

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS!

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CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH

To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known



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We're in holiday season! This may come as a shock to many who have had to put 2020 on hold for various reasons, mostly related to the pandemic that still dominates our horizon. But it's true; traditionally August is the month when buckets and spades are dusted down, last year's sand is discovered in the recesses of picnic hampers, long queues to the beach are anticipated and the cry of "Are we nearly there yet?" rends the air from many an overheated car.

But not this year. For many families, it's felt like a bit of an extended school holiday that started back in mid-March, punctuated with the pressure of home schooling and an increased sympathy for teaching staff. For others, it's been relentless, as they've veered from panic buying toilet rolls to finding the endless summer days stretching, well, endlessly as the usual round of social engagements are cancelled. For those who mark their year with the regularity of Wimbledon and strawberries, there has at least been a diet of classic matches on TV to accompany the cream. For others, TV has been the only company, a reminder of what the world used to look like all in the dim and distant past, or "February" as historians are calling it.

So, instead of finding that our television schedules are crammed with repeats in anticipation of the autumn launch, or the airwaves full of the sounds of the Proms or Glastonbury, we find that its business as usual. A quick look through the listings shows how many repeats are being shown as filming had to pause earlier in the year. They say, "There's nothing new under the sun" and good old

Auntie seems to want to prove the rule (other TV channels are available).

But August (and indeed September for those who like to take their holidays after the school year starts) is going to be quite a bit different this year. There are some who are venturing abroad for a bit of summer sun, in accordance with local guidance and lockdown measures, and there are others who are going to enjoy the rich variety on offer across the British mainland (it seems like the majority of the country will be in Devon and Cornwall if the locals are to be believed). Others are holidaying at home, with the opportunity to discover their locality and their immediate surroundings. Still others are just looking forward to seeing family again in the flesh, as those of us who are getting used to Skype or Zoom (other video conferencing platforms are available) are going to find out if our relatives still have legs.

And, looking forward to September, there is an expectation that the schools will reopen to welcome all children to a full year of learning and formation. Of course, their first challenge will be to find out what has been going on between March and July and how much has been learned. The lockdown will, I'm sure, cast a light on some deep safeguarding issues, where children have been more exposed to problems in the home and the shadows of these situations will extend far into the autumn and beyond.

For this is one of the consequences of this situation. Even as the days lengthened through the first few weeks of the pandemic, doors were shut and families drew back as the school gates clanged closed. Try as they might to maintain contact, there is only so much that school staff can do once the children are no longer seen on a regular basis.

It has been reported that calls to domestic abuse hotlines increased massively from March onwards, with added strain placed on relationships; even strong and stable ones were derailed by the immediacy of furloughing, redundancy, home schooling, empty shelves and a myriad factors that no-one could have predicted.

But it isn't all bleak, though we are mindful that what has been de-

scribed so far barely scratches the surface of the impact that the lockdown has had on people's lives. We could go on to mention isolation, loneliness, fear, other health worries, other forms of abuse and so much more. But this is not the time nor the place to explore these important issues.

Looking at the flip side of the situation is helpful, just as the image I painted earlier of a day at the seaside shouldn't be remembered for a seagull stealing a chip but for the unmistakable and not unpleasant slightly gritty taste of sand with every mouthful of pasty. Nothing beats that, in my book.

The same is true of this pandemic. There has been a lot that has gone wrong with this situation as the whole world has had to react, and not always well. But there is also so much that has gone right and we might want to hold onto this as we look forward with uncertainty to whatever the rest of the year has in store for us.

For one thing, we have seen the re-emergence of the importance of the community. Many of us made a weekly appointment with our neighbours to applaud or bang a saucepan in support of the NHS (cost to Graham household: one wooden spoon, broken in a spate of over-enthusiastic clanging). Others have joined local community support groups, running errands, shopping and phoning the vulnerable and shielding. Others have done the same thing unofficially for all sorts of people. Yet others have been the grateful recipients of this level of care.

All of this has shown that we can still talk to one another; we have found a common cause to unite us. And I don't mean the virus, though that has been the catalyst for this whole thing. What has united us is a question, or a variation of the same: "How are you?"

We have shown that we care. We care for old Doris down the road, whereas before we might just have ignored her as we got on with our busy lives. We now look out for Stanley and have a chat with him over the garden fence as he continues to watch for anyone unfamiliar trespassing on the street. Instead of being a nuisance and a busybody, they're now counted as ... friends.

Certainly, there are people who I now have saved in our telephone list who I didn't even know existed 6 months ago, let alone realised lived in Clare. The virus may have closed doors for some, but for others it has opened up lines of communication and all based on the biblical principle of "loving our neighbours".

We also pray. For those who we are not able to contact we know that God's Spirit can go where we cannot. We pray that they will know God's grace, peace, love, whatever is needed to get them through the day. We pray that God will send someone who can bear his light into the darkness, that there is hope. And where there is grief, we pray for God's comforting embrace.

What the world will look like at the end of September, when the next article is due for publication, I haven't the faintest clue. However, I hope that we continue to share in the burden of care that God places upon each one of us, for ourselves as well as for others. After all, the greatest commandment reminds us:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Paul Graham

(Photo by Luke Dean-Weymark on Unsplash)

This edition continues to face the reality of lockdown through the eyes of different people but the underlying theme still is God's care and support for us. A special emphasis is a celebration of the glory of the natural world.

The first of Rita's photos



We invited two Daughters of our Church to write about their walk with God

Catherine Bugg (nee Catton)

For those of you that don't know me I was brought up in Clare Baptist Church, baptised here at the age of 13 and spent many happy years here growing up. Jonathan and myself were married here in 2001 and then we moved away to Wales. Just to complete that part of the story, Jonathan was dramatically called into the ministry 12 years ago and completed his training at South Wales Baptist College. For those 3 years he was studying and working hard and I was trying to bring up our 4 children and (if I am honest) really had no inclination to be in church ministry or leadership myself.

Jonathan was called to our sending church in Penarth for the first 3 years of our ministry journey and then he was called to Nuneaton in the Midlands.

This is really where my part of the story starts if I am honest. It felt like God was calling me into a new season and he wanted me to step up and step out. This definitely did not come naturally to me and if I am completely honest scared the life out of me. It was time for me to take an active role in the church God had called us to.

With no idea how to begin this new season in my life I thought the best place to start was to stop - sounds strange doesn't it? I needed to pray and seek God. After some time of prayer I began by getting involved in the areas of youth and worship (where I felt safe and had years of experience) and gently began bringing in new ideas and ways of working. Within a short space of time I was heading up the Women's Ministry, leading the youth work and was an active member of the worship team.

Then 2 years ago we felt like God was calling me into something more, that he was calling Jonathan and I into a partnership of leading together. I was so grateful that my journey over the past 10 years had seen me work with some amazing women of God who were leaders in all different aspects of life and I began forming in my head what I thought a "leader" should look like. After many

months of feeling inadequate as I was not comfortable leading “from the front” and others telling me that “preaching is one of the main roles of a leader so if you can’t do that how can you lead?” I heard God say “a leader looks like you!”. What I had failed to see was that I was already leading in the way God wanted me to and that was the perfect way. So I stopped trying to be someone else and focused on being the best me I could be and trusting God to give me all I needed as he led me into this new role.

Over the past 2 years I have learnt to only step where God nudges me to, that if he calls me to do something he will give me the strength and courage to do it and that I have skills and gifts that he wants to use for his kingdom. One of my biggest lessons has been that failure is not a bad thing, that we mustn’t be afraid to try things in case we fail. Every time you step out, you grow and if what you try works, that’s great, if it doesn’t it gives permission for others to try new things and fail too. It’s so freeing to create a culture of learning together without fear of judgment or failure.

I love the speaker Christine Caine and the wisdom she shares. A few days ago she put this quote on her social media “Courage is not the absence of fear, it’s the will to persevere in the face of fear”. This really describes my journey so far (and I am sure I have a long way to go yet)! I struggle terribly with nerves and a few years ago I would honestly have never dreamed I would be doing some of these things I am but like I said before, if God calls you to step out he will give you everything you need. Ultimately though the choice to take the step is still our own. We could stand still, stay where we know, stay comfortable and live out our days doing the roles and same things we have been doing for years. As much as I love the faithfulness of sticking in a role for the long term there is an excitement in trying something new and letting God use you in a new way. As in the story of Joshua crossing the River Jordan (Joshua 3), the Israelites had to be brave enough to step out before God made a way across the river. So it is with us that we have to take the initial step of faith, say “yes” to God and let him lead you beyond where you thought you could go, to do incredible things for his kingdom.

Peter and Maureen's Meadow

By Peter Dawkins

It is nearly four months since COVID-19 came into our lives and how it has changed our day to day routine: walking into a bank wearing a mask and being welcomed.

Maureen and I have been so blessed because we have the Meadow. We have been able watch God's grace in the way the Meadow has been changing over the last few months: the wildlife, hedgehog, badger, muntjac, and now the lizards and toads.

The beauty of the wild flowers: as the weeks pass the flowers



change there may be some who will see them as weeds but I suppose I see God's grace in each flower. And I must not forget the birds: woodpeckers, robins, rooks, blackbird, blue tits, starling, and the humble sparrow all add to the picture that God has painted on the meadow.

And if that was not enough He remembers us. As I write this the blackberries are ready for our crumbles, and the apples, greengages, crab apples, and what we have been able to plant in our vegetable garden are ripening.

I know when I struggle to make sense of the world I can sit down on the bench opposite the Cross and talk to God about my problems and fears and then look out across the meadow and the calming effect gives me hope for the future. I hope this helps give a picture of how blessed we are and everybody is welcome to visit the meadow and enjoy the grace of God.

A Puzzle submitted by Janet Baillie

Find 30 books of the Bible

There are 30 books of the Bible in this paragraph. Can you find them? This is a most remarkable puzzle. It was found by a gentleman in an airplane seat pocket on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, keeping him occupied for hours. He enjoyed it so much, he passed it on to some friends..

One friend from Illinois worked on this while fishing from his john boat. Another friend studied it while playing his banjo, Elaine Taylor, a columnist friend, was so intrigued by it she mentioned it in her weekly newspaper column. Another friend judges the job of solving this puzzle so involving, she brews a cup of tea to help her nerves. There will be some names that are really easy to spot. That's a fact. Some people, however, will soon find themselves in a jam, especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalized. Truthfully, from answers we get, we are forced to admit it usually takes a minister or a scholar to see some of them at the worst. Research has shown that something in our genes is responsible for the difficulty we have in seeing the books in this paragraph.

During a recent fund raising event, which featured this puzzle, the Alpha Delta Phi lemonade booth set a new record. The local paper, The Chronicle, surveyed over 200 patrons who reported that this puzzle was one of the most difficult they had ever seen. As Daniel Humana humbly puts it, "The books are all right here in plain view hidden from sight." Those able to find all of them will hear great lamentations from those who have to be shown. One revelation that may help is that books like Timothy and Samuel may occur without their numbers. Also, keep in mind, that punctuation and spaces in the middle are normal. A chipper attitude will help you compete really well against those who claim to know the answers. Remember, there is no need for a mad exodus. There really are 30 books of the Bible lurking somewhere in this paragraph waiting to be found.

God Bless

Clare Community Hub During The Pandemic

Rita has asked me to write about the work of the Clare Community Hub during the current pandemic. It's an interesting question, as most of the work of the Hub has been focussed on the Monday morning drop-in sessions at the Library, which through necessity had to stop in mid-March.

However, the Hub has been a key player in the work of the Clare COVID-19 Response Group, or Clare Cobra as it is more simply, if colloquially known. Natalie Tarling, the community engagement officer at Clare Castle Country Park, has been maintaining the Hub's Facebook page, regularly posting links to key services and useful information for people who are increasingly reliant on social media for their news and support. We will probably never know the impact that these posts will have had on people's lives, but with the reported increase in demand for support services, we hope that we can play our part in pointing people in the right direction.

Through the links that we've established with Reach in Haverhill and Storehouse in Sudbury, we've been storing food parcels at the church to distribute to people in need in Clare and the surrounding villages whilst travel was restricted or advised against during the worst of lockdown. Working with the Primary Schools in Clare and Cavendish, we've provided food for 3 families who were unable to get to Haverhill or Sudbury. We've also made up food parcels for a further 3 residents, as well as making referrals to Reach for further support.

Residents who have been receiving the government food parcels as part of their shielding have offered excess goods as well, meaning that the church has at times begun to resemble Arkwright's from "Open All Hours". This has been used to supplement the provision from the Foodbanks, not least when we received several much-sought after toilet rolls! Even the Fray Bentos pies have found a good and grateful home, though I'm considering starting a soup kitchen with the number of tins we've received. When we feel that it is appropriate, all remaining food will be divided between Storehouse and Reach to help them support folk officially.



Though not a specifically Christian venture, the Hub has continued to seek to do as Jesus commanded in looking after the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) in whatever way it can. There are tentative plans to restart the drop-in sessions, but this is dependent on when the other organisations will be able to offer face-to-face support. In the meantime, it is a real privilege to be part of this venture and I encourage you all to pray for the witness that is brought by the church’s involvement in the Hub.

Paul Graham

Answers to Janet’s Puzzle

Amos, Mark, Luke, John, Joel, Judges, Job, Esther, Acts, James, Ruth, Romans, Titus, Matthew, Genesis, Philemon, Chronicles, Daniel, Nahum, Hosea, Lamentations, Revelation, Timothy, Samuel, Numbers, Malachi, Peter, Exodus, Kings, Hebrews.

Books of the Bible

Our Second Daughter
Lou Webber (nee Bateman)

***The challenges and opportunities
of Lockdown.***

The last few months have passed in a bit of a blur to be honest. I greeted lockdown fresh from a well overdue three-month sabbatical, my first official day back at work being April Fool's Day! I was glad I had taken Ian's advice to not write a spoof resignation letter to the deacons on my return as what I returned to, was a worn-out group of people who had done a great job leading the fellowship and navigating their way through uncharted territory. But they were also keenly awaiting my return because I think they had this idea I'd know what to do!

And so, after alleviating them of the expectation that accompanied that clever idea, we did nothing but pray. I think I have been sustained in this whole time through having been able to establish a rhythm of prayer to my day. This is probably the greatest opportunity this time has offered to me. Time for prayer, and not just me yacking on, but time to sit in silence to hear God speak as well.

You see the truth is I have no idea what I'm really doing most of the time, so at the very least lockdown has meant we're all on a level playing field! My take on it all was simply this, I don't know what I'm doing, but I have been with Jesus and spent far more time than I usually might have done deliberately putting myself in his presence, and that will have to be enough. And I believe it is. It sounds a bit more spiritual than it really is, because what underlies it all is an ever-increasing awareness of my vulnerability and also incredible lack. Lack of control, of power, of certainty and many other things that I sense has driven me to prayer.

So here at Broadway we have met weekly as a leadership team for prayer and this has been beneficial for all of us. Our weekly Wednesday morning Northumbria Community Daily Office prayer meetings have seen a far greater attendance and active participation via zoom than prior to lockdown. Although much of what was

normal for church and ministry has changed, some things are benefiting from the shake up!

I have a sense that one of our greatest challenges in all of this still awaits us. This is the challenge of moving beyond lockdown, of making the journey into the new reality of what we are being called to be as post lockdown church. There is you see this inevitability that we will want to rush into getting 'back to normal', to find comfort again in the well-worn familiarity of ways of being and doing. And of course, the jeopardy in this is simple – we run straight back into ways that have held us captive for longer than this lockdown has.

Much of what was normal for church and ministry has been changed because of lockdown. We have all had so much stripped back from us and that's a real challenge. It's challenged our priorities, the things we put our trust in, our faith, the nature of church and what constitutes church even being church. And yet in these challenges there are huge opportunities. Can you imagine for a moment the ways in which God can use a people stripped of all they have placed their trust, hope and security in? Stripped of all they have allowed church to become? Can you imagine for a moment the ways in which God can use a people brought to their knees in vulnerability to pray? If you can't then you really need to get with it or just pick your bible up a bit more regularly. If you can begin to imagine it for just one moment then maybe as St Ignatius of Loyola suggests we should all work as if everything depends on us and pray as if everything depends on God.

Thanks to Lou and Catherine who found time in their busy lives of service to write articles for us. God bless them, their families and their churches.



How wonderful is God's creation

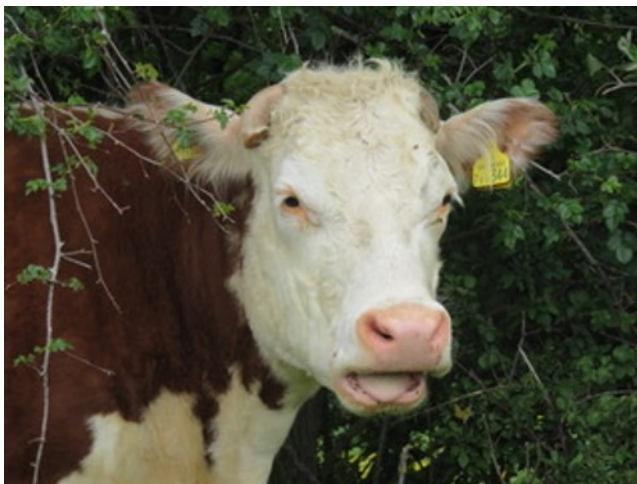
Genesis chapter 1 says it all, “and it was good.”

I'm sure I am not the only person living in the countryside who has said so many times during lockdown -

“How fortunate we are to live in such a beautiful place”, to have space around us, the country views, the walks, to be able to hear the sounds of nature as well as the time to see it all and take it all in. Just having the time to spend each day, no appointments to keep, not having to be anywhere at any particular time.

Oh my God, how great thou art. Thank you, Lord, keep opening my eyes to the wonders of your creation.

Rita Bateman





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