 For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

*13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

If you want the sung version of 'You shall go out with joy' that Harriet suggests you can find it here:

<https://youtu.be/unWnWSgoSt0>

I was reminded of this post on social media this week, as my children moan about the ineptitude of their father's ability with technology, others tell me how clever I am and they couldn't possibly do what I do. Such is the tension of being middle aged I suppose!

If you've seen the Youtube service for this week, you'll see that I think the climate emergency is one of the great issues of our day and age, God's word is coming to the human race quite clearly - either we respond and cut carbon emissions and save the planet, or our lives will continue to be disrupted and coronavirus will be one of the least of our worries.

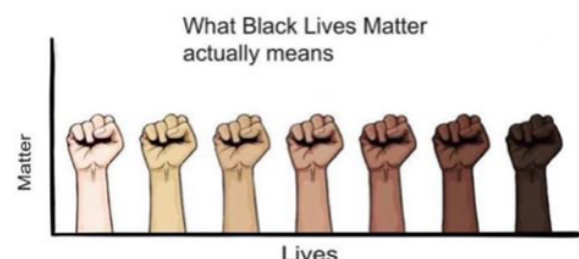
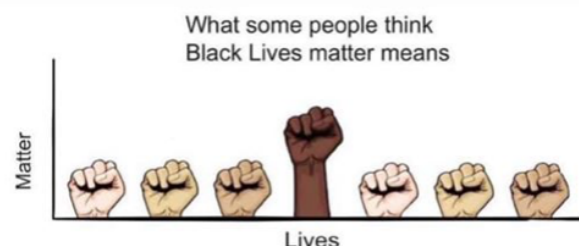
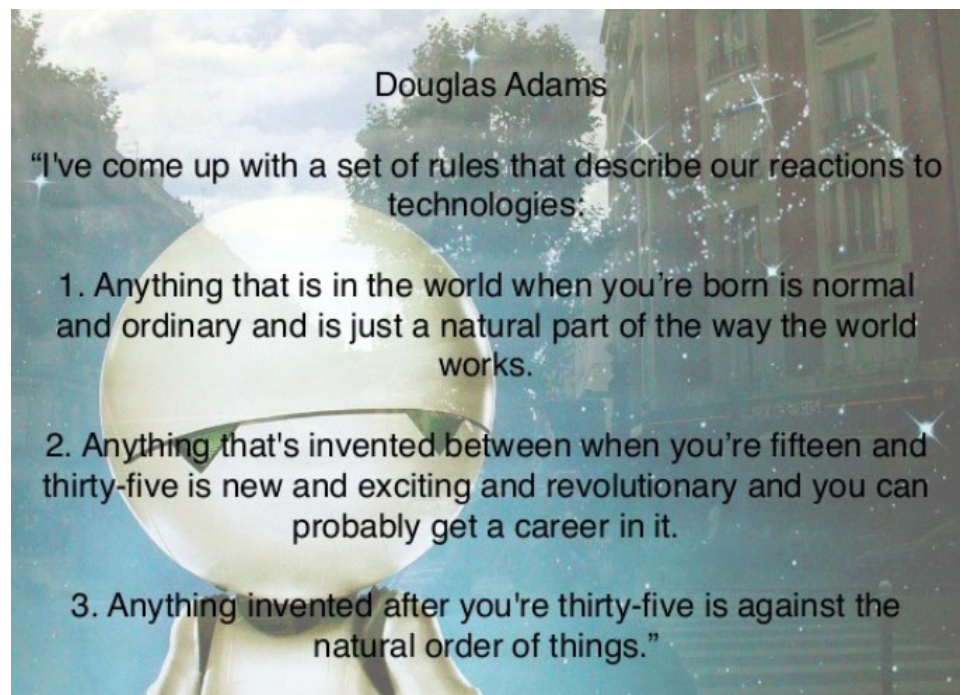


I took this picture of a bee banner in the rain the day I went to hear Greta Thunberg in Bristol. It's message is very simple, yet profoundly true. In next week's Youtube service I intend to focus bit more on what we can do for the climate emergency.

Meanwhile another great big issue remains the Black Lives Matter campaign. It so obviously is

needed, as some things haven't changed in the thirty or so years since I trained for ministry, and first came across my own racism in a racism awareness training course. The fact that black people still feel the question 'where do you come from' means something different when asked of them, than a white person, is just such a simple example.

One of the ways those of us who are white can begin to understand the endemic racism in our midst is to realise something that's there, that we collude with and replicate all the time, without realising we are doing it. The Methodist Church has published an



Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Toolkit, which is good training, from the section on Race we find this piece about White privilege. Most of us live with it all the time without realising it. Have a read and think how you just take your privileges for granted. If you don't quite understand, if you're a man, ask a woman what male privilege is, and if you're a woman and you know a man who doesn't understand male privilege, tell him!!

White privilege

Unpacking the invisible knapsack: Peggy McIntosh

- As a White person, I realised I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects which puts me at an advantage: White privilege.
- I think White people are carefully taught not to recognise White privilege, as males are taught not to recognise male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have White privilege.
- I have come to see White privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but which was 'meant' to remain hidden. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank cheques.

The daily effects of White privilege on my life: Peggy McIntosh

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- Whether I use credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin colour not to work against the appearance of my financial reliability.
- I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, poverty or illiteracy of my race.
- I can speak in public or challenge a situation without putting my race on trial.
- I can do well without being called a credit to my race.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to, "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
- If a police officer stops me, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I can go home from most meetings feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

One of the other readings set for this week is Romans 8: 1-11, just a few verses from that passage read as follows:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Harriet was reminded last week of the great favourite old hymn 'And can it be' a version of which, in big style can be found here: <https://youtu.be/sQelGbKqiW8>

The famous hymn is based, in many ways, on this passage. For St Paul, as for the Wesleys, 'the flesh' was the whole human way of being, the human condition, as it's sometimes called. Freedom from it means freedom from racism, and any other sin of the human condition that we are susceptible to. The great and wonderful truth of what God has done in Christ, is to free us from it - so we can, with education and awareness be free. We are also, though ashamed of the racism and sin we find in ourselves, free from the guilt - we are obliged to live that freedom and challenge injustice wherever it is found, thus enabling that life of peace that St Paul spoke of. Corporately and collectively, this is called the Kingdom of God, 'Thy Kingdom come'.

1. Mine eyes have seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord;
he is trampling out the vintage
where the grapes of wrath are stored;
he hath loosed the fateful lightning
of his terrible swift sword;
his truth is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

2. He has sounded forth the trumpet that
shall never call retreat;
he is sifting out the hearts of men
before his judgment seat;
O be swift, my soul, to answer him;
be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Our God is marching on.

3. In the beauty of the lilies
Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in his bosom
that transfigures you and me;
as he died to make men holy,
let us live to make men free,
while God is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
While God is marching on.

To hear it big and join in, here's the link:
Mine Eyes have seen the Glory - Royal Albert Hall Big Sing
https://youtu.be/maty13s_db4

This hymn, like 'we shall go out with joy' is a hymn of faith and hope, it's looking towards the future and it's hope is for the transformation that Christ will ultimately bring. It's what the verses in Romans were meaning too: '*as he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free*'.

There is much to think about this week. Don't forget to keep saving your envelopes, giving by direct means online, sending us a cheque, or asking Alison to come and fetch your cash. Don't forget to let Harriet or myself have your choice of favourite hymns, we are gradually compiling the favourites list!

And also, as an extra this week, we're asking you to complete this form about what we are learning in lockdown. Church Council met last week, and realise there is much work to do before we can re-open the building. The first task is to understand how we are feeling, and this form is asking you to let myself and the church leadership know. Please spend some time prayerfully answering the 4 questions. Wesley Place is a church dear to our hearts, and putting into words what it means is sometimes hard. Members of Church Council spoke of how important it is that we continue to include everyone, especially of all ages. What we miss, what it's time we let go of, what we really need to hold on to, are all questions that the Prophet Isaiah would have been familiar with as he asked the people to listen for God's word, before promising they would go out with joy.

This week as well as remembering Judith Bell as she moves, we hold Barbara Houghton in our prayers after a fall and hospital visit, her husband George and their son Jonathan and family, and I apologise to Cynthia Cartledge for getting your name wrong last week, oops, sorry Cynthia.

Climate Blessing

We Hold the Earth

We hold brothers and sisters who suffer from storms and droughts
intensified by climate change.

We hold all species that suffer.

We hold world leaders delegated to make decisions for life.

We pray that the web of life may be mended through courageous actions to
limit carbon emissions. We pray for right actions for adaptation and
mitigation to help our already suffering earth community. We pray that
love and wisdom might inspire my actions and our actions as communities.

so that we may, with integrity, look into the eyes of brothers and sisters
and all beings and truthfully
say, we are doing our part to care for them and the future of the children.
May love transform us and our world with new steps toward life and hope.

Amen

THE SENILITY PRAYER:

God grant me the senility
to forget the people
I never liked anyway,
the good fortune
to run into the ones I do,
and the eyesight to tell

I love this, a
rare picture of
a mother vise-
grip feeding her
baby wrenches.
Nature, truly is
amazing!!



The Methodist Church - Alsager Mission Area.

Please return to a steward or the Minister.

What are we learning in lockdown? What is God saying to us?

What do we miss that we should now let go of - Let us grieve and move on

What have we lost that we must get back - Let's remember why

What are we holding on to that we need? We must learn and grow

What is new that we are learning? We must adapt and change