

LINK PLUS++++

April 2021

Dear Friends

This is the second Easter that we will have been in Lockdown, and although East Brent and Milton will be opening their doors from this Easter Sunday, for some churches the decision to re-open has been more complex. But whether you will be in church in person, on zoom or in your home with a piece of paper, I hope that this Easter will be different from last year.

One thing that this year has taught me is the value of hope. It is hope that has seen us through the crisis times, hope that has sustained us when we have felt at our lowest, and hope that now drives us forward as we look towards a time when vaccinations will make things possible again. Hope brings joy, peace, and contentment in times of turmoil and stress. On this Easter (compared with last) we can already say "Tomorrow is a better day".

Easter itself is built on hope. The disciples hoped that what Jesus told them about who he was and what he was doing would make a difference in their lives and to the world; and it did. The first to see Jesus after his resurrection ran to tell the others what had happened because, in this, all their hopes had been fulfilled. There was, and is still, a new way of living and being, because of Jesus!

Easter brings hope, and hope brings new birth after death and resurrection. God's church was born anew after the horror of that first Easter. If we are Easter people, then the church today must be reborn in hope following the fears and frustrations of pandemic. As followers

of Jesus the same hope enables us to trust him and follow him and be led by him into the future.

May you be greatly blessed this Easter, as you discover afresh what Jesus has done for you.

Steve

Brean

<http://www.breanmethodistchurch.org.uk>

Easter. I get the feeling it's been a long time coming and suddenly it is here. However do we cope with both that and an extra hour we now have in the day as well? I don't know about you, but Lent seems to have passed me by with scarcely a murmur. To my shame, I can't say I have given it much notice this year. But I guess too, that it is the moment of quiet and reflection before new activity, and new life.

Which brings me to last month's Link. The topic was Rosemary's lambs. She was hoping for a basically dry month and warm enough to operate comfortably. Perhaps lambing is all finished now, but this is what she has said on the weekend the clocks went forward:

Well, I am now at the last gasp. Only 4 more to go and I hopefully will have lambed 70 by the time I have finished.

This in sheep terms is a very small flock but plenty for me.

The 4 left are mainly first time mums who have no idea what is happening. They either back off in horror and stare at this thing that has appeared or get so excited that they go round in circles and don't allow the lamb to feed. So do need more watching than older ewes.

Fortunately all mine have been good mums so far and the lambs are doing well.

As usual I have a number of lambs to bottle feed. I start off really enjoying it. 2 months later I am not so keen.

We are getting ready on site for April 12th.

We have been shut for so long it will seem odd to welcome everyone back

It will be nice to see the church open again and see everyone.

Among all the holiday activity that has dominated Brean in recent years, it is good to see that traditional routines, ones that are part of nature's regular cycle of creation, are still being maintained in our

midst. For someone like me who grew up in a village and culture where the idea of a farmer could only be seen in masculine terms, I find it richly rewarding to see farming as a woman's livelihood too. Well done Rose.

April 12th is red letter day for most of the sites in Brean. Easter will have gone by then so, unless we get groups of youngsters hell bent on defying Covid rules it will be relatively quiet in the village over Easter weekend. From April 12th sites will be able to open for self-catering visits, and I am sure that many people are looking forward to that. That includes several of our regular summer visitors. As Rose intimates we shall be glad to welcome them as we greet each other into our church again on 18th. That really will be a blessing.

Happy Easter from all of us
Harvey Allen

Brent Knoll

We have decided, predominantly for safeguarding reasons, not to open our Chapel on Easter Sunday. We have all given this much thought and believe this to be the right decision. Instead, those of us who can will be joining in fellowship via Zoom in the service led by Rev Steve.

And writing of Zoom services, I think now is the time to send out a big "thank you" to all ministers who have kept our Sunday services going throughout these difficult times. They really have provided a vital service (in many ways!) for those of us who have joined in together each week. A special thank you to Rev Steve who has been sending out weekly services to us at this end of the Circuit. You've kept us worshipping!

We are looking, possibly, to re-open at Pentecost which this year falls on Sunday 23rd May. But we are taking it steady, putting the safety of our congregation first, so as always, I will update you as soon as we know ourselves. But whenever we re-open, one thing is certain. At some point, we will be having a service of thanksgiving for all who have come through this most trying of years and of remembrance for those who, so very sadly, didn't.

Because despite it being a year like no other, there have been moments of light in an otherwise dark time. Our incredible National Health Service - those men and woman at the coal face of this pandemic - have shown such courage and have been such an inspiration as they served tirelessly, putting their own selves at risk. Then there were the acts of solidarity and appreciation shown for those NHS workers by all those who stood outside and clapped for them each Thursday. There have been "ordinary" people doing extraordinary things. All those who managed our Foodbanks, ensuring it was open for business so all those who needed it so desperately had food during lockdown. And all those who donated to it - it couldn't have continued its valuable work without you! And to everybody who kept an eye on their neighbour. Making sure that those who lived alone and felt isolated knew they had a friend - even when unable to visit, a phone call would have made all the difference.

All these things were acts of love. As Christians, we know that Jesus gave us a new commandment, to "Love our neighbours", and so many of you have shown this love to yours. This month, The Link will come out at the beginning of Holy Week. That time when Christians follow Christ's journey from the gates of Jerusalem to the cross in the ultimate act of self-sacrificing love. There would have been such a mix of emotions experienced by his followers during that week. Joy and laughter when he arrived on that donkey. Maybe puzzlement when he washed their feet and broke bread and drank wine with them on that first Maundy Thursday. Then the shock of his betrayal by one of their own which led to Jesus' arrest, conviction and then to his crucifixion.

Then on Easter Sunday, those disciples discovered Jesus was alive! He'd been raised from the dead and all their rollercoaster of emotions culminated in joy and wonder.

From all of us here at Brent Knoll Methodist Church, we wish you all the hope and the joy and the wonder of Easter. Each and every one of you remain in our prayers, and may God continue to bless us all.
Rosemary Krull

Burnham

It's been a funny old year coming towards albeit a further couple of months yet towards the end of our third lockdown. It has meant we could not celebrate Christmas as we used to, we will not be able to celebrate Easter either. Personally, I am going to miss the 6 am service on Easter Sunday at the top of Brean Down.

The last 12 months have been very difficult for all of us but now we can look forward to the green shoots of spring flowers returning to our gardens and lighter evenings my word how we all need warmer days and just a little bit of sunshine.

Now let's look on a far more positive side. How many of us thought we would be using our skills to become skilled in zoom meetings! I feel that thanks to our ministerial team we have not only enjoyed the services they have provided but we have made new friends across the circuit. The suggestion was made we have been able to see each other's faces rather than the back of folks heads a comment was made that when we return to Church perhaps we should sit in circles. Let's hope we can make the warmth of the fellowship that we have learnt in sharing zoom meetings be carried forward to Circuit meetings and services.

We must thank the hard work of the scientists for skills in developing a vaccine and the Government ministers that have made the vaccine programme work so well but I thank the Lord for guiding the scientists into finding and develop the vaccine in the first place. It has been evident that many people thought we were on our own, but it's not been the case the lord has been with us in guiding and being there for us to lean on and we are thankful for that.

Many years ago I was told that our lives tend to change course however slightly. roughly every seven years. We at Burnham are going to have a change in church secretary Daphne Hill has been a brilliant secretary keeping everyone informed about church activities in a very quiet and efficient manner. We at Burnham extend our grateful thanks to Daphne. We wish her well in her 'retirement' that does however

leave us with a vacancy available to anyone wishing to fulfil. We feel sure that Daphne would give guidance in that roll. If you feel that you would like to consider the position, please contact Steve.

May I extend Easter Greetings to you all.

Geoff Stait

East Brent

The pandemic continues to dominate our lives but as I write we are approaching the second stage of the roadmap. Discussions on whether we have had our vaccines have moved on to have you had/when are you having your 2nd vaccine?

There have been lots of “12 months’ on” reporting in the media. Last March we thought it would be over by summer or at the worst Christmas. We had a new grand-daughter in May 2020 and we have only been able to see her twice since then, other than on a screen. She will be walking and starting to talk before we see her again! Many other families will have had similar experiences.

It is now the second year we have been unable to erect the crosses on the knoll for the Easter period as whilst we could social distance during the open air service the practicalities of erecting the crosses involves several people at very close quarters. Although some churches are hoping to open for Easter services, others will remain closed. East Brent is hoping to open on 4th April.

We all miss the fellowship of meeting each other every week but throughout this time, Steve’s Zoom Services, coffee mornings and Bible Study have been a good way of keeping in touch. We are pleased that Gordon & Jill are late converts to the Zoom services and amused that their dog has upstaged the cat that regularly joins in!

Rosemary Gilling

PLUS +++
POEMS, PRAYERS and OTHER
MESSAGES

The Gardeners' Hymn

Judy Allen has found this variation on a well known hymn for your enjoyment this month. It was given to her many years ago, by Lilian Stone, who many will remember as a long time centenarian member of our church:

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.
But what we never mention, though gardeners know it's true,
Is when he made the goodies, he made the baddies too.

All things spray and swatable, disasters great and small,
All things paraquatable, the Lord God made them all.
The greenfly on the roses, the maggots in the peas,
Manure that fills our noses, he also gave us these.

The fungus on the goose-gogs, the club root on the greens,
The slugs that eat the lettuce and chew the aubergines.
The drought that kills the fuchsias, the frost that nips the buds,
The rain that drowns the seedlings, the blight that hits the spuds.

The midges and mosquitoes, the nettles and the weeds,
The pigeons in the green stuff, the sparrows on the seeds.
The fly that gets the carrots, the wasp that eats the plums,
How black the gardener's outlook, though green may be their thumbs.

But still we gardeners labour,
midst vegetables and flowers,
And pray what hits the neighbours',
will somehow bypass ours.

Anon

Easter Offering Service from MWiB

We are delighted to announce the completion of the promised video-recording of this year's Easter Offering Service, 'Into all the world', which is now available for you to watch on our brand new MWiB YouTube channel. The video has been produced by the MWiB Executive and lasts around 45 minutes. With the text of the service on

screen, and recordings of hymns and songs to join in with, the video is ideal particularly for smaller groups (if able to meet) and for individuals to watch at home.

If you're unable to meet, why not arrange a time for your group to watch it at home 'together-apart', and perhaps arrange an online/Zoom chat over coffee afterwards? You will also find at the end of the service the following information regarding payment of donations to the Easter Offering (and please note especially that however you make your donation, you need to reference it for "Easter Offering 2021", so that it can be counted in this year's total):

~ Any offerings made via the EO service are wholly donated to the World Mission Fund. If you would like to donate directly, via the Just Giving page, please visit www.justgiving.com/mcfworldmission/donate and reference your donation with EO Service 2021. You can also access this page via the Methodist Church website (www.methodist.org.uk) when you search for World Mission Fund.

~ If you would like to make an offering in your usual way, please contact your treasurer with the offering and make sure they know it is for the World Mission Fund.

~ Offerings can also be made to the WMF via Bank Transfer with the reference EO 2021. You can access this information from your church or regional group.

The link to the YouTube video is:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg9uuQq_6qM&t=2s

Joyce Pipet

FAITH AFTER DOUBT

'Faith after Doubt' was the title of a Zoom Webinar that I tuned into a couple of weeks ago. It was by an American called Brian McLaren and, as you might imagine, it was held in support of his recently published book of that name.

Four years ago, Norman Lester and I had travelled over to Cardiff to hear a previous lecture he had given. I can't remember its topic at this distance except that we were somewhat disappointed because it was all over in half an hour. It seemed a long way to go.

Anyway it is not that we have a lot to do in the evenings at present, so I thought I would watch his talk. And I am glad I did, and I thought I would share it here because its topic seems to me to be relevant to anyone who has had a difficult time in this last year.

McLaren traces elements in how faith develops within us. He calls them stages but admits there are no clear dividing lines and accepts that elements of different stages can be with us at the same time. When we were young, McLaren says, we learnt about life at home and at school. It was a binary world of two dimensions, good and bad. We took it as a matter of course from our parents and our teachers. God was up there somewhere, the ultimate good, looking down on the world; he loved us, but woe betide us if we were naughty and sinful (actually my parents were a bit more enlightened than that, but you know what I mean). Our generation (for those of us who are of a more senior age group anyway) absorbed the stories of the Bible without question. The Bible taught us all we needed to know about Faith, and we had Jesus as our ultimate friend. We took to the stories in the Bible without question.

McLaren calls this stage Simplicity. It was enough, life was settled, we could get on with the rest of our days.

And to be fair that positive attitude has stayed with many people throughout their lives. It is sufficient, it brings hope, it becomes the anchor. Any challenge to that can be absorbed knowing that God is on our side.

But for many of us, we were challenged by the life around us and by the variety of understandings that confronted us as we grew up. We started asking questions. The Bible for example. How could God create the world in 7 days? Or something we learnt at school perhaps. How does Evolution tie in with what the Bible says? And then perhaps our parents could no longer keep us sheltered from all that went on in the outside world; we started to question, why? The path leads us, says McLaren into his second topic, Complexity.

Many people are able to put such things to the back of their minds. Their focus remains on the Simplicity that was present as they absorbed their parents influences, and first learnt of God, and of Jesus. But others are not so fulfilled. They can't let go of their new learning and experiences. They cannot rationalise the seeming contradictions, so they go their own way into a life apart from church and of reliance on scriptural truths.

Some though, find a way of holding on to their faith and practice. They adapt the literacy of scripture into the science of today and they learn to live in faith alongside some of the seeming contradictions of what they learn and recognise around them.

It becomes a time of choice, sometimes at a fairly early age, sometimes much later and sometimes as a halfway house where stages one and two continuously re-cycle themselves.

But for many, life becomes more complicated than that. Complexities grow one on top of the other. They test our abilities to cope. New concerns rise. We ask why? A child or young person murdered, a promising career is wrecked, an earthquake wrecks a town, illness brings untold handicap, a whole family's life has changed. And not just one instance, so often one problem leads to another all within a short space of time. We feel we can't cope. Where is God in all this? Why God have you left me. Are you there? Are you a loving God, there for me; or not. The core of our being is shaken. A whole range of things just take us over the edge. Do I want to know a God who is like this? Is He even there? Do I believe any more?

And lack of faith can be even more insidious than that. It just fades away. You wake one morning and it is not there. Who is this God, what is my purpose in this seeming charade?

It is the stage that McLarade calls Perplexity. Life gets on top of us. It is a time when even someone who has lived happily in the simple level of faith and trust, relying on the understanding of God and of scripture, can be tested to breaking point.

It can be a difficult period in our lives but McLaren hasn't finished. There is a fourth stage which he calls Harmony. A new awareness of God, one with which we find a new sense of being held in the love of God through a new understanding of faith.

The question of course is how is this achieved how does the period of perplexity work itself through. What do we do to bring it about? McLaren offers some suggestions here too.

Perhaps the first thing is to hold on to those blessed memories of the past. They become an anchor. In my twenties I was captivated by the books of Rev Norman Vincent Peale who proclaimed the Power of Positive Thinking. He gets a bad press these days because his message has been badly misconstrued by those who see it is a means to 'get on in life', Donald Trump included. But the essence of his philosophy was positive thinking is a spiritual energy. One of his suggestions was to seize those times when you have felt the power of God working in your life. Hold on to them and affirm them in faith. Recall them at intervals. On a similar vein was to write out any little phrase from scripture or elsewhere that made an effect on you (he called them Thought Conditioners), onto little cards, learn them and recall them in your mind from time to time. I remember I had a little boxful of such cards written in a variety of colours. And very worthwhile they were too. When things are not going well we can so easily withdraw into ourselves. Love is not what we naturally think about when things get on top of us. We feel sorry for ourselves, the world is against us we say, so why should we bother? A temptation to be resisted clearly but that is easier to say when we feel right with the world. Paradoxically it is the very time to live our lives with integrity and concern for the needs of others.

We all have our own way of experiencing God in our lives, and there are many out there who know God within them without realising it. We know enough to appreciate we need to take time out to be with him, even if we only pay it lip service. Richard Rohr a Catholic Priest and Franciscan monk (and with whom Brian McLaren works from time to time) identifies the importance of regular periods of contemplation,

the state of emptying the mind in order to centre on the presence of Spirit filling the space. I confess that I recognise the importance of the practice, of how it will build us up, but it is always the thing I tell myself I must find the time for. One of these days...

The questions after McLarens talk lasted over an hour and the recurrent theme making a pathway through a time of doubt, became that of faith expressing itself through love. We forget that God is far greater than we can ever imagine. Whatever aspect of him that has lodged in our understanding is but a very small part of his Presence. In broadening our minds we need to hold on to our integrity, and widen our understanding of what love is; in doing so we are led into a deepening of our faith, a faith that is challenged and even changed. We should not be afraid when those four stages repeat themselves again and again. Personally, I no longer see God as up there somewhere or one that intervenes in my life in the sense in which I once did; now I try to 'see' God as Presence in every part of this universe right from the far distance right through to the smallest sub-atomic particles within me. That's a challenge.

Life and its meaning can indeed be perplexing. Doubt is an important phase in the deepening of our faith. Jesus on the Cross must have known that.

'For now we see through a glass darkly....' Now where have I heard that before.

Harvey Allen

**Finally, please note....
the deadline for the May Link Plus is
25th April.**