



Clare Baptist Church

**"To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known"**

Thought for the Week: 1

22nd March 2020: Mothering Sunday

Reality Check

Today was meant to be about celebrating. The original plan was to take the opportunity to say "thank you" to God for all that has happened in and through the life of Clare Baptist Church during the past 12 months. With a scheduled Annual General Meeting looming and an Annual Report to release, the Sunday morning service was to be dedicated to recognising God's presence in the midst of everything that we've been involved in, both individually and collectively.

And then we suddenly face the crisis of today and everything changes course. Plans have to change, services are cancelled, meetings rearranged and we have to adapt our programmes and methods to keep in contact whilst not being face to face with one another.

So, we do both things.

We take the chance to celebrate God's continuing faithful presence with us through the past 12 months. He has been evident in both good times and bad. We can't pretend that it has been an easy year, with bereavement and health challenges bringing people up short and meaning that we finished 2019 (and indeed continue into 2020) with a few faces no longer with us, either temporarily or until we gather together in eternity. We can, however, recognise that God has been gracious to us in many ways. The Annual Report, sent out with this "Thought for the Week", will tell its own stories of the year we've shared with so many and with God.

In recognising God in the past, we also need to recognise God in the present.

At the moment, we're not sure what the future will bring. We face an ever-evolving picture of reaction, pre-emptive action and revision. National guidance leads to local changes and, in many cases, greater challenges. Whether the greater needs will be for physical or mental health support we wait and see. We might find ourselves to be more in need of the support that we would usually offer. We might need to actually talk to our neighbours, rather than just nod and smile.

But all this is for another day (possibly tomorrow...)

For today, we also need to recognise that we are stuck in a situation that feels very much out of our control. We cannot control people's shopping habits, which is at times showing a far more selfish side than we would like to contemplate. We cannot control the requirements placed upon us because of our age, health and those of our family members. We cannot control the spread of a virus that doesn't show itself until it's been floating around the body for a few days.

So, we may feel helpless.

So, we may feel wretched.

So, we may feel lost.

So, we may feel abandoned.

It's at times like this that I'm relieved that the Bible has space in its library for Lamentations. I'm glad that those who compiled the Psalms kept in the ones that speak of despair without resolution. From the glory of Psalms 8 and 9, with declarations of God's majesty, power and grace we quickly move to the desolation of Psalms 10, 11, 12 and 13, with their fear and loneliness in the face of opposition.

There are so many Psalms to list where we don't know the ending of the story; was the psalmist saved from their predicament? Though some of the Psalms can be related to specific events found in other books of the Bible (sometimes the translators helpfully provide the context, particularly for those attributed to David), it's not always so clear-cut.

What we do know, though, is that the Psalm writers were united in their hope in God's salvation. No matter when they composed, whether in the middle of trouble or on the odd occasion when they had the luxury of looking back, their hope was in God as refuge, strength, deliverer and guide.

As we navigate these uncertain waters, may we have a dose of that same faith: as we look back at what we faced yesterday, as we come to terms with what we face today, as we don't know what we will face tomorrow, may we recognise that God is with us. As we recognise our helplessness and our vulnerabilities, we continue to cry out to the one who is, was and will be faithful, gracious, loving and merciful.

In the midst of this crisis and uncertainty, whilst we are apart as a fellowship but united through Christ, may we have the courage to call out together:

"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me."

(Psalm 13:5-6)

Amen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.