

EMURCE No: 320 – 14th May 2020
EDITED THIS WEEK BY: DEREK GRAHAM



Rainbow Reflection

There's no shortage of self-isolation in the Bible. Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai before descending with the Ten Commandments. Jesus, following his baptism, endured 40 days and 40 nights of wilderness privation and temptation. This underlies the very word "quarantine", derived from the 40-day *quarantena* imposed on visiting ships by 14th-century Venetians, who sought to arrest the progress of the plague by acting on good Biblical precedent.

At eight weeks and counting, our present lockdown drags on longer still. Longer than the 40-day downpour that rained upon a wicked world in Genesis 7:17. We must pray it does not last the full 150 days that verse 24 tells us the waters covered the earth.

Inundation seems to loom large in our lexicon of catastrophe. At times these past weeks, we may have felt we're, "going under". I know I have. Conversely, to signal we're coping, we say we're, "keeping our heads above water". And we promise one another we'll, "see you on the other side". (At least, I take that to mean the opposite bank and not, you know, the Other Side. In the circumstances, that wouldn't be quite the sort of reassurance we intend.)

Noah's sojourn on the floodwaters ends in God's gift of a rainbow to seal a fresh covenant: never again will the world be drowned. So it seems somehow apt that this great sign of hope and deliverance has become the dominant emblem of the Covid-19 crisis, too. Posted in the windows of every second house, it is so ubiquitous that the V&A is now collecting examples of children's rainbow artwork to document this remarkable moment in history.

It strikes me that the rainbow makes a remarkably versatile symbol. Right now, its message clearly follows the Biblical template: assurance that the storm will pass and the sunlight break through. At the same time, it has become entwined with expressions of thanks to doctors and nurses, farmers and teachers, refuse collectors and checkout operators – the many and various people pulling together to uphold us in time of need.

This hints at another meaning of the rainbow: as a joyous expression of unity in diversity. So for example, it makes a natural banner of pride for the LGBT+ community – and indeed of Pride. Similarly, when Nelson Mandela came to power and pursued the reconciliation of the races, South Africa became the "rainbow nation". The rainbow emblazons inclusion, harmonious coexistence. We are many, we are one.

In some streets, the Thursday night ritual of applause for key workers has been followed by renditions of "Over the Rainbow"; in my home church, the Youth Group is busy rehearsing its own version over email and Zoom. It is a song of yearning (I'm tempted to say a secular Psalm) that aptly describes a further dimension of the rainbow's mystique. For it's always someday and somewhere else that "skies are blue, and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true." Yes, the rainbow represents promise, but one whose fulfilment is deferred. The pot of gold at the end of its crescent is always just beyond our reach.

If our current rainbows come with a pot of gold attached, perhaps it's the much-vaunted "new normal". There's a growing realisation that the post-viral world may never be the same as before – but not only that: reverting to all our old habits would be an opportunity squandered. If only we have the will, our society might instead emerge greener, more equal, more compassionate – purified, as if by the Flood. We might choose to leave in the past our old norms of selfish isolation; thoughtless consumption; exploitation and polluted air; perhaps even worship confined within four walls.

The Council of Christians and Jews has embarked on a "virtual pilgrimage", pairing priests and rabbis for simultaneous visits to hospitals, care homes, schools and food banks to raise the voice of faith loudly in support. "But this is not just about the present," says its instigator Jonathan Wittenberg, senior rabbi of Masorti Judaism: "It's also about looking to the future and working so that the 'new normal' is a way of life in which we notice and care for each other and nature with greater attentiveness and kindness."

A pot of gold for sure and one that may sound accordingly elusive. Yet we may dare to dream of deliverance from quarantine and disease. And we should, as disciples, dare to dream of building a better world in its wake.

Of course, the rainbow is not God's last word. In Christ we have the New Covenant. Next Thursday – tellingly, forty days after Easter – comes Ascension and our Saviour's guarantee that, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Here is no end-of-the-rainbow promise, but true fulfilment.

May Christ indeed be with you every day of our present tribulation and every day beyond.

Derek Graham, TDO

Artwork by Naomi Ling, from a youth group art competition at Plume Avenue URC, Colchester. Reproduced by kind permission.

NEWPORT PAGNELL URC NEEDS YOUR HELP!



Whilst on your daily exercise- go 1 mile (on foot, a scooter or on your bike!). When you get home, donate £1 (if you are able) and nominate 1 person to do this. PLEASE.

We are building community in Newport Pagnell and need to raise the money to finish the Community Building called the Mead Centre. It will have a sensory room, fully accessible changing facilities, meeting rooms, a large hall and be a space for all! It is the culmination of many years of hard work and effort. Help us reach our £1.1 million target! We urgently need your support as Covid-19 has, understandably, limited access to funds for building.

If you are unable to donate, we kindly ask you to like our Facebook page (The Mead Centre) or our Instagram page the_mead_centre and help spread our message.

This building is for our community and is the Church's part in God's mission to the community, we can't do this without support and need it now more than ever.

We thank you and are eternally grateful for any support! All donations are gratefully accepted via PayPal at <https://www.urcnewportpagnell.org/mead-centre>

OR <https://www.justgiving.com/unitedreformedchurch-newportpagnell>

PREPARING FOR THE NEW NORMAL

Few if any of us could have anticipated the scale of challenge or the range of issues that would arise from the Covid 19 virus and the accompanying lockdown. It has presented a serious challenge across society and the church has been impacted along with everyone else. Inevitably many questions have arisen in church circles – about practical issues, processes and how to live with "the new normal".

The agenda of the Moderators' Meeting (currently meeting weekly and virtually) has been punctuated with questions arising from the church at synod and local level. The accompanying document – ***Preparing for the New Normal*** – is one result of our discussions. It is commended to synods and local churches in the hope that it might be both a useful resource and also a catalyst, when it feels right and proper to do so, to have serious conversations and give thought as to what "the new normal" might be in each setting and context.

It is important to avoid any sense of panic. Whilst it is important to plan it does not matter if we cannot do everything that is necessary straight away as the lockdown is not going to be lifted immediately.

You will notice that questions and issues range from what might be described as practical and property-related as well as mission and vision thoughts. As such please consider sharing it among your elders and others who have responsibility in all of these areas of church life.

A copy of the document will be posted on the Synod website and Facebook pages:

[URC - Preparing for the New Normal document](#)

[URC East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](#)

We commend *Preparing for the New Normal* in the hope it will be of use to you and to yours.

STATEMENT FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY AND SYNOD MODERATORS

In light of recent statements from the Prime Minister, and from the devolved governments in Wales and Scotland, the United Reformed Church holds to the position that all church buildings should remain closed except for the provision of essential services (foodbanks, addiction recovery groups, etc.) or for one person to attend in order to record or livestream worship. It will be many weeks before it will be possible to resume meeting safely for public worship. Further statements will be made when government advice changes. All churches are encouraged to use our discussion document "Ready for the new 'normal'" in this intervening period, to help them in continuing their work during lockdown and in planning for a safe resumption of activities.

www.urch.org.uk/coronavirus

Geoffrey Clarke,

Moderator

Helen Lidgett,

Clerk

David Greatorex,

Treasurer

11th May 2020

PEOPLE

Hannah Holmes, TDO PA will be going on maternity leave on 22nd May. For all training enquiries and bookings please contact Derek Graham, TDO in the first instance on: training@urch5.org.uk

ADVICE REGARDING CHURCH ORGANS

The URC Music Network have let us know that advice is being given by the Church of England to their Churches regarding pipe organs during lockdown.

Ideally, Church pipe organs should be played for at least 15 minutes a week to prevent decay developing and thereby avoid unnecessary repairs.

Further information can be found on: "<http://www.harrisonorgans.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Advice-regarding-organs-during-Covid19-24-April-2020.pdf>".

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

We are pleased to introduce a new Synod Facebook Page. We hope this will develop into a place of sharing and of celebration. If you are a Facebook user, please feel free to Like and Share both the Page and its Posts.

You will find it by searching "URC East Midlands Synod" or following this link: <https://www.facebook.com/URC-East-Midlands-Synod-102279281444717/>

Our Moderator, Revd Geoffrey Clarke, has been leading Evening Prayers daily at 9.30pm since the beginning of the lockdown. Geoffrey draws on a variety of resources from several denominations to offer a time of peaceful prayer and meditation toward the end of the day. Please join us!

There is a Synod youth and children's Facebook page, which shares news and ideas related to children and youth. There is also a link on there to the Synod youth and children's leaders group.
<https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/>
We would love you to follow this page too.

EAST MIDLANDS SYNOD OFFICE CLOSURE

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Synod Office closed on 24th March and will remain closed until further notice as we follow Government guidelines. Whilst we are closed all members of staff will be working from home. If you wish to contact them please e-mail in the usual way. For the list of emails click on the link below:
<https://www.urb5.org.uk/synodstaff>

Telephone calls will now be forwarded to mobiles so please call the office in the usual way on 0115 9609241 between the hours of 9am - 3pm, Monday - Thursday, if you wish to speak to a member of staff.

Due to the office closure, at this time we have no access to the database for sending out group emails. Therefore all information will be put on to our website. Please keep checking for updates. All other information will be sent out using our E-Letter provider so if you have not already signed up, please click on this link:
<https://urb5.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=7b9491ce2216f1835e4829f87&...>

Please note that our E-Letter will be going back to fortnightly editions from this week onwards.

AND FINALLY: - This E letter is sent on behalf of The URC East Midlands Synod, 1 Edwards Lane, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AA. Telephone: 0115 9609241

Email address for E-Letter Editor: modpa@urb5.org.uk

Copy Date for Next E-Letter: 25.05.2020

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