



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH-UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 11th October 2020

NEWS UPDATE

Annual General Meeting – Sunday 25th October

Our church AGM takes place on Sunday 25th October, which is two weeks away. The morning church service will finish by 10.15am, allowing a little breather before we start the meeting at 10.30. Those who need to leave before the meeting starts will be able to do so. We will sit socially distanced in much the same way as the church services are conducted, and everything needed for the meeting will be projected onto the screen.

I hope a good number will be able to make it. It will be strange looking back on all the photos from 2019, when life was 'normal.' The annual meeting also allows us to take stock, and think about the future, which could be an interesting conversation this year.

Church Roof



We are struggling with our church roof, which I realise is nothing new. We received an affordable quote to recover the whole main section of the roof using the 'raise the roof' donations that were given last year, but it would seem that the tradesman concerned may not actually want to complete the work, as we have tried and tried to get him on site since July. So we are now approaching other roofers about the work that needs doing, while the rain continues to leak into the building causing more and more damage. Please Say a prayer that we will get the breakthrough we need soon.

Cleaner Living Tips – Ways of saving energy in the Kitchen

1. USE A MICROWAVE - Using the microwave is generally the most efficient way to heat up and cook food because its relatively small size means that a stronger level of heat can be focused on whatever is being cooked.



2. BE WATER CONSCIOUS – When you're boiling food in a pan, use only the amount of water needed, because boiling water you don't need can waste energy. Similarly, when you fill a kettle, put into the kettle only the amount you intend to use.



3. TAKE IT SLOW – To save energy try using a slow cooker to cook throughout the day. They only use about as much energy as a light bulb.



THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ENJOY – ENGAGE – ENCOURAGE – EMPOWER

This week we continue with our series, focusing on our second topic – ENGAGE.

Christians are called to be active in the world, promoting the message of God's love in Jesus through our words and our actions. Jesus gave us the *Great Commandment* – “love your neighbour as yourself.” He also gave us the *Great Commission*, to “go and make disciples.” Both of these require us to be engaging with other people. We cannot fulfil these commands if we withdraw from the world, keeping safely within our holy huddle; and yet we also know that the world is a messy, spiritual battleground for us, full of temptations and other risks, so our engagement needs to be approached with wisdom. If we are over-active in service yet under-nourished spiritually will we be ineffective, and vulnerable to burnout. We need to balance giving time and energy to other people, with time for God as well.



Did you know that our own country was converted to Christianity in the 5th and 6th centuries, through the Celtic monks in the North who had come over from Ireland, and the Benedictine monks in the South who originated from Italy? As these two monastic movements spread, they came together in the Midlands. Monks and nuns are not renowned for their engagement with the world. They are known for living separate lives that are set apart for prayer, simplicity, and holiness; and yet when these monks did engage in missionary work, they did so in a way that was so full of love and the power of the Holy Spirit that the results were tremendous. It was the kind of Christian engagement that really transformed people.

Another great example of effective engagement is St Paul, whose missionary activities are recorded in the book of Acts. Today's bible reading is from Acts chapter seventeen, where Paul visits Athens in Greece, and it is something of a masterclass.

Bible Reading – Acts 17:16-34

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the market-place every day with those who happened to be there. Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.' (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, 'May we know what this new

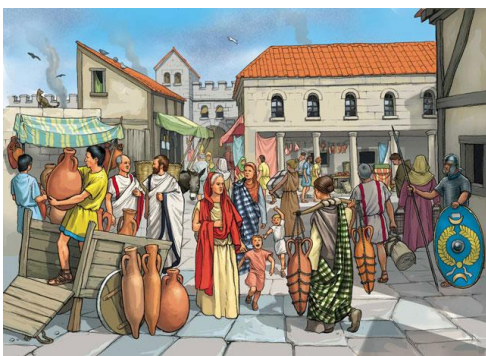
teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.’ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, ‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.”’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.’

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ At that point Paul left them. But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Engage Strategically



Paul headed for the big cities, to the marketplaces and the synagogues. He wanted to reach as many people as possible with his message, and a place like Athens was ripe for discussing and debating philosophical and religious matters. We read that the people “*would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.*” Paul knew that he would find some openness to the Christian message in a place like Athens.

In our lives today we don’t have time to engage with everyone, and like Paul we should be a bit strategic. If we are eager to love our neighbours, and keen to share our faith with people, we also need to discern where best to invest our time and energy. Paul used his common sense, as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit (who sometimes led him where he did not plan on going), to focus his engagement strategically.

Engage Lovingly

Paul “*was distressed to see that the city was full of idols.*” Paul knew that the worship of false Gods – statues and images made of wood and stone – was harmful and destructive for the people, and he was upset to see that idol worship was so rampant in Athens.



We may feel the same today when we see people seeking comfort and meaning in the wrong things, worshipping the false Gods of our age; for example sexual promiscuity, gambling, drugs and alcohol, addiction to shopping, or material greed. These sad realities should motivate us to engage with people, as we offer a different focus for life that is centred on the knowledge of the true God – Jesus Christ, and the peace that he brings. Our desire to proclaim Jesus should have little to do with trying to enlarge our numbers at church, and a lot more to do with wanting to love people into fulness of life.

Paul saw that people were groping around in the dark in search of their creator. As someone who was able to turn the light on for them, how could he not choose to engage?

Engage Patiently

We are not told how many days Paul spent speaking and debating with people in the synagogue and the marketplace. It may have been quite some time. Eventually he generated enough interest that he was invited to address the crowd at the Areopagus, the remains of which still exists in Athens today.



At the end of his speech some say to him, “*We will hear you again about this,*” which suggests that the conversation wasn’t over! Paul would need to continue engaging patiently after this.

The same is true of our engagement with people today. We must be patient, allowing the seeds of God’s word to grow in God’s time and in God’s way, as we continue to share our faith in a spirit of love and prayer.

Engage Positively

There is nothing worse than a street preacher who yells at passers-by, telling them that they will burn in hell unless they repent! This is not the model that Paul presents us with, and neither is it the way of Jesus. Paul looks for points of connection, and he makes compliments. He says to the Athenians, “*I see how extremely religious you are in every way,*” and he quotes their own Greek poets where these have written things that complement the truth about God.

Likewise today there are plenty of things that our unbelieving friends are getting right. There are points of connection with the Gospel, for example through music, films, and the arts. Instead of arguing down those who think differently to us we should start by looking for things that we have in common. We need to watch and listen to the culture around us, so that when we engage with people we are relating our faith perspective to the things that they already know, things that they can relate to in their lives.



I will admit that I am not always very good at this. Last week Mark Bradford, the vicar from St Cuthbert's, sent me a little message to say that there was a beautiful photo of Emmanuel Church on the Blog Preston Instagram page, and I had to admit to him that I don't go on Instagram. I am a bit of an old man before my time! I doubt I will ever be *down with the youth*, but I would like to understand better the world that others inhabit so that I can relate to them. I had better start by listening to Isaac more, now that he has started secondary school!

Paul got to know the culture in Athens by watching and listening, and this enabled him to engage intelligently. We too must strive to understand our culture today if we want to engage well with it.

Engage Truthfully



Having watched and listened, Paul recognised that some aspects of their culture and religious life could not be affirmed, namely their idol worship. Paul does not give them a harsh rebuke, but an honest telling of the truth. The God who made heaven and earth *"does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands."*

Most of us prefer to affirm what others already think and believe, and how others choose to live their lives; but sometimes we cannot. We have to be truthful in our engagement, which is ultimately kinder.

Engage Persuasively

At the end of Paul's message he provokes them with a challenge to respond. *"While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed."*

The best kind of engagement is that which persuades people to respond in some way, because our message, backed up by our example, is compelling. I am not saying we should become like commercial salesmen in the way that we present Jesus, but it *is* appropriate to think about how we can engage persuasively. People today are distracted by many competing messages, most of them aimed at selling us something. If we don't learn to be a bit persuasive in our engagement as Christians then the message of Jesus will get drowned out by all the other competing voices.

Starting from where we are



People today are not going to learn about God or Jesus from anyone else besides you and me, so we have to engage. I know that many people feel busy enough already without trying to add something new to their timetable. Perhaps we don't need to?

Surely the first place God calls us to engage is where we already are – with the people in our families, our workplaces, our streets, our clubs, our shops...

At the risk of stating the obvious, we are not in a strong position to engage with people at present whilst pandemic restrictions continue, but this is a timeless message that always applies to the Christian life. We might want to think about how we *can* still engage with people at the moment, recognising that while people are feeling disconnected, the efforts we make to engage with them may be all the more meaningful.

Prayers – Written by Louise Walton

Father, we pray for your Church throughout the world. We pray that Christians may love one another and their neighbours, as you loved us, and that working together, they may bring peace to all people. We praise you for the diversity of your people and cultures across the world. We acknowledge that this can lead to fear, distrust and conflict, and we pray your peace may spread across races and religions, within our communities and families.



Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who offer their services in the leadership of the affairs of the world, that they may uphold what is right for the peace and survival of mankind. We pray for our Government, that they will make wise choices in their efforts to control the Coronavirus, and maintain prosperity and economic stability. We pray for the people of this country that they will co-operate with the measures brought in for the common good.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Loving God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus has loosened our burdens and healed our spirits. We lift before you those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world. We pray for all those who are known to ourselves who needing your healing touch...

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, we bless you for the people in our lives who show us your wonderful love. Thank you for the sense of belonging, and the peace of mind that this brings us. Now give us courage to engage with others, that through us more people will be led to the knowledge of your goodness and love.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**