

Hopes, Fears, & Blessings

The background of the image is a close-up of a weathered tree stump. The wood grain is dark and textured, with several horizontal cracks. In the lower-left and lower-right corners, there are several stems of ivy with bright green, lobed leaves. The text is written in a white, cursive font, centered on the right side of the image.

Dear Lord,
Despite everything that the world
is going through, we have so much
to thank you for
We praise you for beautiful nature
For our neighbours;
For the community spirit;
For all the lessons learnt;
For the time with
our families and for so much more.
We know that whatever is
ahead of us,
you will guide us through
Amen

Hopes, Fears and Blessings

Journeying Through Times of Challenge and Moving On

Prayer and picture on front cover by Joanna Sopyło-Firrisa

This booklet has been produced as a circuit resource. As you read through you can empathise with the fears expressed, knowing that you are not alone if they are like your own. We can all have hope because of our faith in God who has shown us the blessings of this year of turmoil.

All the material has been written during the year and contributed by members and friends of our circuit. There are some prayers included but plenty of articles for personal meditation and prayer.

Thank you everybody who has contributed to this booklet.

For more thoughts on HOPE see the Methodist magazine Connexion Autumn 2020 which can be read at:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/19219/the-connexion-magazine-issue-20.pdf>



Advent 2020



Father,
I thank you that even on the darkest of days,
I can find your light shining through.
In the touch of a friend
In a glimpse of nature
A message by text
A call of a bird
And by remembering that your love is constant,
By counting my blessings and knowing that you are always there,
On days, when all my strivings to find you, seem in vain.
Surround me with your love and guide me through the day.

Jennifer Pitt

Lockdown

For some

A welcome embrace of the quiet

Hearing your own breath

Discontinuity with busyness

Stripped from activity

Catching an occasional glimpse of Glory in a Moses-like experience
of the I AM.

For some,

In the quiet

WHO?

WHAT?

Can drown out the noise of the past?

Hurt, retribution, countless humiliations: their noise

In the head, in the heart, echoing in every bone and sinew.

For some,

A chance to read, to write

An opportunity to muse and reflect.

To hold together thoughts

To prepare, refreshed, to gather once more.

For some,

No books to read

Nothing to write

Thoughts a jumble.

The illiterate, like my brother.

The unwell in mind, like my daughter.

Their hours

Tick tock tick tock tick tock

Are more than 24 each day. Endless hours.

These are who we were.

These are who we are.

O Lord make speed to save us.

O Lord make haste to help us.

Lord, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy salvation.

June Hardcastle

Lockdown, The garden.
Two great tits - vivid colour.
Spring sunshine. Hope flowers.

A shrub full of flowers
more plentiful than ever
Creation renewed

Human rush judders
Space to look and really see
God's all around you

Nigel Deller

Lockdown was when things changed

Online learning instead of going to school

Chating with neighbours after clapping for carers

Keeping two metres apart when out and about

Discovering new places on our daily exercise

Opportunities to spend time at home

Wondering what will happen when back to school

Normal life gone and replaced by a different one

Jessica Reay, aged 11

Father God,

I pray for the well-being of all children and young people in this time of uncertainty. Help them to feel your presence when they are anxious or lonely.

I thank you for the teachers and staff of our schools and universities as they manage in difficult circumstances.

Amen

Gill Lawson

Cleaning the Surfaces

As well as the grass in our back garden we have a small wall which goes three parts around the garden, with the growing part behind it. When the small wall had to be renewed some years ago we painted it a 'light yellow' or 'cream' colour to give it that feeling of warmth and tidiness.

There is only one problem with this – well one major problem. At the end of the garden furthest from the house, the underneath part of the 'U' bit of the wall gets exceptionally dirty. To the extent that there is usually more dirt to be seen than nice bright paint.

So with this enforced isolation having to stay mainly in the confines of the house and garden, it seemed appropriate to give the wall a 'spruce up'. As the bit at the bottom was worst, that seemed the obvious place to start. How is it done. A bucket of water and flash, scrubbing brush, and plenty of 'elbow grease' (in other words hard work scrubbing).



What a difference this cleaning produced. Having got round the 'U' bend (sorry about the pun) and looking out from the house, it really has come up remarkably well. The wall is showing an almost 100% improvement to what it looked like before the scrub.

This reminded me that as we go through life, we all pick up the dirt and litter that lies around us. It is inevitable. Under normal circumstances we are all mixing with the rest of humanity and we pick up some of what they leave for us to put our big, or small, foot in. And once we have got

it on us, it is very hard to dislodge it.

I suppose you could say the same of the current situation. Once we have got the virus we cannot easily get rid of it - it just has to work its way through our system until we hopefully, come out unscathed, on the other side. (I pray this does not happen to you.)

But back to the wall. As I mentioned above, some things that we pick up are not always easy to detach. Some we may quite like having on board as we go through life – it makes us more popular with our colleagues and acquaintances, and they think more highly of us because we join in with their 'activities.' But are they God's activities we should be involved in?

It is only when we are confronted with the things that we have picked up that we realise we need to shed some of that load. We cannot do it ourselves, but need the help of God to get us through. Let us remember Jesus' words:

'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

Terry Rowell

White vested brothers
songs in many languages
God's people are one

Space, silence, light, songs.
White crosses taped on the floor
Taizé Covid time

Multi coloured squares
Lattice of fluttering flames
Silence, song - Taizé

Brothers old and young
Young people around the cross
God is singing too!

Nigel Deller

(written on his recent sabbatical visit to Taizé)

I wrote these Acrostics in July when we were beginning to see the light on the horizon.

I had splashed and trod carefully through the muddy puddles of anxiety, filling the freezer, planning twelve weeks of leisure.

I had reached the hilly ups and downs with more time but restricted interaction with others.

My watch stopped and the strap was breaking, could I buy one online? But I didn't need to know the time with no meetings to attend!

The door wouldn't lock, the sink was blocked, the roof leaked; little "downs" but followed by big "ups" when solutions were found.

Then the thoughts came of the immediate and more distant future. There is the light of hope, a faith in God, shining through.

The weather is autumnal, and future events uncertain but I thank God for the blessings I have experienced through more time at home, the friendliness of neighbours I didn't know and an inner peace whatever happens.

Gill Lawson

CANCELLED!

Covid-19. What happened?

All events cancelled

Nobody visiting

Churches closed

Everybody stayed at home

Lockdown began

Lots more time

Exercise important

Don't go shopping

Cautiously going out

Always two metres apart

Neighbourly conversations

Church services online

Everlasting sunshine

Looking forward to meeting people

Longer walks

Eating differently

Digging the garden

Change of pace, more time, less pressure

Activities neglected, now resumed

Never take the future for granted

Can life ever return to normal?

Everything normal reassessed

Life in future can be different!

Longing to see family

Easing of restrictions

Dare we?

NEW NORMAL

New priorities

Experiment

What is important?

Never the same

Opportunities

Rules to follow

Memories

Appreciation of others

Look forward, never back

Good Friday Prayers 2020

Suffering Christ

Support all those who struggle to breathe

I pray

As I offer your name to them

With each breath I take.

Je...sus.

Dying Christ

Support all those who watch and wait

I pray

As I watch from afar

With great love.

Je..sus.

Lonely Christ

Support all those who self-isolate

I pray

As I try to keep in touch

Without touch.

Je.sus.

Betrayed Christ

Support all those who feel trapped

I pray

As I seek projects

That give purpose.

Je sus.

Surrendered Christ

Let us receive the love

Set free

In your dying

That we may journey through

These times

With love.

Je...sus.

Angela Webb

Some thoughts on Easter 2020

What a strange week this has been. Easter is the most important time in the Christian year when we remember Jesus, the Lamb of God, sacrificing himself for us all, upon the cross. And after the despair, the joy of the Resurrection and the knowledge that, through this, He is with us forever. It's a time when traditionally we gather to meet our families, to share worship, to eat together and to cover our Lenten cross with flowers. None of which has been possible this year.

I have been thinking of the phrase we keep hearing "When everything returns to normal" and wondering what that will mean. When Frank died a friend, who had lost her husband when she was young and had two small children, wrote to me and said "you will get back to normal but it will be a different normal" I now understand what she meant. That first Easter I imagine the disciples wondered what their future held with their master dead, they could have had no idea that after the Resurrection their life as disciples was to carry on but in a very different way. Life as a disciple entered a new phase, a new normal way of being.

So, what will our new normal look like? I pray that it will be one where people will continue to look out for their neighbours and the vulnerable, where people are more important than possessions, where our emergency and health workers are treated with respect and not vilified and where people learn to respect the earth and remember it is the work of God's own hand, given to us for his glory.

So, this Easter, as we are apprehensive about the future, not knowing when this will end, let us look forward to the time when normal life will return, with the hope that we see the people in our communities continuing to respect each other and creation in the way that God wants for us all.

We may all feel a bit like the disciples at the moment, frightened of what the future may hold, but after the Resurrection Jesus came to his friends and gave them his peace. That is my prayer that whatever situation we find ourselves in, we will know the peace of Christ in our hearts and the joy of knowing that he is with us always and will never leave us whatever we are going through.

Paddy Jose



Old Basing in Lockdown and beyond

Things seemed so dismal and closed way back in March and with so many of our significant Christian year celebrations upon us I thought our village needed to know that we were still there and our life of faith continued.

We have one window which faces the road so I thought I would decorate it appropriately for the season we were approaching.

After Easter and even Pentecost I felt I should continue as it was a means of expressing my own faith too.

At first I had some comments (if people passed while I was there) particularly from members of the Anglican Church as they felt their premises looked so dead. Otherwise I have no idea what impact it has had , we can only trust and hope. In fact that is my main reason for continuing now, one of hope. Thinking of new themes during the summer I realised my many blessings from the shrunken world around us.

I don't know how long I can continue. I am no artist, also strong sunlight and condensation mean I may have to rethink the method. It will be harder to stop now as well because it seems like turning a faith light or beacon off and I wouldn't want to do that. Maybe it was worthwhile even if it made one person think or even smile.

Marion Wales



Marion submitted several examples of the window displays but I like this photo because we see through the Holy Week images to the church but also we have the reflection of the houses and trees reminding us that it is for the world's eye.

Gill Lawson

Easter Season Prayers 2020

Risen Christ
Meet us in the garden.
Show us the healing herbs
And other means
To bring relief
To those who suffer.

Risen Christ
Meet with us
Behind locked doors.
Bring us peace
And renewed purpose
In our isolation.

Risen Christ
Meet us on the beach
Or in the kitchen.
Feed us with breakfast
Or whatever we need
To sustain us
In these times.

Risen Christ
Walk with us
Along the shore.
Encourage us
To speak with you
About anything
That grieves or pains us.

Risen Christ
Remind us of
Your promise
To be with us
Always
As we gather
To worship
Virtually.

Angela Webb

“Rollercoaster”

The invitation came up on my phone to describe my experience of this year in one word. So many things flashed through my mind as I pondered an answer. “Rollercoaster” was my response that day and it does sum things up pretty well. If you knew me well you would know that I am terrified of amusement park rollercoasters but on the up side they do make me pray very vibrantly! 2020 has been similar in that respect!

There is no denying that I have found some days very hard. Or more accurately some nights have been long and difficult as I laid awake unable to sleep. As I worried about COVID tests for family members, my son in his care home, funerals that I was taking, parents not coping and so much more. Being alongside the grieving and the confused has been a privilege, but has not been without cost.

I have found it hard at times to let go and let God! If this has been your experience you are not alone!

There have been truly awesome moments for me too. I have been humbled and uplifted by so many experiences of online worship. I have been introduced to new ideas by prominent theologians and people who struggle to speak but have found a way to do so by recording online content in their own time. I have found time for stillness and contemplation. I have felt real connections with people that I have not met in the flesh. Souls have connected as we laid aside the small talk and shared our fears, our hopes, our faith struggles. I have walked through fields of poppies, and pushed my delighted grandson through the dappled light of overarching trees.

I have missed placing bread and wine into other’s hands so much it has felt like a physical ache but my spirit has soared as God drew me and others into mystical communion with him.

I have discovered a new unity with ecumenical clergy in Basingstoke. The way we have supported each other has reminded me that prayer in community is a powerful thing. If you do not have people you can pray

with honestly and regularly this may be something you could seek out or begin.

I have learnt to be still, quiet and open to God in a more real way during this time and I am indebted to Richard Carter from the Nazareth Community of St Martin-in-the-Fields for his gentle meditations on Saturday morning. Most particularly I have read and reread and prayed his book "The City is my Monastery".



A picture of the East window at St Martin-in-the-Fields. This window has felt like a promise of Light in Darkness through the cross of Christ for us all.

Two prayers have been important to me in this time.

***God be in my head,
And in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes,
And in my looking;
God be in my mouth,
And in my speaking;
God be in my heart,
And in my thinking;
God be at mine end,
And at my departing.***

And one that may be familiar to you:-

***Loving God,
Although our destination is not yet clear,
May we trust in your graceful promises;
Though we are uncertain of ourselves,
May we be rooted in your loving regard;
Though our attention is inclined to wander,
May we hear the things you are saying;
Though we often neglect your influence,
May we be convicted of your power to change,
In Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.***

More than anything else this time has convinced me that God brings good things out of challenging situations. He is able to bring blessings into our lives and he is able to work through us so that others are blessed too. His blessings do cascade.

Alison Parker

Peace, Protection, Provision

Stuart King co-founder Mission Aviation Fellowship 75 years ago died on 29th August 2020. His obituary was in The Times, he was 98.

In 2016 he was asked to write a prayer encapsulating MAF:

Lord, thank you for your peace, protection and provision.

We pray that MAF will always have:

one purpose- the glory of God

one pathway- the will of God

one passion- the love of God

In Jesus name, Amen

An amazing man, and an amazing organisation, truly inspirational. Words that should apply to much more than just MAF.

Brenda McIntosh

Morning

My heart was restless as evening came,
The fading light playing within me.
I longed for healing, for Your touch,
But sleep came, bringing calm and rest....

Now it is early, calm and still,
Fingers of shadow quietly shorten
as the dawn's light feeds this place.
Birds awaken to their song,
Telling all "it is here"!

The warmth of the sun
driving out the darkness;
and my eye takes in the scene,
A perfect waking for a sleeping world.

My heart joins with the cries
of the red kites' morning calls;
Back and forth, as nature stirs,
My senses rising to sight and sound.

My God, my God, now You are here,
Arising with Nature's dawning.
My heart beats with eager yearnings
as Your Love quickens the day.

You are here, You are here,
God is in His heaven,
and all is well with me.

Donald Fraser 16.6.2020

Fully satisfied in a world of pain?

Feeling satisfied in a world of pain?
People suffer, but I gain?
Is it complacent to be at peace
When I'm aware of how sorrows increase?
Is it selfish to experience joy
When injustice never fails to annoy?
For me there is so much fullness in life;
For many there is continuous strife.
The richness of my personal world
Conflicts with the insults and bombs that are hurled.
My own wonder at life's sheer glory
Is hedged about by a different story;
For me "all manner of things shall be well",
But others are struggling with a living hell.
My life can never be entirely complete
It will always be tinged with the bittersweet;
So while I can thankfully receive,
While I can joyfully believe,
I can never compartmentalise
Or wholly interiorise
All the good that I feel
When I know how real
Are the daily deprivations
Known in all the nations
That demand committed giving,
Prayerful living,
Empathy,
Sympathy,
Active compassion,
Unselfish action;
Beyond the jarring dissonance
Of tortured innocence,
The harmony which embraces
All people and all places.

David Jenkins

In these uncertain times, I have found my faith in our loving Heavenly Father has kept me strong and gives me a hope and a purpose.

James 1 v17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows.

Just to know the Father loves me,
That He's forgiven all my sins -
This knowledge is so wonderful,
It gives me peace within.

He is the rock on which I build
My life to keep it strong
To face the testing changes
That always come along.

These come in many guises
Some pleasant ones, some tough
The happy ones are easy
But the others are quite rough.

We need someone to turn to
Who knows us inside out,
Someone who never changes
And one we cannot doubt.

"I am the Lord who does not change"
We have this promise sure,
So we can put our trust in Him
And know our future is secure.

Malachai 3 v6 "I the Lord do not change."

Jo McElveen

Preparing for Pentecost

Christ speaks to us,

“ Come to me,
All you who are heavy laden,
Fearful and Floundering,
Locked-down,lonely and lost,
Come to me
And rest.

Waiting and wondering,
Worshipping and Worrying,
Come to me
And learn.

Learn the language of love,
The attitude of gratitude,
The fast of forgiveness,
The embrace of empathy,
The energy of enjoyment,
The holiness of hope,
The treasure of trust.

Take my yoke upon you
And learn of me.
Let all that is me
Flow into you.
Let springs of Living Water
Flow out of you.
Let the wind of the Spirit
Blow where it will.
Let the fire of my love
Burn brightly
In your heart.”

Angela Webb

Is the earth washed clean by the fresh fallen rain?

This morning the clouds joined across the sleeping world,
And rain came steadily, filling the cups and troughs of the dry parched
earth.

Refreshment to the fields and hayseed grass,
Drink to the beasts and bugs,
The moisture saving, serving and preserving the fresh growth and new
life.

Now the clouds slip away, grey clouds breaking, light parting, and brings
awakening and refreshment.

The ground's wet dew between my feet, cooling and salve; the smell of
fresh grass and leaves surrounds.

Birdsong fills the trees and hedgerows, the cockerel crows again to wake
the day;

All is well, clean and blessed, ready for what the day brings...

May our God bless us this morning, afresh with the newness of His
Spirit.

Reaching down and touching His world, his people, His creation earth.

Donald Fraser 27.6.2020

Where is our hope?

"All my hope on God is founded" is a 17th Century hymn, originally written in German. The words remind us that we can still trust God to guide us through changes.

From Wikipedia;

"Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large."

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hope in a jar?

This is an advert for an expensive face cream but it excited me to read a commercial advert stating that with hope there is faith and miracles too!

Titus 3: 5b-7 (NIV)

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom

he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.



Gill Lawson

Thoughts before attending a service in a church building for the first time since before lockdown.

Our singing
May be silenced
By Covid.
Our smiles
May be shrouded
By masks.
Our eyes
Still twinkle
With bubbling joy.
Your Spirit
Still witnesses
With our spirits
That we are
Children of God

Angela Webb

I decided that I would turn our apple tree into a prayer tree and hang crocheted rainbows on it as a way of praying in these strange times. I hung a few rainbows on the tree and wrote this

This apple tree
Standing in our garden
For many decades
Bearing fruit
Occasionally
Is become for me
The tree of hope.
Its trunk is love.
Its roots are faith
Drinking deep of the Spirit
That sustains all life.
Its leaves are joy and peace.
Its fruit is hope,
Rainbow prayers
Crocheted and hung with love
Reminders of the faithful
Covenant Love of God.
Rainbow prayers for all
Who demonstrate that love
And all who need to know
That they are loved.

Angela Webb

