

Dear Heaton Moor United Church,

Lenten Seasons' greetings to you all.

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Lord and Liberator Jesus Christ. Hope you all had a good week. With the roadmap for the easing of lockdown being announced this week by the Prime Minister, let us hope and pray that it will not be too long before we can all meet in person at Church.

Thanks to Johnnie for leading our reflection this week on our YouTube channel. Thanks to all who have been joining at our circuit zoom service every Sunday, and they will continue to be offered. Thanks also to those of you who have joined for our circuit Lenten Bible Study on the Life changing stories reflections of the Church Action on Poverty. These Lenten studies will be held on every Wednesday till the 24th March 2021 at 7 pm on Zoom, and you are invited to join them.

This week I was attending a Connexional mission committee, and it was good to meet others across the Connexion who have been engaged in various forms of mission. Mission of God is diverse and we are called to affirm and celebrate it. We also had a good meeting of 'Friends of Stockport Interfaith' on Tuesday, and heard from our Stockport Council the various opportunities for faith communities to work with the local authorities. There are some follow-up plans from that meeting, which we will share in due course of time.

On Sunday, the 28th February 2021 at 7.30pm we are having a meeting of Regenerate group, which is a group of youngish people in the circuit gathering for fellowship and prayer. We seek your prayers for it.

Herewith I am sending you the reflection and the worship resources for this Sunday. Thank you all for your encouragement.

Let us keep praying for one another, and specially for children as they plan to return to schools from the 8th of March.

May God's peace be with you and may you have a meaningful season of Lent.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,

Raj

26th February 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITOR

Happy Friday folks, I'm back from my little break and feeling very energised. It was lovely to spend some time at home with the children.

Whilst we await news on when our Church building will be open for services we continue to offer the following things we can all do together but apart this week;

- Take part in Tune In to God: Fridays@5:17.
- Watch the weekly reflection posted on Sunday morning on our YouTube channel
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhynK2FIPDTbOugBiO6D9A>
- On Thursday evening light a candle from 8pm until 9pm

I had my first COVID injection this week and like many feel very fortunate that this service is offered to us as part of our NHS. Raj and I have been busy working on a Vaccine Twinning Initiative and hopefully we will be able to share this with you over the coming weeks.

Just as in pre-caved the team are here to answer any questions, be a listening ear or signpost to other services. Please do get in touch with us if we can be of any help.

If you have anything you would like included in the weekly notices please let me know. As always if you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

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COVID ROADMAP (February 2021)

This roadmap is a step-by-step plan to ease restrictions in England **cautiously**, starting with schools and colleges.

Before taking each step, the Government said it will review the latest data on the impact of the previous step against four tests.

The tests are:


- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- Assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

STEP 1
8 March

29 March


STEP 2
No earlier than 12 April

At least 5 weeks after Step 1

 **EDUCATION**

8 MARCH

- Schools and colleges open for all students
- Practical Higher Education courses

 **EDUCATION**

- As previous step

 **SOCIAL CONTACT**

8 MARCH

- Exercise and recreation outdoors with household or one other person
- Household only indoors

29 MARCH

- Rule of 6 or two households outdoors
- Household only indoors

 **SOCIAL CONTACT**

- Rule of 6 or two households outdoors
- Household only indoors

 **BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES**

8 MARCH

- Wraparound care, including sport, for all children

29 MARCH

- Organised outdoor sport (children and adults)
- Outdoor sport and leisure facilities
- All outdoor children's activities
- Outdoor parent & child group (up to 15 parents)

 **BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES**

- All retail
- Personal care
- Libraries & community centres
- Most outdoor attractions
- Indoor leisure inc. gyms (individual use only)
- Self-contained accommodation
- All children's activities
- Outdoor hospitality
- Indoor parent & child groups (up to 15 parents)

 **TRAVEL**

8 MARCH

- Stay at home
- No holidays

29 MARCH

- Minimise travel
- No holidays

 **TRAVEL**

- Domestic overnight stays (household only)
- No international holidays

 **EVENTS**

- Funerals (30)
- Weddings and wakes (6)

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- Funerals (30)
- Weddings, wakes, receptions (15)
- Event pilots

STEP 3

No earlier than 17 May

At least 5 weeks after Step 2



EDUCATION

- As previous step



SOCIAL CONTACT

- Maximum 30 people outdoors
- Rule of 6 or two households indoors (subject to review)



BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES

- Indoor hospitality
- Indoor entertainment and attractions
- Organised indoor sport (adult)
- Remaining accommodation
- Remaining outdoor entertainment (including performances)



TRAVEL

- Domestic overnight stays
- International travel (subject to review)



EVENTS

- Most significant life events (30)
- Indoor events: 1,000 or 50%
- Outdoor seated events: 10,000 or 25%
- Outdoor other events: 4,000 or 50%

STEP 4

No earlier than 21 June

At least 5 weeks after Step 3

All subject to review



EDUCATION

- As previous step



SOCIAL CONTACT

- No legal limit



BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES

- Remaining businesses, including nightclubs



TRAVEL

- Domestic overnight stays
- International travel



EVENTS

- No legal limit on life events
- Larger events



School Pantry

We have been asked for further food parcels for local families so it is more important than ever that we continue to donate to our school pantry so we can respond quickly.

To the left is a list of items that we are currently short of. If you can help in any way that would be great.

If you would like further information please contact JoAnne on community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk or 07340 269 354

School Pantry donations can be dropped off at Church during the Private Reflection time on a Sunday

Please consider the current guidelines and social distancing



Marie Curie are calling for 23rd March to be a National Day of Reflection. The 23rd March is the first anniversary of the UK National Lockdown and since that day hundreds and thousands of people have died.

Behind the statistics and whatever the cause, every death has been devastating for the people left behind.

On this National Day of Reflection, we will come together to reflect on our collective loss, support those who have been bereaved and hope for a brighter future.

More details will follow over the coming weeks but Stockport Council have an online book of remembrance if you wish to add details of someone you have lost please see here <http://www.condolence.website/we-remember-those-who-have-died-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

As a Church we are also producing our banner, have you started on your square yet? In addition, Stockport Museums and Archives are collecting items to record the history of 2020. If you would like to take part more information is here <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/news/collecting-stockport-2020-help-stockport-museums-and-archives-record-the>



EMAIL AND TEXT SCAMS

Some of you may be aware that in recent weeks there have been emails perpetrating to be from Methodist Ministers asking for help. This week I received a similar text message from Raj, fortunately because we communicate via messages regularly I knew straight away it was not from him, the number was different and it was signed off differently to how Raj would end a message.

If you receive a text message or email and are in doubt please contact the Minister directly, alternatively please contact the office who can verify if a Minister has changed their details.

To report suspicious emails please forward it to the Suspicious Email Reporting Service (SERS) at report@phishing.gov.uk

If you receive a suspicious text message, there will be a way to report it via your device. Alternatively, you can copy the message and send to 7726



Fairtrade fortnight runs from 22nd February to 7th March and this year the COVID Pandemic has shown us more than ever how interconnected we are globally. We all have the power to drive long term change to ensure the people who grow our food and drinks are not exploited and underpaid. We can do this with our shopping choices and by sharing the message of Fairtrade. This year Fairtrade are highlighting the growing challenges that climate change brings to farmers and workers. The facts are straightforward. Farmers and workers in countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Honduras who have done the least to contribute to climate change, are disproportionately affected by it.

The climate crisis is an immediate and ever-increasing threat and those in climate vulnerable countries are already seeing its impacts from droughts and crop diseases to floods, heatwaves and shrinking harvests. With the emergence of the global COVID pandemic the challenges that farmers face now are bigger than ever before.

How You Can Help

Join the online Fairtrade fortnight festival at <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/choose-the-world-you-want/> today there is a live chocolate truffle making session at 3pm

Read the stories of farmers affected by climate change <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/choose-the-world-you-want/storytelling-tent/>

Sign the Climate Coalitions Climate Declaration and tell your local MP our Council about your commitment to putting the voices of farmers and workers at the heart of the climate crisis fight <https://thetimeisnow.uk/>

Where possible buy products with the Fairtrade mark – one of my personal favourites is the Diving Chocolate range!

Finally, Pray. Let us remember the power of prayer.



**Lord God,
In the fields of the poor
Even when abundant fruits ripen,
Injustice sweeps them away,
And families hunger.**

**Help us to share
The fruits of your bounty
So that all your family may benefit
From your gracious gifts.**

based on Proverbs 13:23

LENT

**Circuit Lenten Study Course “Life Changing Stories: Scripture From The Margins”
Every Wednesday in Lent starting on the 24th February at 7pm**

The Bible shows us again and again that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. People on the margins. But too often, when we read scripture in our churches, we focus on other aspects of the story, or we are so familiar with the text that we don't notice the challenging things it has to say to us. *Scripture from the Margins* is a series of Bible studies that encourage people to focus on the voices and perspectives in scripture that we don't usually hear in our churches.

<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/bible/lifechangingstories/>

The Lenten Course will use the same zoom links as the Sunday Worship

For those who found the size of the text in the booklet sent the next weeks readings are attached.



Topic: Lent Road Show (Cat Stoker)
Time: Mar 9, 2021 06:30 PM London
Join Zoom Meeting The presentation will start at 6.45 but the zoom meeting will be open from 6.30.
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86805452033>
Meeting ID: 868 0545 2033

We're excited that here in the United Stockport Circuit, as part of the Eco-Task Group, we have the opportunity to attend a presentation by Matt Oliver, who works for Traidcraft, highlighting all sorts of ideas, products, producer stories, and facts about Fair Trade. It will highlight the fact that Lent isn't all about giving things up, but can be an opportunity to learn and try out new things — and that when people ask you whether Fair Trade makes a difference, you'll have some answers.

You don't need to let us know if you'd like to come, but if you'd like a copy of the new Traidcraft catalogue beforehand please get in touch (details below).

In addition, I have plenty of stock in at present, so I'd love to hear from you if you'd like a Covid safe Traidcraft delivery.

Catriona Stoker, Dialstone Lane Methodist Church, Tel 487 2010; email — cat.stoker@btinternet.com



Prayers from Linda



Prayers of People

Father God, like the Israelites in the wilderness, we too know your love, and experience your care. You invite us to extend that love to the world around us, to care for others as deeply as we care for ourselves. And so as we turn our prayers towards the hungers and thirsts of the wider world we acknowledge that the personal fears and anxieties associated with the outbreak of the

corona virus and the health care and economic crises facing our world today are foremost in our thoughts. We pray for doctors, nurses, cleaners and carers involved in hospitals and care facilities as they work to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We pray for all those seriously ill with the virus, and for their families. We pray for our world leaders and governments, that they make good decisions now we are slowly coming out of lockdown. Amen



Dear Jesus, you have promised to be with us always, I pray that you would be with us as we will be going back to school soon, bless our going and our coming. Bless our learning and our playing. Please protect our heart from fear. Please keep us safe. Please give us good friends. Give use joy to be back at school, and thank you for loving me from head to toe. In your name. Amen.

If anyone would like to share a Prayer with the church family, please call Linda on 07564839380 or E-mail lindawfleming625@gmail.com.



No names required because God Knows.

Setting our minds on divine things

Reflecting on Mark 8:31-38

On encountering the voice of God through the word of God and having experienced the call of God to go into ministry, when my dad suggested that I go for ministerial training and engage in theological education for four years, I resisted that advice, arguing that time is short and the Lord is to return soon. Then I proposed to my dad that I will go as a missionary immediately, for I thought the harvest is plenty and the labourers are few. I was 20 years old then and was waiting for my final year University results. During that period my dad was counselling me about my call and vocation. When my dad was encouraging me to go into theological education so that it will help me in understanding the relevance of the word in our world, I was resisting my dad's advice by quoting several scriptural statements like, 'Go into the world and make disciples for me.' My dad, who was well versed with the scriptural texts, held his peace and kept his cool, listening patiently to all my reasons of resisting to go for four-year ministerial training. After a long conversation, my dad advised me to wait in prayer, set my mind on God and listen to God's guidance for my future. He came to me the next day and said why don't I give it a try to write the entrance exam at Gurukul Lutheran theological college at Chennai and if I succeed in that test then take it as a sign that God is wanting me to pursue ministerial training, and if I fail in that entrance test, then let's take it otherwise. It sounded like a plan and agreed to follow all the procedures in writing that entrance exam. As the entrance test results were announced, I passed in flying colours and eventually joined the ministerial training and pursued theology, initially for four years and then for seven years. Ever since then my love for theology has never stopped. In all of this all I can testify is that I have sensed and experienced the hand of God with me. When I look back and reflect on my faith journey, those words of my dad, "to wait on God and to set my mind on God" at that moment in time stands out prominently as it helped me to see through the signs of God's hand in my life. Waiting on God and setting our minds on God is always rewarding and refreshing.

The text for this second Sunday in Lent from Mark 8:31-38, is a passage where Jesus publicly shares about his suffering, death and resurrection. Peter was the first to react to such a sharing and rebukes Jesus. In return Jesus rebukes Peter to set his mind on divine things and not on human things, and further explained to the crowds what it costs and takes in following him. Why did Peter rebuke Jesus on hearing that the Son of Man is going to suffer, rejected by the chief priests, elders and scribes and be killed and after three days rise again (31v)?

Peter joined Jesus movement and declared that Jesus is the Christ (29v), the messiah, who has come into this world to drive away the Roman empire and bring freedom and liberation to all people. Peter was a witness to many miracles, healings and radical teachings of Jesus Christ, the messiah, but suddenly on hearing that the Son of Man is going to suffer and die, Peter couldn't take it, for he could not imagine Jesus to be a sufferer, a victim, dying at the hands of the Roman empire. Though Jesus did say that after three days of his death he will rise again, he couldn't believe it to himself, and did not appreciate Jesus' sharing it openly. Perhaps, if it were at their team meeting, where Jesus said about the things to come, including his death and resurrection, Peter could have understood, but now that Jesus shares this news about his future in the open, in the public, Peter couldn't resist but took Jesus aside and rebuked him. The next reaction Mark records is of Jesus', where he turns and looks at his

disciples rebuking Peter saying, “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (33v). Mark did not record the reactions of Peter to such a rebuke, but I certainly think Peter would have had a long face and he would have remained silent. Jesus has always been a cool guy, and hardly he loses his cool, and this is one of those occasions where he loses his cool and rebukes Peter and calls him to set his mind on divine things and not on human things. How is it that Peter has set his mind on human things and not on divine things?

The term *Son of Man* is used by Jesus 80 times in the Gospels, with 14 times mentioned in the Gospel of Mark. 8 of Mark’s 14 *Son of Man* sayings contain references to Jesus’ death, suffering and resurrection, and that explains the reason for Jesus to refer himself as *Son of Man*. The audience of Mark knew the title *Son of Man* from the apocalyptic literature, particularly from Ezekiel and Daniel. Peter most likely would have known this usage of *Son of Man* from Daniel, where he mentions *Son of God* as the one coming to rule and have authority over the entire world. It is important for us to read what is mentioned by Daniel as he records about the *Son of Man* in Daniel 7:13-14, “As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a *Son of Man* coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” So, for Peter and the rest of the first century Palestinian community, the image of the *Son of Man* is that he comes with majesty, magnanimity, and magnificence, where he will hold the entire dominion over the earth and heavens. When Peter knew the textual understanding of the *Son of Man* that he is going to come with power above all powers, and was certain about his understanding of the *Son of Man*, suddenly hearing Jesus saying that the *Son of Man* is going to be rejected, suffered, died and risen, Peter couldn’t tolerate and therefore rebuked Jesus. To put it simply, when Peter’s literal reading of Daniel’s *Son of Man* passage did not match with Jesus’ sharing of the *Son of Man*, Peter rebuked Jesus. Perhaps Jesus on recognising that Peter was turning out to be a literalist exhibiting his reluctance to see word becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, he rebuked back Peter. Jesus as the *Son of Man* was translating and offering a new meaning to his being the *Son of Man* as the one who is to be rejected, suffered, died and risen. Such a literalist way of looking at the *Son of Man*, a reluctance to recognise the word becoming flesh in Jesus Christ and a lack of public theological sensitivity to see Jesus’ relevance in his context, is what I think Jesus notices and called Peter to set his mind on divine things and not on human things.

To put it in a nutshell, being confined only to literalist ways of reading and understanding Scripture is like setting our minds on human things and not on divine things. Being closed and reluctant to recognise the word of Jesus Christ becoming flesh in our world, word translating into action, word indwelling/pitching the tent among communities today is also like setting our minds on human things and not on divine things. Being publicly insensitive in seeking and finding a relevance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is also like setting our minds on human things and not on divine things.

Jesus then called the crowd and unfolded what it means to set our minds on divine things, and explained it in four different ways. Firstly, setting the mind on divine things is to be a follower of Jesus Christ, which is by denying oneself, taking up each one’s cross or struggle of

life or cross experience and follow him (34v). Jesus denied himself as the literal textual *Son of Man* and was rejected, suffered, carried his own cross, likewise he invites all people to follow. Secondly, setting the mind on divine things is to lose one's life for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of the Gospel, so that they can be saved in Christ (35v). Thirdly, setting the mind on divine things is not about gaining the whole world for profit, rather is to save life, for there is nothing that can be exchanged for life, except life alone (36-37v). Fourthly, setting the mind on divine things is not to be ashamed of Jesus, the *Son of Man* who chose powerlessness as his tool and of his words, the words of life and life-giving, for in such people Jesus takes pride on his return (38v).

This text invites and calls us to set our minds on divine things today. This text calls for a deeper spirituality, inviting us to offer ourselves to identify with the powerless and suffering communities. This text also invites us not to be literalists with our texts, but are called to translate the word into action relevant for our public sphere. A literal way of reading our texts is like setting our minds on human things. The landscape of our church and society has changed very much due to Covid and lockdown, and in such a scenario, we as followers of Christ can only be relevant by being with people who are struggling in life, and with communities who are poor and marginalised. It was reported this week that Covid is at a risk of becoming a disease of the poor, where it mentions that people living in the deprived locality with ethnically diverse communities, the rates of infections are high and the intake of the vaccines are low. Do we not have a conscience as a church to ask why is Covid becoming the disease of the poor? Should we not be in the forefront speaking truth to the powers and seeking solutions in addressing poverty and Covid? Unless we as a church can set our minds on divine things by addressing these concerns around us, we may lose our relevance. Secondly, with the arrival of approximately 100,000 migrants from Hong Kong into the UK this year, due to the geo-political problems in their country, we can set our minds on divine things by being a welcoming church today. Some might ask are these concerns divine things? Well, the heart of the divine in Jesus is among the poor and marginalised, and our commitment to following Jesus Christ is only demonstrated in our being with the marginalised communities, for Jesus has come to preach good news to the poor, give sight to the blind and release the captives from the bondages.

Those words of my dad, "to wait on God and to set my mind on God" has always been journeying with me, reverberating in me, allowing me to depend on God, despite all my vulnerabilities in life. This season of Lent is an invitation for us to set our minds on divine things, to translate the word into action, to activate our faith into praxis and to carry our crosses and follow Jesus Christ. It is said that, 'for it is easy to wear a cross, but is a challenge and risk to bear a cross.' May God in Jesus grant us the needed strength in bearing the cross and follow him faithfully by setting our minds on divine things. Amen.

Raj Bharat Patta,
26th February 2021

Ananias and Sapphira: wealth and poverty

A Bible study by Nick Jowett

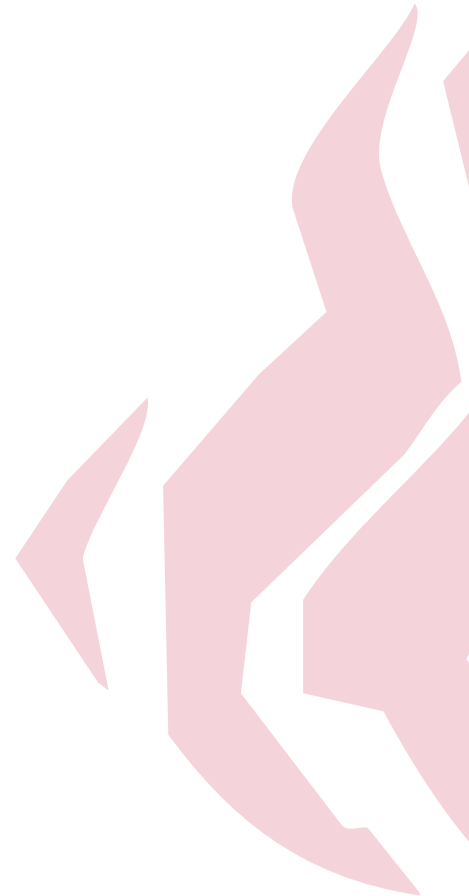
Read: Acts 5.1-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; ² with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" ⁵ Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

Reflect

- How do you feel when talking about your own income, or other people's?
- Are there people who have too much money?
- Ananias and Sapphira apparently suffered an extraordinarily heavy punishment for their deceit. Is it too easy in the UK to hide wealth, e.g. through tax evasion?
- If an ideal society means sharing everything much more equally, how is this best achieved?



Think

The author of Luke's Gospel is writing his second volume, about the growth of the church from small beginnings in Jerusalem, some 50 years after the start of it all. Scholars have questioned the historical accuracy of his accounts, but he will have depended on the memories of those who lived through the events, even though it's clear he also wanted to create an edifying and encouraging narrative for his Christian readers. But it is not a whitewash. Luke was willing to record many incidents which do not show the early church in a good light: there were fall-outs and failures as well as fortitude and faithfulness in the Christian Way, and that speaks of reality.

There is no way of checking what exactly happened to cause the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, but the context is one of a small, threatened community of Christians, made up of poor and better-off people, holding all things in common and using resources donated by the richer members to meet the needs of all. We've just heard about this ideal community at the end of chapter four in Acts, but now we meet a couple who want to claim the kudos of being benefactors without the pain of giving up the full proceeds of the land they've sold. They're mean; they're hypocrites; and they are liars. Peter accuses them of lying to the Holy Spirit of God. What he means is that this is a new Spirit-driven community, fulfilling the vision of God's kingdom as Jesus had embodied it in the equal sharing of everything by rich and poor – and Ananias and Sapphira's actions threaten to undermine it.

There may also be a subtext of social suspicion, because Peter, the leader in this community, is also an ex-fisherman; as someone who will have known poverty or the threat of it in his earlier life, he may have in-built negative feelings towards people who can afford to be ostentatiously generous.

Listen

Luke's picture of the first Christians is really a parable of community life. When he uses the word 'church' for the first time, as he does at the end of this passage, it's the Greek word '*ekklesia*', a gathering of the people. That 'church', in which the 'law of the Spirit' was that everything was shared, is a miniature image of a society in which, through good employments, taxation and national insurance, free charitable generosity, welfare provision or even a citizens' basic income, every member has a decent living.

(Listen to the episode of Church Action on Poverty's 'Podcast to End Poverty' about mutuality to hear more reflections on the values that would underpin such a society: anchor.fm/casttoendpoverty/episodes/A-fantastic-outpouring-of-goodwill-efasi5)

But our current UK society is not so arranged: the tax system does not guarantee fairness and it does not yet give adequate welfare provision for every citizen. The rich can hide away their wealth through tax avoidance or evasion. Even the moderately well-off will not vote for political parties proposing fairer, more adequate taxation. Charities, contributed to by rich and poor, are assumed to plug the gaps in public provision, but, in spite of their many achievements, often fail to do so. The unwillingness of Ananias and Sapphira to throw themselves fully into the new Christian society can be compared with the reluctance of the better-off in our society to 'dig deep enough' to ensure a decent life for all. We are mostly willing to pay a certain level of tax and we are happy to support favourite charities, and we like to think of ourselves as generous, but are we any better than Ananias and Sapphira, who deserved Peter's condemnation?

In November 2019, before the last General Election, the *Guardian* reported this: "The super-rich are preparing to immediately leave the UK

if Jeremy Corbyn becomes prime minister, fearing they will lose billions of pounds if the Labour leader does ‘go after’ the wealthy elite with new taxes, possible capital controls and a clampdown on private schools. Lawyers and accountants for the UK’s richest families said they had been deluged with calls from millionaire and billionaire clients asking for help and advice on moving countries, shifting their fortunes offshore and making early gifts to their children to avoid the Labour leader’s threat to tax all inheritances above £125,000.”

That looks bad, but looking at this the other way round, isn’t it possible that some of us are also guilty of the kind of angry enviousness – perhaps a bit like Peter – towards the apparent sins of ‘the rich’, many of whom create wealth and contribute substantially in our economy?

Act

Find out about and consider joining the ‘Build Back Better’ campaign which, after the coronavirus pandemic, seeks a new deal that prioritises people, invests in the NHS and creates a robust, shockproof economy that is capable of tackling the climate crisis.

www.buildbackbetteruk.org

Pray

O God of justice, your kingdom is brought to reality in decisions of fairness and actions of love. It is a community in which we place our money and possessions, as far as we can, in the service of all. As a nation, we have used the ways of taxation, universal provision and charity, but still fall short, leaving some with too much and many with too little. Help us by your Spirit to engage with the issues of wealth and poverty without rancour or prejudice, and to press those in power to be bold and visionary in creating the conditions for a fairer society. Jesus, we remember, asked the rich man to give up his wealth and follow him, and so we ask this prayer in Jesus’ name.

Take it further

- ‘Ananias and Sapphira: a Case of Malicious Identity’
www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/acts/a-clash-of-kingdoms-community-and-power-acts-5-7/an-anias-and-sapphira-a-case-of-malicious-identity-acts-51-11
- ‘As the rich get richer, why don’t British people care about inequality?’
www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/18/rich-britons-inequality-poverty-social-wealth
- ‘What is Universal Basic Income?’
citizensincome.org/citizens-income/what-is-it
www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-48185806

Sunday 28th February 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

Jesus lead us to the Father by your Spirit; help us draw near. As we come with awe and gladness, help us draw near. Amen (Selected lines from STF 29)

Hymn: The God of Abraham Praise (STF 91)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/hymns/the-god-of-abraham-praise-stf-91/>

The God of Abraham praise,
who reigns enthroned above,
Ancient of everlasting Days,
and God of love.
Jehovah! Great I AM!
By earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name
for ever blessed.

He by himself has sworn,
I on his oath depend:
I shall, on eagles' wings upborne,
to heaven ascend;
I shall behold his face,
I shall his power adore
and sing the wonders of his grace
for evermore.

The God who reigns on high
the great archangels sing;
and 'Holy, holy, holy,' cry,
'Almighty King,
who was and is the same,
and evermore shall be;
Jehovah, Father, great I AM,
we worship thee.'

Before the Saviour's face
the ransomed nations bow;
o'erwhelmed at his almighty grace,
for ever new:
he shows his prints of love,
they kindle to a flame,
and sound through all the worlds above
the slaughtered Lamb.

The whole triumphant host
give thanks to God on high;
'Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!'
they ever cry.
Hail, Abraham's God, and ours!
We join the heavenly throng,
and celebrate with all our powers
in endless song.

Thomas Olivers (1725-1799)

Let us pray together

God of all grace
We come before you to praise you, mindful
that you are the God of our ancestors, the
God who made and keeps your promises. In
Christ you showed us love that was willing to
die on a cross for us. The Holy Spirit lives in
our hearts and we rejoice that she binds us
together as a family of faith. For these things
we rejoice.

We are thankful for the wonder of nature that
captivates us. We are thankful for all those
people we love and care about and who bring
great joy to our lives.

Yet we know that we do not live as your
children or keep your commandments. If you

kept a record of our sins, we could not stand. Joyously we know that through Christ's abundance grace we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen

Today's Reading from the Old Testament

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Today's Gospel Reading:

Mark 8:31-48

Time to Reflect

Do you always manage to do something you have said you will do? Or do you sometimes like me find time runs away with you, you simply forget or that it just proves to be impossible?

In today's Bible passages we see the opposite we see a God who is faithful and who always does what has been promised. We have already been assured of pardon for our knowing that is true because 'if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9)

In our Genesis reading we see the making of the Covenant with Abraham. Even Abraham's name was changed from Abram to reflect this. We know that God's people did not always follow God but we do know that God kept that covenant for God is faithful.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of God's faithfulness was Christ- God incarnate- dying on the cross for us. In our gospel reading Jesus makes it clear that he must suffer and die, choosing to suffer for us out of pure obedience and love.

Jesus offered us a challenge as to whether we are prepared to take up our cross and follow him? In Lent we traditionally think about temptation. Perhaps the ultimate temptation is not to be faithful to Christ. We know that because he was faithful to his calling we can

be equipped in the power of the Holy Spirit to be faithful to our calling to follow him.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer (please add your own prayers where the ellipses are)

Loving God,

We pray for our world. Particularly thinking of those places we know that are on our screens on the news this week...

We pray for our communities and particularly those parts of our communities where hurt or division is felt...

We pray for those we know who are sick and suffering and ask that they know your presence...

We remember all who have died and their families and ask that you comfort the bereaved and hold those who have died in your eternal care...

Merciful God accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

***Listen to* Faithful (Lou Fellingham)**

<https://youtu.be/h0vm5JNfJ34>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

May we know the faithfulness of God in our lives, may we live with the assurance we are children of God and know ourselves to be loved. May we find ourselves faithful even amidst temptation.

And the blessing of God the Three in One reside with us always. Amen

Original Materials by James Blackhall

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Local Churches please insert CCLI No here

We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team. We aim to continue to provide these resources until the end of August 2021.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.'

God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

Mark 8:31-48

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'