



Cheltenham United Reformed Church

'The Pew sheet without any Pews'

Bulletin No 16 / 28.06.20

Dear Friends

In company with all other organisations, the Church is following Government guidelines and not meeting for worship while the coronavirus emergency is on.

This weekly bulletin has worship, news, prayer requests, information about virtual services, plus anything else that might be 'in the notices'.

Prayer Requests

- Geoffrey Harmsworth, Mhairi Turner, Sharon Williams, John Standing
- Steve and Joan Osmond, friends from Christchurch
- Those with birthdays and Anniversaries this week.
- The country as we start to slowly emerge from lockdown

If you know of anyone who would like to be added to the prayer list, please let us know and they will be included in the next bulletin.

Rev. Ken Martin sends greetings from the hills of Malvern and looks forward to the days when we can meet in person again.

Lectionary Readings

Jeremiah 28 v5-9

Romans 6 v12-23

Psalms 89 v1-4,15-18

Matthew 10 v40-42

Coffee and Prayers

Please join Bob Alger on Zoom for :

- The 11.30 am **Sunday morning Coffee Chat**
- The 8.30 pm **Monday Prayer Meeting**

The link is: <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/6147530476> (Meeting ID: 614 753 0476/Password : 6BcgyC)
Any problems please call Bob on 01242 512343 or email realger@sky.com

Virtual Services

For a list of virtual services, please visit <http://www.urchic.org.uk/news.aspx>

Our Way Forward

We all know that the Government has changed the coronavirus distancing rules this week and that technically Places of Worship can open from 4th July.

However, there are a great deal more considerations for our churches before that can happen.

At St Andrew's the clean-up after the fire must go ahead first. This will involve commercial cleaners of public buildings, who have the expertise to clear smoke particles from high buildings. The Insurance company has approved this work, we do not yet know the timetable.

At Prestbury, the electrical safety works are now complete, but the church will need a good clean before opening as there is a lot of plaster dust around – so a working party will need to be formed.

All our Churches need to produce detailed Risk Assessments of all areas of their buildings. TCiWH has made a start on this, Prestbury and St Andrew's Elders are beginning talks this week. User groups will also need their own Risk Assessments built on those written for the Church.

Once these documents are written, Synod will give the approval to reopen.

We will keep you updated.

Janet and Fiona

ST ANDREW'S

Our July Charity

Commitment for Life is the URC's channel for giving to, learning about, and praying for, areas where some of the world's poorest are struggling with the effects of poverty, climate change and injustice.

The areas at present supported by CfL are Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Central America and Israel/Palestine, and churches choose which area they wish to focus on. The money raised goes via Christian Aid to its partner organisations in the chosen country, who devote it to meeting needs of the people. The partners work across all political and religious boundaries.

This year our money will go to a group of countries in Central America, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. All of these suffer from poverty, endemic violence, and the effects of climate change in this tropical region. Education and training is generally of a poor standard, and the ambition of many young people is to move to the United States where opportunities are greater. Women and their families are often at a disadvantage from gender-based violence, and lack of education in family planning. 80% per cent of the population depend on agriculture, and weather extremes cause real problems.

Here are two projects which CfL are helping with:



- The Sexual and Reproductive health project in Guatemala provides women with information on family planning, pregnancy and gender-based violence. Many vulnerable women live in impoverished and remote areas, with no basic services or government presence. The midwives who run the project in the rural communities support new mothers, run talks and training on childcare and children's nutrition, and go into schools accompanied by a doctor, teaching young women about reproductive health, information that they don't get anywhere else. The project has brought many improvements, including reducing or eliminating underage pregnancy. The project workers also advocate policies which will advance women's rights, bringing to the attention of government officials the negative conditions many women experience and ensuring that the promises of improvements they obtain from authorities are delivered to these vulnerable women.
- Agricultural yields are declining because of the cycles of drought followed by too much rain. Coffee is an important crop, but fungal growth caused by excessive rains affects the less hardy varieties, and farmers can lose up to 30% of their crops. The Soppexcca project in Nicaragua helps 200 coffee farmers to diversify and grow cocoa. They attend workshops and receive tools to take care of the cocoa plants, and fertilisers, and saplings to help shade the plants from the sun. Also on climate change, Christian Aid works across the region with Centro Humboldt which monitors climate and trains local people to collect data to share with small farmers, cooperatives and local organisations.

Commitment for Life reports regularly to supporting churches on these and other projects which it is involved in through Christian Aid.

Last year St Andrew's contributed £1,234 to Commitment for Life. Please will you give generously to our July charity of the month to ensure that we reach or surpass our last year's total. If you do not already donate regularly to our monthly charity, in lieu of the retiring offertory plate please see the guidance sheet 'donations to the church during the closure' as sent out with the church accounts in April. Thank you.

Robin Derbyshire



Bicycle Sculpture, Montpellier

Reflection from Rev Dee Brierley-Jones

Jewish Wedding Customs and Jesus' Return

During this time of Coronavirus, weddings are still happening in some parts of the world - but attendance is limited.

Sadly, but very sensibly, my July and September Weddings Celebration Services have been put forward a year, due to the restrictions of guests from abroad reaching England even after our lock down is lessened.

Since the summer months are usually full of weddings, there is no better time to reflect on the much anticipated gathering of the bride **and the wedding of the Lamb**.

"For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. ... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:7, 9)

The exchange of covenant vows between two people who love each other is a blessing in any culture, and should be rich in spiritual truths.

This ancient ritual prophetically points to the coming of the Messiah, and the great celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb. It also teaches us unique lessons about God's covenant love for His people.

"Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither people nor animals, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom." (Jeremiah 33:10-11)

Since **Jesus used the model of the ancient Jewish marriage ceremony to refer to His future second coming**, to recognize exactly what He was talking about, it's helpful to understand the nature of marriage during His earthly ministry in Israel.

There are three distinct parts to the ancient Jewish wedding:

- shiddukhin (mutual commitment),
- erusin (engagement), and
- nissuin (marriage).

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" (Genesis 2:18)

In ancient times, the father of the groom often selected a bride for his son, as did Abraham for his son Isaac (*Genesis 24:1-4*), and marriage was looked upon as more of an alliance for reasons of survival or practicality, and the concept of romantic love remained a secondary issue, if considered at all. Romantic love grew over time.

Of course, the consent of the bride-to-be is an important consideration. Rebecca, for example, was asked if she agreed to go back with Abraham's servant to marry Abraham's son, Isaac. She went willingly (*Genesis 24:57-59*).

Likewise, we cannot be forced into a relationship with the Son of Man - Jesus.

In the same way that Rebecca was asked if she would go with Abraham's servant, **the Holy Spirit asks us if we are willing to follow Him to be joined in a covenant of love with Yeshua.**

Traditionally, in preparation for the betrothal ceremony, the bride and groom are separately immersed in water in a ritual called the **mikvah**, which is symbolic of spiritual cleansing.

In Matthew 3:13–17, we read that Jesus has already been immersed (baptized) by John in the waters of mikvah at the Jordan River.

"Whoever believes and is baptized [ritually immersed] will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord." (Proverbs 18:22)

Matthew 1:18–25 provides an excellent example of divorce in that day, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, and he considered divorcing her, although he had not yet brought her home as his wife.

"...he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'" (Matthew 1:19–20)

Although the bride knew to expect her groom after about a year, she did not know the exact day or hour. He could come earlier, and it was the father of the groom who gave final approval for him to return to collect his bride.

For that reason, the bride kept her oil lamps ready at all times, just in case the groom came in the night, sounding the ram's horn to lead the bridal procession to the home he had prepared for her.

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (*Matthew 25:1–13*), **Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to this special period of this Jewish tradition**, when the groom comes for his bride:

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps." (Matthew 25:6–7)

So too today, in the season of Jesus' end-time return, we should be careful to remain alert and prepared for His coming, since Jesus was speaking to His disciples prophetically about the condition of the Church in the last days.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3)

Likewise, Jesus, as the Bridegroom, has gone to prepare a place for us, because the day of the return of the Messiah for His Bride is soon approaching.

Although, we know approximately the time of His return from the signs of the times, *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (2 Peter 3:10)*

The Bride - we believers in Jesus - should be living consecrated lives - keeping ourselves pure and holy in preparation for the wedding feast of the Lamb, when the Groom comes with the blast of the trumpet (*1 Thessalonians 4:16*) to bring His Bride home.

"Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber [huppah]." (*Joel 2:16*)

Let us consider **the promised and prophesised "Marriage Supper of the Lamb..."**

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." (*Revelation 21:1-2*)

When Messiah returns for us, we will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb with Him, and our joy will be beyond measure!

But, sadly, there will be those who won't share in our wedding and celebrate with us because they do not know Jesus.

Blessings, Dee

Lord, I have time, I have plenty of time. All the time that you give me, the years of my life, the days of my years, the hours of my days, they are all mine....I am not asking you tonight, Lord, for time to do this and that, but for your grace to do conscientiously, in the time that you give me, what you want me to do. Amen

Michel Quoist

Fiona, Janet and Brian

