

Newington Methodist Church

Church Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, ME9 7JT

News and views for the week commencing 16th May 2021

The church building

Will reopen on 30th May.



Notices

- **Sunday on-line service at 10:30am** will be led by Eddie and Richard Vincent. The service can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qsX1g2a0il>
- **Newington social catch-up before the service at 9am** online using Zoom at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4628098433>
(meeting ID 462 809 8433) ... or join by telephone: 020 3481 5237; when requested enter meeting ID 462 809 8433 followed by #; press # again when asked for a participant ID
- **Next Sunday on-line service 16th May 10:30 am** will be led by Robert Zachar. It is Pentecost Sunday and Local preachers re-affirmation service.
- **Sittingbourne Sunday morning service, 10:30 am.** Booking is in place, please call or text Paul on Tel: 07939 604253
- **Table top sale 15th May 11am to 1pm** at Newington church car park. In case of rain (90%) the plan "B" is to move in the church hall.
- **20th May 10am to 2pm spring cleaning day.** What jobs need to be done? Cleaning inside the church, painting doors, gardening.
- **23rd May Pentecost service in orchard-** this year the service will take place in St Mary's church yard at 10 am. We are welcomed to join in and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit with our brothers and sisters from CHO E.
- **Newington Methodist church reopening 30th May 9:30 am** service with Holy Communion in preparation. Preaching plan - see in the attachment. Thanks to all making this possible to happen. This plan is provisional plan, there may be updates. We need to talk about frequency and perhaps moving the time for afternoon service?
- **Other activities you can join in during the week via Zoom**
 - **Bible study** – see the poster for more details. Link to join in: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83665077649?pwd=SzQyQjZnTGRxeFNEOUUxMENla1d3Zz09#success>
 - **Prayer and Share 9:30 am.** Meets fortnightly: 30.4.; 14.5.; 28.5.; 11.6.; 25.6.; 9.7.; 23.7.
<https://zoom.us/j/84866590559?pwd=UzlLQklnK1BZa3Nya1p6M3lVNnN4Zz09>

A Reflection on Acts 1: 6-14 for Easter 7B (Sunday after Ascension)

“Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?” by Gillian Collins

Harold Camping, president of Christian Family Radio in the USA, made it his life's work to calculate from Bible references the date of the Last Judgment, when Jesus would return, the righteous would fly up to heaven (the Rapture). This would be followed by several months of turmoil and disaster, culminating in the end of the world. As a series of dates passed uneventfully, he made a final prediction for 21 May 2011. This time he was so certain that his followers began to give away possessions and make provision for their animals, hoping to be among the raptured ones. Once again the date passed without incident and Camping said he had misunderstood (again?). A spiritual judgment **had** happened but the Rapture itself would take place the following 21 October. He died in December 2013, his predictions still unfulfilled.

Are you worried? People have always been fascinated by these questions and there have always been people ready to predict answers. But they and Mr Camping have not properly read their Bible – or at least, they are very selective (focusing on Daniel and Revelation, which offer visions, not prediction). “*Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?*” applies to them very well.

The Apostle Paul and the early Church believed they were living in the End Times: “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are ... left will be caught up together ...to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*” (1 Thess. 4:17) They were convinced at first that Jesus would return very soon and God's great plan would reach its triumphant conclusion. As time passed, they became less certain and got impatient, even bored. Paul constantly encouraged them to stand firm, hold the faith, be patient and above all pray. But he knew better than to try and predict dates and times. For did not Jesus himself discourage this speculation, and with good reason?

After some time had passed since Jesus's death, during which he'd appeared in his resurrected form to many people, his followers gathered on the Mount of Olives and asked him, “*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*” Surely, they thought, the amazing things they had recently witnessed must herald something even greater. They were still thinking of the old style Messiah who would usher in the triumphant restoration of the glory days of King Solomon, longed for by all Jews. Would this be his parting gift to the world? They seem to have forgotten or misunderstood all that Jesus had taught about the Kingdom of God – how it wasn't just for some future climactic time in history, but even now was growing like a seed among them and was to be experienced here and now. Jesus replied: “*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.*” (Acts 1:7)

Do you remember going away on holiday or a day trip, perhaps with young children in the back of a car? Every five minutes after leaving home, it seemed, there was a plaintive wail from the back: “Are we nearly there yet?” We are not always that good at waiting patiently for things, even more so in these times of instant gratification when you can order anything you want to be delivered almost immediately. Just like many of us, the disciples wanted certainty. Is this the time? Is this the way God's going to make it happen? The Psalmist also cried out to God for answers: “*How long O Lord, how long...?*” (Psalm 13:1). How like us, when we think we know what's good for us, what we would like God to do, and how we think God ought to go about it! We sing cheerfully that the whole world is in God's hands, but somehow we want to keep things in our own hands too. How amazing that Jesus was able to trust these people with the Gospel! How amazing that he is able to trust us!

Instead of certainty, the disciples were offered a promise and a hope. “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” They had been seeking the wrong kind of reassurance. God was not going to do things

according to their wishes, but neither would they be left with a sense of failure of all their hopes. Hadn't Jesus spoken of this power from above which would come to them only after he had left them? Instead of immediate satisfaction, they were to wait. Wait together in the city, with all the growing community of Jesus people. Wait and pray together. God's time is not our time. God's power, the Holy Spirit of encouragement, would equip them and enable them to go out as partners and co-workers in God's plan, taking the message of hope and new life to all parts of the world.

God holds the knowledge of dates and times. We have a limited, human understanding of God's ways. God offers us no certainty, but asks that we trust and remain patient. We may long to see more evidence of the coming of the Kingdom, the righting of wrongs and injustice, the triumph of good over evil, the baddies getting their just deserts. But God's time is not our time – the kingdom is planted and growing among us. No plant grows more quickly just because we desperately wring our hands over it. Does it grow if we talk to it, sing to it? I don't know, but if it does, it must be because that's the way the creator made it. Meanwhile "we plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand." That's not just a song for Harvest Festival, it's a reminder of the way we are called to live.

God asks us to wait in the city. The city was where the community met; where they worshipped in the temple or synagogue; where they met to pray, to encourage each other and to share fellowship and care for people in need. We should wait in the city (and the rural communities too). Like the early Jesus people, we need each other for encouragement and support. Do not give up meeting together, said Paul, when some of his community were getting discouraged, or tired or bored. He knew how important it was to preserve church life. We have been unable to meet normally for over a year, but we too have managed to maintain our fellowship in many innovative ways.

God does not ask us to "stand gazing up into heaven." The disciples of Jesus were sad and nostalgic for the past. Their heavenward gazing was making them impotent and ineffective, so that they were in danger of failing to see what was around them and forgetting the Gospel message of new life, new hope. The Kingdom of heaven is among us, not above and beyond, not in the glorious past or the longed for future. It is in the people we meet and serve, or who meet and serve us, In us they meet with Christ, in them we meet with him, touch him, see him and hear his voice. Not gazing up into heaven, but here and now on this earth, we are Christ's body. And so the promise is made real, *"I am with you always and everywhere, unto the end of all things..."* (Matt. 28:20).

Christian Aid week 10 -16th May



People and places for prayer

- Prayer response on the recent news from Israel, and Gaza region. Pray for the peace in this world.
- We pray for upcoming reopening of our church.
- Val Trice is back home. Visited Val and had a chat and prayer, she is very happy to be back home, strict indoor regime, carers 3x a day.
- John G. will visit Rainham hospital on Monday;
- Beryl and Peter W. Peter had a fall and Beryl fractured finger it was all an accident and hospital visit till late evening last week.

- We remember our friends who have died and their loved ones: Audrey, Margaret S.

Please send news, prayer requests and any other contributions for inclusion in the weekly newsletter to robert.zachar@gmail.com

Bank details for Offerings:

Newington Methodist Church, HSBC Sittingbourne. Sort Code 40 – 42 – 04, Account 70614696.

If you prefer to send a cheque contact our church treasurer Chris Ch.