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The Ark

WHATEVER

Today we hear a lot of 'buzzwords' or fashionable words — they come along and everyone uses them for a while.

You may well be familiar with things such as “24/7” we used to say ‘all the time’ or ‘every day’ ; there’s also ‘chill’ which is used totally out of context to mean ‘relax’ when the real meaning of the word chill is an unpleasant experience or feeling of fear.

One word which is used a great deal and can be irritating is “Whatever”. I’ve heard people arguing and then rather than agree to differ or sort it out, they will walk away from each other shouting and waving their arm in a dismissive manner saying “Whatever”, in other words it’s being used as a dismissive, non-committal word which portrays a ‘couldn’t care less’ attitude.

These days many folks avoid making commitments to things, be it to jobs, partnerships, church, all kinds of things but decisions are a big part of life. There is a huge move to get us all to accept things that are clearly wrong and against God’s commands and advice. We have been prepared to adopt the attitude of ‘live and let live’, ‘don’t get involved’, ‘keep yourself to yourself’, ‘don’t rock the boat’ or ‘everyone’s doing it, so it must be OK’. But how wrong can we be?

There are some very well known words which Joshua said which we need to remember as they apply to us today:

Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15.

The same question is asked of us — who will you serve? We can’t say “whatever” or “whoever” - we need to make a choice.

God requires that of us; we can’t play at being Christians — we either are or we're not.

The Lord needs us to make our stand for Him today.



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WHO HAD A PET OWL?—
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QI Fact— ‘Forty’ is the only number in English that has its letters in alphabetical order.



BIBLE READING—MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-52

³¹ He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’

³³ He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’

⁴⁴ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on

finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ ‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ ⁵² And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’

[On-Line Bible](#)

THIS WEEK’S REFLECTION

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN LIKE?

This is a question I sometimes put to the children at school, well almost. The task I actually set in R.E. is to draw a picture of what they think heaven is like.

Some pictures will show heaven as a floating, fluffy cloud. A place that is cotton-wool soft, the sort of scene you might gaze upon from an aeroplane window when flying above the clouds, and imagine you might jump onto and have your fall cushioned, not plunge 30,000 feet to earth! It is the image of a land presided over by a kindly, elderly Father, God sitting on a golden throne with a white billowing beard merging into the clouds below. It is a soft, gentle, safe place where falls are cushioned and all live in comfort.

Another route that children sometimes take, is that of a place where everyone is happy. To them, the setting and background is less important than the happy, smiling faces of heaven’s inhabitants. For them heaven is a place of happiness and enjoyment for all people.

Others will draw something different again. This time they focus on their own personal heaven. It is a scene dominated by electronic devices, with fast food delivered to the side of their gaming chair. A place complete with X-Box, Tablet or any other device you can think of. A land where you can play on Fortnite, Rocket League and Minecraft all day and, if you get bored of that, a tablet where you might watch others on YouTube playing those same games.

(Yes, today’s children really do that and some YouTubers make big bucks doing it!) This is their heaven.

I’m sure many of you will identify to some extent with the first two examples; places of protection, safety and happiness. But I wonder what you think of the third, a very common one in my experience. To some of you, this final example might seem more like hell. You might wonder what on earth, or in heaven, I am talking about - Fortnite is simply two-weeks-misspelt, not a video game that entertains some young people for many hours, depriving them of movement, daylight and vitamin D!

We could debate what we think of these three children’s ideas for ever, but each has its own merit. The first describing a place of safety, free from worry and harm. The second, a place where all are offered true happiness. The third, a personal heaven from one particular point of view. All have their own appeal, even if the subject matter of the third might be different for each of us.

But what about you? What would you draw if you were asked to do the same task? Why not have a go and see what you come up with?

Why not have a go and see what you come up with?

The reason why this task is so simple whilst being so incredibly difficult, is that we cannot see the kingdom of heaven in its entirety until we enter it. We can merely form our own ideas based on what we know or imagine. We can’t yet ‘Zoom’ heaven to see it!

There are, however, clues in our gospel reading. Jesus begins to reveal to us what heaven is like through his ‘The Kingdom of heaven is like...’ parables in Matthew’s gospel. Just like on ITV’s Catchphrase, when each press of the button reveals one section of the image, Jesus reveals to us aspects of heaven through these sayings.

The first thing that strikes me about these short parables, is that they seem to be quite a disappointment. Stories about a seed that turn into a bush that middle-eastern

PAIN KILLERS

Do you ever take pain killers? If so, do you take one for your shoulder, and another one for you knee? Of course not. Once the painkiller enters your bloodstream, it goes everywhere, soothing and damping down the pain, and hitting all the right spots.

God works a bit like that on the pain in our lives. He has a prescription for ALL the problem areas of our lives. Most of us carry emotional scars, or a burden, or some heart-ache, around with us. It may be the trauma of loss, or it may be anxiety for our family. It may be uncertainty over our jobs, and our futures.

Whatever it is, God offers us a prescription to help the pain. The psalmist writes: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1) Jesus added: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

This kind of help is real and immediate and there for the asking. We don’t have to put up with our disease and struggle alone. God, our heavenly Father, is only a prayer away. Not just twice a day, after meals, but whenever we need him.

WHAT GOES AROUND...

When customers visited the first supermarkets in the UK, they were afraid to pick up goods from the shelves in case they were told off.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE HAD A PET OWL

Iconic nurse Florence Nightingale made her name tending to soldiers during the Crimean War but she practised her nursing capabilities as a youngster by tending to a plethora of injured animals. One of the more unusual ones was a little owl called Athena that she trained to peck her sister when she was being annoying.

And it wasn't just woodland birds that took her fancy - she adopted at least 60 cats during her lifetime and advocated the use of small animals, even tortoises, to help sick people in hospital recover more quickly..



Continued from page 3

farmers treat as a weed; parables about baking bread, ploughing and fishing; and a story about a merchant – the polyester-suited car salesmen of the day. None of these really cut the mustard! What can these short, dull parables tell us about the kingdom of heaven?

Those images have never appeared in the children's work and I doubt they are part of your own imaginings. Yet their ordinary, down to earth nature can offer great comfort. God's kingdom is not like earth's proud empires that will pass away; it's not about golden thrones, grandeur and exclusivity; neither is it about iPads, X-Boxes or any other material possessions. Heaven's worth is invaluable, even when measured against the finest of pearls. Heaven offers more than anything we can imagine. It is a place open to all, rich and poor, with a special welcome for lowly, down to earth folk and there's even room for the untrustworthy merchant! God's net is wide enough to catch all, yet it is up to us whether we want to remain in his net.

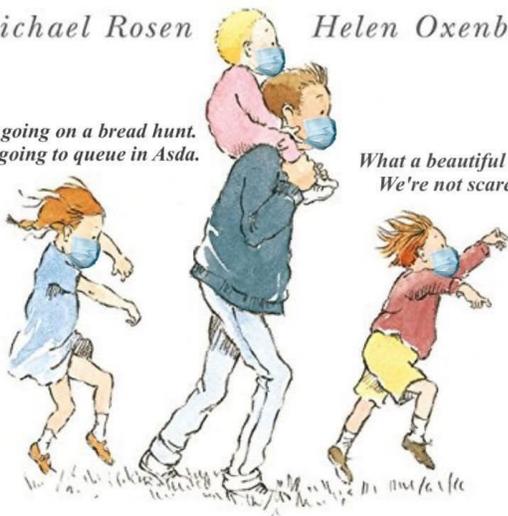
Whatever is revealed to us about heaven, we can be sure that all are invited. We cannot earn it and it is not dependant on our goodness or otherwise. We simply have to accept the invitation offered to us in Christ. Once we have accepted it, we are not to wait for 'pie in the sky when we die', but work to ensure that, like Jesus throughout his ministry, we reveal glimpses of heaven to our brothers and sisters with whom we share this planet. Stealing the words of Charles Wesley, may the 'Joy of heaven to earth come down!' Amen.

Tom Ferguson

We're Going on a Bread Hunt

Michael Rosen Helen Oxenbury

*We're going on a bread hunt.
We're going to queue in Asda.*



*What a beautiful day!
We're not scared.*

poke.

How to ATTEND Church Online

GET OUT OF BED AND GET DRESSED

It'll put you in the right mindset to worship

GO THROUGH YOUR NORMAL SUNDAY ROUTINE

Minus the "hurry up, we're running late!" part

GATHER YOUR FAMILY TOGETHER

No multitasking; worship is a family activity!

PROJECT THE FEED ON YOUR LARGEST SCREEN

It'll feel more like you're "there"

SING ALONG LOUD AND PROUD

Yes, it feels weird; it feels weird for the people who are leading worship in an empty room, too

PAY YOUR TITHE

LEAN INTO THE MESSAGE

Say "Amen," clap, shout, and have a time of prayer at the end; make your home a sanctuary

Home is a very special place. The dictionary describes it as where we live or dwell

It is our base, the place we come back to after a day's work; a holiday; or our travels.

Home is where our family and loved ones are; it's where we keep our belongings; our memories and things that are special to us; the place where we eat and rest. When we are unwell or feeling down, there's something about home that is soothing and comforting, where we can feel at ease and we can recover. Let's thank God today for our home. A truly happy home is where God is welcomed and honoured — remember it is God who puts us in families and provides our security, shelter and food. If we include Him in our home and family life, we can expect blessings!

“Unless the Lord builds the house its builders labour in vain.”

Psalm 127:1

PRAYER

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.
Day followed night, every week had a Sunday
And that was the day for church.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.
We made our plans, held our meetings,
Kept the roof on the church and the show on the road.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.
We would see colleagues, friends and loved ones again,
And we would embrace, laugh and share stories as we always have.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

And now we know something new.
We know that the world is not ours to control,
And that our plans are confounded by the smallest microbe.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

And now we know something new.
We know that church is not committees, agendas and buildings,
It is us, in homes, streets, hospitals throughout the world.

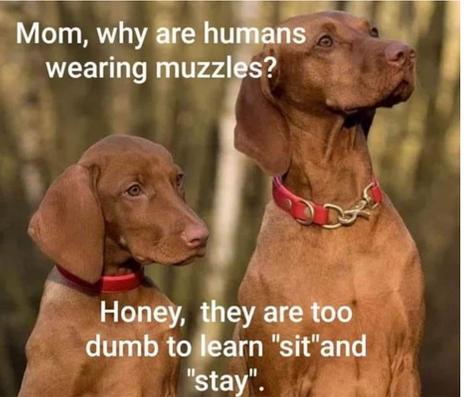
How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

And now we know something new.
We only have today with those we love, today is the day
To say “I love you”, to mend an argument, to hold on tight.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Amen

*By Revd Michaela Youngson
Chair of the London District
Past President of Conference*



ACTUAL COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY A RESORT CHAIN (BEFORE LOCK-DOWN!)

- ◆ On my holiday to India, I was disgusted to find that almost every restaurant served curry. I don't like spicy food.
- ◆ We booked an excursion to a water park, but no one told us we had to bring our own swimsuits and towels. We assumed it would be included in the price.
- ◆ The beach was too sandy. We had to clean everything when we returned to our room.
- ◆ No one told us there would be fish in the water. The children were scared.
- ◆ It took us nine hours to fly home from Jamaica to England. It took the Americans only three hours to get home. This seems unfair.
- ◆ We had to line up outside to catch the boat and there was no air-conditioning.
- ◆ I was bitten by a mosquito. The brochure did not mention mosquitoes.

I need to practice social-distancing - from my refrigerator.

THE LOCKDOWN LIFTS

There's life in the town!
No longer 'locked down'!
The people stroll out in the sun
The majestic trees
Sway in the light breeze
Like they wanted to join in the fun!

Like light after dark!
We can walk in the park!
Buy our tea, and sit out on the grass!
We can chat to our friends
As our loneliness ends
And we smile at the strangers we pass!

Yes there are still queues
Which cease to amuse
But things are no longer so black!
As they sing in that song -
You miss what is gone,
But it's great when at last it comes back!

By Nigel Beeton

I finally remember what Zoom meetings remind me of.



It's Good to Talk

If you wish to talk to a Minister
then please contact Rev Barry

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The **Methodist Church** 

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

A year ago, on 17 July 2019, I had a heart attack. I was frightened, anxious, worried. I was only xx years old. Lots of things I wanted to do. Wanted to see my grandchildren grow up. Maybe I would be a great grandparent. A year later, here I am, frightened, anxious, worried. That's not how it was supposed to be. But many things have happened in twelve months. Lots of things have changed. Things which neither I, nor anyone else, could have foreseen. Things over which we have had little or no control. Other people are making the big decisions. Sometimes they get it right. Sometimes wrong. I would not criticise. That is too easy. And this is an unprecedented crisis.

So, if we have no say in what happens, what can we do? I suppose we can just accept that our lives are in their hands. We just follow the rules and hope for the best. Well, I believe in following the rules – social distancing, no unnecessary journeys, wearing face masks etc. However, we are social animals. We need other people. Even when we follow the rules we are still only able to meet in very small groups. Some cannot even meet with their family, siblings, children or grandchildren.

So, the rules may separate us from our loved ones. But no rules can separate us from God. He is always there, a constant in our lives.

As Christians we are called upon to pray to God. And over these past few months I have felt more than ever the need to pray. Especially when there is little prospect of an early end to this crisis, locally, nationally or internationally. Which is where I have a problem. I must confess that have difficulty when people say "We should pray for (people, crisis or situation....)." I just never know where or how to start. I always feel that I am being challenged, or tested – and found lacking. But I get over it by not using the word "pray." Instead I "talk" to God. Just like I would talk to a friend. After all, God is my friend, so it should not be a problem. And it is something I can do alone. I don't have to be in a group, so fits in well with the current situation.

I think that, as Christians, this is something we can, and should, be doing to help in this crisis. We can talk to God. Take a few minutes each day, when it is quiet, no distractions, outdoors or indoors. Tell Him how you are feeling. Tell Him what, or who, you are worried about, personally and on the larger worldwide scale. Talk to God about your fears and hopes. And don't forget to mention the good things that you have experienced.

It really is that easy. Just chatting to a friend. Talking to God will certainly help you to get through this crisis and, if we all talk to God, well, who knows what might happen?

Ian Riley