



Walking with God through COVID: a Sermon Series for the New Year

I was sitting in the barber's chair (in those distant days when we were allowed to sit in a barber's chair!). And he said to me 'David, what's it all about?' He was asking where God is in the current troubles. I could only mumble through my face-mask. It wasn't the ideal moment for deep theological debate.

But the barber was right to push the question. What *is* COVID all about? How do we square it with belief in a God of love ? And this question is never just intellectual. As we enter a third lockdown, how do we each survive as people, how do we stay human and, somehow, live well amidst hardship ? And that includes both the hardships of the pandemic and the other hardships we face in life.

On Sunday mornings from 10 January, we will explore how we as Christians can make

sense of COVID. We'll be looking at the Old Testament book of Job which unflinchingly asks where God is in the face of suffering. We'll look at the gospels and we'll finish with 1 Peter, a letter written to a church facing much suffering, yet a letter full of hope.

Here are details of how we'll try to walk with God through COVID:

10 January Job: What not to Say

17 January Job: Walking through the Valley

24 January Job: The God who is There

31 January Jesus: The Crucified God

7 February Jesus: The Power of an Unquenchable Life

14 February 1 Peter: Never Walking Alone - a Community of Hope

These are tough days. And amidst the stress we feel ourselves often struggling. But the Bible also sees suffering as a kind of refiner's fire. The gold not only survives the fire, it emerges burnished, shining.



Photo by Maulana on Unsplash

God is the enemy of death and pain. His aim is its abolition. But that abolition is a process. It is a journey. You might even call it a walk. So, do make use of this upcoming teaching series, *Walking with God through COVID* and encourage others, who are asking where God is amidst COVID, to do the same. It can be accessed in church or online.

There is a lot of walking in scripture. The disciples walked with Jesus. The psalms talk of walking in slippery places and even of walking through the

valley of the shadow of death. And the Bible is clear that as we walk through life we should expect suffering. Christian faith is not some kind of exemption ticket from trouble. But we can walk believing that God will bring us through these present troubles and journey hopefully. Walking with God through suffering, we walk expecting not that we will simply find ways to manage our pain and the pain of others, but that one day it will be defeated.

Encouragements

The weather currently is grey and the wider news is mostly grey too. But there are good things that happened over the Christmas season, which should encourage us:

1. Over 100 Hug in a Mug cards and hot chocolate written and delivered
2. Around 220 Christmas cards written and delivered along with Comfort and Joy booklet to the church family
3. Hot drinks and scones served to Foodbank guests during November and December

4. Christmas hampers and craft packs went out through Feast of Fun to over 200 local children and adults over Christmas

5. The online Crib Service was attended by 200 to 300 people and between 1000 and 2000 people attended or tuned into St Barnabas' Christmas services overall.

Thank you to everyone involved in these really great initiatives and the many who have quietly worked to ensure St Barnabas continues its ministry and mission in these difficult times.

Finally, did you catch the New Year's Eve Worship Night ? This was online and if you've not yet seen it, do make use of it. It has a spiritually nutritious message for the whole of the coming year. You can access it via the 'News' section of the church website.

Vision Sunday – 10 January

Over much of 2020, St Barnabas engaged in a programme called 'Immeasurably More', based on Ephesians 3:20,

'to him who is able to do

immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.'

By the Immeasurably More process we have sought to discern God's vision for us as a church in the next few years. The result was the creation of a 'Mission Action Plan', which the church adopted in September 2020. You can see it in this month's Outlook. The PCC (the church council) have designated Sunday 10 January as 'Vision Sunday'.

This is a moment to reflect on the Mission Action Plan and see how we are doing. Please have a look at it and can I encourage you to share with myself and with members of the PCC how you think we are doing. Where do you feel we can thank God for progress made? Where do you think we need additional focus? Do you have a scripture, a word, a picture from God that speaks to where we are right now? And if you do, please share it. And please keep praying for St Barnabas as we seek to be all that God calls us to be here.

David Goodhew

['Immeasurably More' a Mission Action Plan for St Barnabas](#)

(approved by St Barnabas Parochial Church Council, 7th September 2020)

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Who We Are: Four Key Values

- We seek to be Bible-based
- We seek to be Christ-centred
- We seek to be transformational
- We seek to be servant-hearted

Five Priorities

Blessing in Jesus' Name: Worship

Our top priority is giving glory to God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit - it's what we (try to) do

- Use 2020-21 as a year of 'faith-recovery' from COVID for the whole church
- Termly 'Bible Focus' which gives us a concentrated half-day/day of teaching

- Significant enhancement of worship via online resources
- Regular renewal evenings/healing evenings.

Blessing those aged 0 to 25

We recognise the crucial importance of work with people under the age of 25. Our 'fringe' has markedly shrunk in terms of children/families in the last 20 years, so we need to create a new 'fringe'

- Deepen discipling of families and 'church in the home'
- Seek warmer relationships with and ways of supporting Linthorpe and Ayresome schools.
- Deepen collaboration with para-church bodies such as uniformed groups and Big Kids
- Appoint an existing clergy member to coordinate children and families work
- Start major initiative, with a specifically Christian ethos, connecting with significant numbers of children and young people inside and outside the church by 2021 (for example: a 'St Barnabas After-School Music School'; provide educational support for the many children, especially from poorer households, whose education has suffered during COVID, such as a tutoring programme, homework club)
- encourage all church children over 11 to go to Christian children's camps from 2021
- Aim to have an average of 30 people under the age of 16 in church each Sunday by 2022; 40 by 2025
- Grow student membership: – aim for 30 students at termtime Sunday worship by 2023

Blessing Middlesbrough with the Compassion of Christ

We seek to be a compassionate church which works for transformation of individuals and the community, building on the good work already happening at St Barnabas

- To do this well, we will use 2020-21 to deepen our understanding of the parish, especially the Ayresome end – including a termly 'Middlesbrough Seminar'.
- start a major new compassion outreach in 2021-22, recognising that we can't touch every need, but are determined to start something significant and which fills a key gap
- work intentionally with the diverse nationalities in Middlesbrough
- Green the church: become better stewards of God's creation is part of discipleship – including an audit of current behaviours; eg target of 50% of energy use from renewables by 2022; explore ways to further green the church grounds; hold a Summer Festival in June 2021 with a strong environmental theme.

Blessing People with the Good News of Jesus

The gospel is good news, which needs to be shared. We aim to be a gospel-centred church, continually engaged in evangelism, particularly in the north end of the parish.

- Maximise the church's accessibility to the community – via physical and online presence
- run Alpha three times a year, including an Alpha specifically designed for parents
- Energetically encourage baptism and confirmation, with a target of 10 non-infant baptisms/confirmations a year
- Major mission annually, in February/March each year; first one in 2021 or 2022
- prioritise evangelism across all ethnic groups, with the aim of St Barnabas becoming 'a church for all nations'
- Aim to see average adult attendance rise 10% by Christmas 2022
- Plant a new congregation (inside or outside of building) by 2023

Blessing for all Church Members

St Barnabas seeks to be a nurturing church, nurturing the whole church family as disciples for life.

- support the rapid integration of new people into church life via a 'Welcome Pathway' – in place by autumn 2021.
- supporting seven-day discipleship by church members at work/in the community/at home – including focus on weekday discipleship in Lent 2021
- increase Life group membership. Those unable to join a group are encouraged to link with at least one other church member as a mentor/support/prayer partner. Aim that everyone aged 18 to 40 has a mentor/support/prayer partner by 2022 and that 75% of church are in small groups or have a mentor/prayer partner by 2022
- Marriage support: regular courses for marrieds to support them in sustaining life-giving, lifelong marriages
- Encourage every church member to seek spiritual refreshment through one of the following every year – Spring Harvest, New Wine, Keswick, retreats, quiet days and/or equivalent day conferences
- Explore and develop giftings in ministry and mission, across the church family

Afterword: We can Only Bless if we Have the Resources to do so

Resources are the elephant in the room – we can't achieve things simply by wishing they were so. That means finding the money, time, staffing, tech and buildings to support the call we believe God has given us.

Daily Hope



A free phone line offering hymns, prayers, and reflections to tens of thousands of callers after church buildings closed because of the coronavirus is still available. Daily

A free phone line of hymns, reflections and prayers

Hope, launched by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, in April, has now received 173,000 calls from over 37,000 people – with calls topping more than two million minutes.

The service – which is available 24 hours a day on 0800 804 8044 – was set up as a simple new way to bring worship and prayer into people's homes, especially older people and anyone unable to join online church services.

Stories sent to the Archbishop from across the country share how the service has brought comfort and support during these difficult times. Many who wrote in said they had recommended the line to others.

Callers to the line are welcomed with a short new greeting from the Archbishop before being able to choose from a range of options, including hymns, prayers, reflections and advice on COVID-19.

New material to the service continues to be updated, including mental health reflections voiced by Pam Rhodes, as well as prayers from the Mothers Union.

St Barnabas Church on the Phone

Don't forget that you can listen to the 9am service on the phone for the cost of a local call, by calling 01642 130011. There was a delay to the service being available when we returned to church in September, but it should now be available from 5pm each Sunday.

Caring in Covid

We are blessed to be part of a caring church family. Thank you for all you are doing to support and look out for friends and neighbours. If you have a particular concern for anyone, or would value practical support or prayer yourself please contact Lindsey or David Goodhew on 01642 817306 or email the Church Office office@st-barnabas.net

Would you value talking to someone who will listen?

A reminder that listening ministry is available for anyone who may have a particular need to talk to a trained Christian listener. It is a free and confidential ministry. For further information, please contact the Church Office or Ali Ward (allisonward@tiscali.co.uk).

PCC in December



As it was the first meeting after the APCM of the new PCC, the PCC officers were re-elected. The treasurer, Phil Edwards, gave a financial update and the budget for 2021 was approved. There was more discussion about the role of churchwardens and deputy churchwardens.

There was the usual review of church life in the current restrictions and an update on plans for Christmas.

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