



Bulletin 13

"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God..."

Being together as church puts things into perspective! Which is what the writer of the Psalm above discovered! He looked upon a world which appeared to prevail and even thrive without the Lord. Then, when he put the Lord back at the centre of his world, he discovered that was the only way to make sense of his situation, to prevail and know true peace. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes discovered that same thing:

"When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labour that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night - then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it."

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17

The world's philosophy is so dependent on self-advancement, success and accumulation of wealth in its endless search in the darkness for peace, fulfilment and joy. Take away worldly success and nothing remains. No so for the Christian. Our eyes and hopes are set on a farther horizon.

The other day we turned out some of our cupboards and storage space. What fell into my hands, but a copy of John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress'. He depicts Pilgrim struggling through worldly distraction and temptation. What keeps Pilgrim going is the promise of heaven. Looking beyond his present circumstances to something of far greater, infinite value and certain promise. Church facilitates that for us. It enables us to walk in the light of certainty, not the darkness and gloom of blindness. Through being together, and the living word of God, our focus on life, our vision is sustained. Therefore, our continuing to meet together in whatever way present circumstances demand is critical.

"...do not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Hebrews 10:25

We met as a staff team last Monday to discuss when and how it might be beneficial for us to meet together in our church buildings. Our first and steadfast priority is that whatever we do, it has to be something which sustains the whole of our church fellowship – ***we travel together as the body of Christ!***

As I write we are awaiting precise advice from Government, from Church of England and from our Diocese but it would seem that fairly soon we will be given permission to meet for limited congregational worship. Initially, the limits are likely to be quite severe and prevent singing, touch and The Lord's Supper. They will also constrain numbers as the need for social distancing as individuals, households or bubble groups is likely to remain in place for some time.

As a leadership, we are concerned that we do not do less well in church buildings, those things which we can do far better in our homes! We anticipate the initial limitations of what we would be able to do at any physical gathering to achieve less than we presently do on Facebook. ***We therefore feel, that for the time being, our Sunday 'Facebook Live' 10.30am time continues to serve us best as our 'main weekly event' for gathering the church.***

So, for now, we have decided on the following:

1. To continue the 10.30am Sunday Facebook gathering as our main meeting.
2. To offer a Sunday afternoon gathering in Emmanuel Church for youngsters and their families at around 4.30pm. We will confirm this if it comes into being, but we hope we might do the first one on 19th July.
3. To offer a simple service of Compline (Night Prayer) live on Facebook from St Pauls at 6.00pm on every Sunday Evening starting 19th July. Again, this awaits final confirmation. It could also be attended physically by modest numbers – perhaps up to ten.
4. Continue our daily morning prayers at the same time of 9.00am for the time being.

As restrictions are eased further, we will adapt our plans provided the new freedoms make for a better means of expressing our congregational worship, fellowship and mutual encouragement. Again, be assured, we will travel *together!*

Our biggest concern at the moment is about accommodating the numbers of people in our buildings who want to attend further services that we might begin to hold. It would be awful if twice the number turned up who were able to be admitted to the building and they had to be denied access! Therefore, it would be really helpful if people were able to provide some feedback on this.

Could I therefore please ask you this question?

"If there were a church service, prayer meeting or event in church that you really wanted to attend, and we could put it on within governmental regulations, would you

actually come? (I stress we would have all recommended hygiene, distancing and protocol safety measures in place.) Or would you feel you regrettably needed to stay away until you could be more certain of your protection from the Covid19 virus?

If as many as possible could email (karl.freeman@emmanuelplymouth.co.uk) or message me via Facebook, that would really help our planning. We may send a more detailed survey regarding different kinds of gatherings at a later date!

In the meantime, fix your eyes upon Jesus, “*the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

Every blessing in Christ,
Rev Karl