



After the wettest February on record we've now had the sunniest May and this astonishing weather has certainly made a difference to lockdown. It also feels good for the land to see the return of rain again!

Last weekend we celebrated Pentecost, the outpouring of God's Spirit, His breath, upon His people. As we continue to welcome more of His breath we do so whilst lamenting the horrific injustice of breath being taken from George Floyd last week. This is an evil which has rightly triggered protests in our nation as well as in the USA. As we pray, Lord have mercy, Heal our Land, we also pray that the LORD would flush any racism and injustice out of our hearts and communities. Revive us we pray #ComeHolySpirit

A few updates:

- **Alpha Online begins next Mon 8 June** - <https://vimeo.com/417957182> - please be covering Rachel and her team for this in prayer! Might there be someone you've been praying for, perhaps one of your 5 from Thy Kingdom Come, who you're keen to invite? Contact Rachel on smlalpha@hotmail.com if you would like to register interest.
- **This coming Sunday 7 June (Trinity Sunday) Online** - as I mentioned in my last update, rather like Easter Sunday, we have an 8.45am service with a Communion liturgy and two hymns, at which Mark will be speaking, and then an All-Age Service at 10.00am.
- **Upcoming Sermon Series** - it was such a tonic hearing Christy Wimber last Sunday; do listen to her talk if you haven't had the opportunity yet, a real encouragement for us as a church community in these times. From Sunday 14 June we're launching a new series - **Choosing to Reset Well** - based on **Philippians**. Philippians was written when Paul was confined in prison in Rome, so it's a '*Letter from Lockdown*' and is an Epistle of Joy,

which speaks with remarkable relevance into our times. Why not read it through in one sitting to gain an overview before we begin the series.

- Also, from next Sunday, in our online services we aim to include more **'home-grown' worship** which we've all been missing and will be a special blessing!
- **Staff Furloughs** - recent government announcements have clarified that the final opportunity for any employees to be placed on the furlough scheme is the 10th June and for flexible furloughing (i.e. part-time furlough/ part-time work) to be made possible from the beginning of July, as long as staff have been furloughed for a full three weeks before this date. In evaluating this for SML, as in previous conversations the discussion focused on roles and not people or personalities. The equal value of all staff and their roles continued to be upheld throughout. After extended consideration it was agreed that Paul (Operations Director), Claire (Church Centre Manager) and Gillian (Vicar's PA) will be placed on furlough from next Wednesday 10 June for at least three full weeks. This is a short-term measure, we will need them back very soon, and potentially those already on furlough (Andy D, Julian and Miriam) may be needed after this time too depending on further lifting of lockdown restrictions around churches and the opening up of other activities. It does mean for the next three weeks we will, in particular, have less cover in our offices and the church centre will be quieter. However, centre bookings are already increasing from early July and we will be strategically planning a wider reopening of our buildings and other aspects of ministry.
- **Reopening of Church Buildings** - as you're probably aware only clergy plus a member of their household are allowed in churches at the moment for private prayer or recording of services. However, we anticipate hearing more news about a gradual reopening for a phased wider usage. As and when that unfolds, we will communicate what is permissible and be taking all the precautions necessary to ensure that we are compliant with all the Covid-19 health regulations.

I've been reflecting over the past few days on Paul's encouragement, *'Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity'* - *Colossians 4:5*. These uncertain times continue to cause people to ask questions and re-evaluate their lives, there are spiritual stirrings, so let's pray we would each act wisely and make the most of unexpected opportunities. We're aiming to bear this in mind too as we shape and pray for our online services. It's also thrilling to hear of so many of you supporting each other so well and lovingly serving your neighbours.

See you online on Sunday!

With my love and prayers,

Andy

