

# Park Life

## April 2020



### Welcome!

I write to you in the midst of some very strange times indeed! For the first time, possibly in the 2,000 history of the church, there will be no physical gatherings of Christians together on Easter Sunday.

Of course this does not diminish the power and brilliance of what Jesus achieved on the cross and through overcoming death at the resurrection. But it does affect the way we mark and celebrate this key moment that defines our faith.

The truth is that this year we may identify more with the darkness of Good Friday and the isolation of Easter Saturday, than with the hope of the resurrection. If you are finding this time difficult, then be reminded that it is ok to not be ok. The Bible has an entire book devoted to this, called Lamentations. The art of lamenting has become a little lost in our worship, but is perhaps more relevant now than it has been in many years.

To lament is to offer up to God our anger, our frustration, our sadness and our pain. To recognise those feelings which make us uncomfortable and which we'd rather bury and ignore. God's shoulders are broad

enough to cope with our ranting, and his arms wide enough to embrace us in our sadness and reassure us in our pain.

There is no need to rush through Holy Week in order to reach Easter Sunday. In fact the opposite is true. Pause, slow down, recognise your own difficult emotions and offer them to God as you engage with Jesus' story. But remember that there is light on the horizon, and it comes in the form of the hope of an empty tomb.

In this month's *Park Life* we reflect upon how we might share communion 'virtually', prayer requests abound and information is shared about what we continue to do during this period of quarantine. I also ask you to pause on Monday 20th to give thanks for the life of Robin Day, one of our longest-serving and well-loved members, who died earlier this month. As he enters into the presence of his Saviour, we can be assured that he is greeted with the words "well done, good and faithful servant."

Stay safe, and may God bless you,

*Peter*

**NOTE: There are no services currently at church due to Covid-19**

## People for Prayer

There are lots of people and situations to be praying into during this difficult time. Here are a few prayer points from our own church family:

- **Martin Frisby** as he awaits results of recent tests and prepares for an operation. Pray that the cancer will not spread and for wisdom for the doctors as they develop his treatment plan.
- **June Day** as she comes to terms with the loss of Robin and prepares for his funeral on 20th April. Pray that the peace of Christ may fill her heart and she would know God's comfort at this time.
- **Lessie Keenan & her mum, Pam** Following Pam's diagnosis of stage 4 cancer in her lung and brain, pray that her faith may be reawakened. Pray for Lessie as she moves in to care for her mum and for Richard and the family as they offer support from a distance.
- **For our Key Workers** who continue to work in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. Pray particularly for those working at the hospital, in the Police force & in supermarkets.
- **For those caring for vulnerable family members** that they may be protected from the virus and for the Lord to give them energy and strength.

# WHO CARES?

The vision evening to launch 'Who Cares East Coast', has now been rearranged to take place via Zoom on Tuesday 5th May at 7pm.

Perhaps now, more than ever, it is relevant to be asking the question 'What hurts the most?' Who Cares? founder Rob Tervet will explain the vision behind the initiative and how it provides a framework for mission in our local area.

We took part in this around 6 years ago, when it first launched and the results helped shape our approach to mission.

If you've not used Zoom before it's quite straightforward, and Peter is happy to offer tutorials to anyone who would like one.

The link to access the meeting is:

<https://zoom.us/j/990114063>

The meeting ID is: 990 114 063

## Rethinking church during Covid-19

Many of you will know by now that Peter and Jorge have both been uploading services to the church YouTube channel on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. These involve times of prayer, a Bible reading and short message, and in Jorge's case, some singing!

During Holy Week Peter has also been uploading a short daily reflection to help us engage with Jesus' story. These can all be found by visiting [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and typing 'Park Baptist Church Great Yarmouth' in the search bar.

We have also enjoyed using the video conference calling app 'Zoom' to connect every

Tuesday and Thursday morning at 10am. Around 20 of us gather to exchange news, pray together and to hear a 'thought for the day' from Peter. It is proving to be an encouraging and positive time. The link is: <https://zoom.us/j/499588809>

Connect Groups are also encouraged to keep in regular contact using What's App or via phone calls. This is especially important for us to remember those who are living alone at this time.

We also have a network of willing and able volunteers who are able to pick up items of shopping/prescriptions etc if you cannot get out. Please speak to Peter if you need some help.



Are you self isolating? Unable to get food in any other way?

# Great Yarmouth Foodbank can help!

## Call 07907 616566 for assistance

Last month the GY Foodbank took on the mammoth role of supporting the community with emergency deliveries. Anna Heydon, along with Anna and Matthew Price (*St. Mary Mag*) have given oversight to this project working in close partnership with Liz Townson (*Gorleston Baptist*), whose prophetic dream this was. They are asking for your prayers. The GY Foodbank Emergency Delivery Service aims to provide emergency 7-day food parcels for people who are self-isolating and have no way of accessing food (e.g. friends, families, deliveries). The fast growing volunteer team have been working closely with the Council to achieve this. Last week (WC 30/03/2020) the team delivered a whopping **96 food parcels!**

The Bible tells us to **Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus** (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18). We would be grateful for your prayers!

### Thank God for:

- Give thanks for the amazing provision of food, funds and volunteers to date.
- Here is some feedback that we had from one of our drivers who delivered to an elderly lady recently: *"She just wanted to pass on her deep gratitude. She said it meant so much to her. She told me that she had a 'little cry' after I left. She was quite overwhelmed by what was provided, especially the fruit and veg. In fact, she said it was all more than she would normally buy for herself at Christmas and would last her for a good while. She'd just enjoyed the lovely ham in a sandwich. She was genuinely grateful to us for our kindness and when she is back to normal she will always put food into the foodbank tub at the supermarket. I told her it was a privilege to deliver it and it was our way of showing the love of God, and if the parcel seemed extravagant that was a bonus!"*
- Give thanks for the close partnerships between churches in the borough and the GY Borough Council and pray protection on those relationships.

### Please pray for:

- Continued provision of food and funds.
- Pray for there to continue to be enough volunteers - as some have to self-isolate that others would come available.
- Pray for those that receive the parcels that they would see them as a sign of the love and hope available in the gospel.
- Pray for particular wisdom for our Phone Managers (all Christians) who are manning the calls as they seek to discern those in genuine needs and point others who have alternative avenues where appropriate and they are able. May they express the compassion and care of Christ with those in desperate situations.
- Pray for plans going forward - particularly for the Easter weekend - and for dealing with seemingly daily fluctuating demand.

Please also continue to remember in your prayers the Foodbank locations which continue to operate across our borough as they did before the current crisis, but with increased pressure and demand.



# Communion in a Time of Corona

The question of how we might share communion during this difficult time is an important one that raises a number of theological questions. The following (edited) article was originally published on the Baptists Together website and is written by minister Simon Woodman. His liturgy was adapted by Peter to be used on Maundy Thursday.

It is often said amongst Baptists that our buildings are a function of our faith, rather than integral to it. I paraphrase. What is actually often said is that, 'we could worship in the woods if we had to'. What matters for Baptists is the gathering and the worship, not where we do it. And Amen to that. But the Coronavirus epidemic has raised a slightly different question for us, which is that of whether we need to 'gather' physically at all, for church to still be church.

There is of course biblical precedent for 'virtual fellowship', just ask St Paul, who continued his ministry in a variety of congregations while physically distant from them, using the technology available at the time (and inadvertently writing a large part of the New Testament while he was at it). In fact, I find myself wondering whether times of extremis have the potential to bring the best out of us, theologically speaking, as we are forced to take our faith into spaces that it has not previously had to go.

For many of us, in 2020, that previously strange space is the virtual world (at least, it is strange to many of us over 'a certain age'). The questions we are facing here are new: what does it mean for us to 'gather' meaningfully from our homes? How can we 'discern the mind of Christ together' when we are not physically in one space? And what role for the sacrament of Communion?

If, as Chris Ellis suggests, the sacraments are a means of 'embodied grace', can they have meaning in the disembodied space of online gatherings? Ellis says that 'the God who is made known to us in the breaking of bread is the same One who is present in every meal', suggesting that for Baptists, the sacrament shared together also reveals God's presence in separation. The embodiment of God's grace is not restricted to what we do 'in church', but infuses all areas of our life.

It seems to me that it is a logical extension of this to suggest that when God's scattered people share bread and wine intentionally and in harmony, the sacramental moment is still to be found. This is not dissimilar to the common practice of sharing home communion with those who can no longer attend worship due to age or infirmity. The key difference between Baptists and some other denominations, is that our doctrine of the priesthood of all believers allows in theory for anyone authorised by the congregation to preside at the Lord's Table, even if this is 'normally' done by the minister. The bread broken and wine poured at home can be for us as sacramentally valid as that which normally happens in our church buildings.

Many Baptist congregations during the Coronavirus lockdown have moved their Sunday gatherings online, sharing together in prayer, preaching, worship, silence, discernment and reflection. It is a natural question to consider what they might do in terms of sharing communion, and questions and discussion around this are welcomed. Please feel free to discuss this in your connect groups etc, and send Peter any questions you might have. We will continue to share communion online on the third Sunday of each month.

If you are interested in examining this issue further, the Baptist theologian Steve Holmes has written some articles exploring both sides of the debate on his blog: <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7716>

