**Latest News – 26th April 2020**



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**Gogglebox vicar Kate Bottley to lead this week's online broadcast, featuring British Sign Language**

BBC Songs of Praise presenter and former Gogglebox star Kate Bottley is to lead the Church of England’s national online broadcast this week from her home with a church service interpreted into British Sign Language (BSL) for the deaf community.



The broadcaster will welcome viewers at the start of the broadcast, especially those who have not taken part in virtual worship before, encouraging them to join in where they can, in a service with prayers offered for those suffering and bereaved as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

 “We are as a nation conscious of the challenges and problems in the world at the moment, and the joy of the risen Christ can often feel far away,” She said.

“Anyone can join us at this service and all those taking part for the first time are especially welcome. I hope that the prayers that are offered and the message of the gospel will go some way to help all those seeking comfort and support at this difficult time.”

The prayers will be signed using BSL by Carolyn Denmark, of St Barnabas Parish Church in Swindon, Wiltshire, who is deaf. The rest of the service will be signed by Gill Behenna, the Church of England’s National Deaf Ministry Adviser with the sermon delivered by broadcaster Chine McDonald, who is Head of Media and PR at Christian Aid, the international aid agency.

Ms Denmark will pray for strength and comfort for all those suffering as a result of the virus including those who are sick and dying and those who mourn. She will also pray for the needs of the deaf community. She will further pray that God will guide scientists, the Government and the NHS in their efforts to treat patients and stop the spread of the disease.

In her sermon, ahead of Christian Aid week next month, Ms McDonald will speak of the urgent need to support those living in poverty around the world who face dealing with the virus while lacking even basic medical care, food and water:

 “People living in poverty are already facing a lack of water, food and medical care. As coronavirus infection rates speed-up in poorer countries, it will put a massive strain on already fragile health systems. This will be catastrophic.”

Ms McDonald also says: “Coronavirus impacts all of us. But love unites us all. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope. Love compels us together around the table, to stand together, elbow to elbow in solidarity with our neighbours near and far.”

As in previous weeks, the service will be available from 9am on Sunday on the Church of England’s [website](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online), [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/thechurchofengland) and on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/thechurchofengland).

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*The Rev Peter Crumpler is a Church of England priest in St Albans, Herts, UK, and a former communications director with the CofE.*

**Blessed are the truth-tellers**

*By the Rev Peter Crumpler*

ITV News journalist and presenter Julie Etchingham, a practising Christian, has defended the role played by journalists during the Coronavirus pandemic.

She told the Christians in Media website, “Reporters are coming in for a lot of flack for the questions they are asking government. But what else are we for? We all get that this is a crisis like no other; that few in government have ever had to navigate such a challenge.

“But, if we're still attempting to function as a democracy in the face of this, then scrutiny is clearly crucial. Many in our frontline services and the wider public are demanding answers. We are there on their behalf. We don't always get it right. This isn't a moment to trip people up, but urgently to get to the truth.”

As a Christian who has worked in communications for around 50 years, I strongly support Julie Etchingham’s view. Now is the time for truth and accuracy to be at the centre of all our communications.

So, yes, we need to be praying for and supporting the front-line health service staff, the public health experts, the scientists researching vaccines to combat the virus, and the key workers keeping our societies running.

But we also need to be praying for and supporting the men and women working in and with the media to publish, upload, broadcast and distribute the most accurate information, without spin or distortion.

So here is a prayer for the media in these challenging days.

*Loving God,
We pray for everyone working in and with media in these challenging times.
Encourage all who seek to explain and interpret the fast-changing world around us.
Embolden the truth-tellers, truth-seekers and fact-checkers.
Promote coverage that builds our shared humanity and where everyone has a voice.
Bring clarity where there is confusion
Bring knowledge where there is speculation
Bring wisdom and insight when the way ahead seems unclear.
And bring us all to a knowledge of truth that sets us free, and helps keep us safe.
In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

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*Nigel Beeton works in Radiology* in a hospital in the East of England. During this time of the coronavirus crisis, he is writing a weekly diary of his life at the hospital.

**On the Covid Frontline: 24th April 2020**

There was a group of my staff just standing in the waiting area outside one of the CT scanning rooms the other day. I opened my mouth to speak but one of then caught my eye and put his gloved finger in front of his visor in the universally understood bid to be silent, understood despite the fact that his lips were separated from his finger by the visor and a face mask. They don’t often shush their boss, so I very obediently closed my mouth again.

The door to the room opened, and an elderly patient appeared, accompanied by another radiographer.

“Happy Birthday Mabel!” everyone chorused (I’ve changed her name to protect her confidentiality.)

Happy Birthday to you,

Happy Birthday to you!

Happy Birthday, dear Mabel,

Happy Birthday to you!

Even I joined in. I’m not sure if my singing voice is up to much, but my sentiments were genuine. I hoped she’d have a good birthday.

We all rounded off the melody with a round of applause, latex gloves make a strange popping noise if you clap while wearing them.

Dear Mabel loved it. She was clearly surprised and taken aback by the sight of half a dozen staff in PPE singing ‘Happy Birthday’ to her, but the experience had transformed an alien world of CT scanners and PPE into a familiar one of birthday wishes and a well-known song. “Oh, thank you everyone, you’re all so kind; my family can’t be with me today. Usually they come for my birthday.”

Mabel, in her eighties, was self-isolating due to her age, but still living independently at home. We check dates of birth as part of ensuring that we are doing the right thing for the right patient, and so my colleague had clocked that today was her birthday. Having got to know her well enough during the setting up stage to be happy that she wouldn’t mind, he conspired with his colleagues while watching the scanner do its stuff.

The coronavirus may be keeping us separated from one another, but it is spurring us all on to make greater efforts to be connected to one another, to show our humanity towards one another. Someone bought us lunch today. It appeared in pots by our gate, and we sat down and enjoyed a meal of restaurant quality food. Our friends had supported a local restaurant which, in its hour of need has branched out into ‘meals on wheels’, and shown us such love and concern that a tear was brought to my eye.

I hope and pray that the coronavirus will soon fade into history. But I pray equally fervently that its legacy of connected humanity will last for many, many years to come.

 **Nigel Beeton**

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*Are we creating the problem of new diseases with our abuse of the natural world? Dr Aysha Akhtar is a Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. See more at:* [*https://www.oxfordanimalethics.com*](https://www.oxfordanimalethics.com)

**Don’t blame the animals**

“By creating distressed and sick animals, we are harming ourselves,” claims Dr Aysha Akhtar, a neurologist and public health specialist and a Commander in the US Public Health Service.

“Three-fourths of emerging human infectious diseases come from animals. But it’s not the animals’ fault. If we want to prevent these diseases and save millions of people from untold suffering, we have to face the inevitable and uncomfortable truth: the real culprit is how we choose to relate with and treat animals.

“Although it’s too late to prevent the current pandemic, perhaps we can prevent another one if we take a moment to look at how most new infectious diseases arrive on our doorstep in the first place.”

Dr Akhtar is a Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (OCAE), and author of *Our Symphony with Animals* and *Animals and Public Health.* She insists that there is a direct link between human welfare and animal welfare: “Just as humans are more likely to succumb to disease when we are stressed, weakened or wounded, these same factors also suppress the immune systems in animals, leaving them extremely vulnerable to catching new infections. As a result, the worldwide animal trade creates very sick animals and ideal conditions for pathogens to multiply and jump from animal to animal, and ultimately to humans.”

“To prevent the next pandemic, we need to look beyond the wet markets or illegal tradein China. The entire, global trade in animals needs to stop. A virus doesn't care if it's being transmitted through the illegal or legal trade. The wildlife trade as a whole is detrimental to ecosystems, cruel to animals, and poses a strong risk of emergence of new viruses. We need to take a hard look at how we relate with all animals.”

Centre Director, the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey, commented: “A world in which cruelty to animals goes unchecked is bound to be a morally unsafe world for human beings. We have always known this in theory, but now it is increasingly confirmed by science.”

“Too many people still think of sentient beings as just commodities or resources without any intrinsic value. But thinking this way is spiritually impoverished and leads to a morally regressive view of animals. Now is the optimum time for a fundamental rethink.”

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**Take comfort**

**Pslam 91**

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
    will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
**2**I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
    my God, in whom I trust.”

**3**Surely he will save you
    from the fowler’s snare
    and from the deadly pestilence.
**4**He will cover you with his feathers,
    and under his wings you will find refuge;
    his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
**5**You will not fear the terror of night,
    nor the arrow that flies by day,
**6**nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
    nor the plague that destroys at midday.
**7**A thousand may fall at your side,
    ten thousand at your right hand,
    but it will not come near you…

**9**If you say, “The Lord is my refuge,”
    and you make the Most High your dwelling,
**10**no harm will overtake you,
    no disaster will come near your tent.
**11**For he will command his angels concerning you
    to guard you in all your ways;…

**14**“Because he[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+91&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15410b)] loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him;
    I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
**15**He will call on me, and I will answer him;
    I will be with him in trouble,
    I will deliver him and honour him.
**16**With long life I will satisfy him
    and show him my salvation.”

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**Some simple ideas**

Pick up the phone. Why not decide to ring someone in your church and community, every day? Start a small group and design a ‘phone tree’ so that every participant both receives and makes a phone call each day.

For the more technically confident, introduce more people to video phone calls via Apple Facetime or Google Duo.

Is there a WhatsApp group on your street? Why not start one, to make sure that all your neighbours are safe, and no one is in need?

Become your street’s pastor: start praying each day for each one of your neighbours, and let it be known that you will help in any way if someone is in trouble. Kindness and compassion go a long way in a crisis.

Make the most of your family. Your children may drive you crazy at times but think about it: this is the only chance you may ever have to spend so much time with them. So do some home projects together, play games together, study together and cook together. Read the Bible with them, pray with them and TALK to them. How well do you actually know your own family?

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**Losing a loved one at this time.**

Reverend Clive is here to listen and help at a time like this. Please contact him using the contact numbers given on this website or send him a message with your contact details.

**What about the funeral?**

Suppose you lose someone whom you love at this time?

Current guidelines from the Church of England, in light of the current restrictions over Coronavirus COVID-19, say that funerals may now only happen at the Crematorium or at the graveside. Only immediate family members can attend (if the crematorium allows).

When we lose someone we love, it is a time of great sorrow. A funeral is therefore a time for family and friends to express and share their grief, to give thanks for the life lived, and to commend the person into God’s keeping.

It is hard to bear the sadness and grief of losing a loved one if you cannot even go to their funeral. This may have a big impact on your grief and bereavement. Grief is a long and painful journey, and you may need additional support. (For more help please visit: [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)).

These prayers may be helpful for when you cannot go to a funeral

Dear God,
Thank you for xxxx, for all that they meant to me and others.
I so wanted to say goodbye, to be alongside my friends and family.
Help me to know you are there,
Holding all my hopes,
Holding all those I love, especially xxxx,
And holding me this day.
Be close this day with your peace and hope.
*Amen.*

Loving God,
Life is so strange just now – I don’t know what to do.
Comfort me with your presence,
Be with all who grieve
And give us strength and courage to face this and all the days ahead.
*Amen.*

**Other News**

**Latest figures**

The Johns Hopkins [Covid-19 Dashboard](https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6) appears to be one of the best source for statistics on the spread of the virus.

**Joni Eareckson**

The well-known American Christian writer and quadriplegic, Joni Eareckson Tada, talks about how Christians can meet the threat of the virus: ‘[A Calming Word during the Coronavirus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwHlJk2L-qE)’

**Mental health**

* The Church of England has produced some mental health reflections to help you in this time of uncertainty. You can access them at:  [cofe.io/MentalHealth](https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/mental-health-resources/supporting-good-mental-health/supporting-good-mental-health).
* The Mental Health Foundation has also produced some useful resources, which can be found at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus>
* You can find a host of other [mental health resources](https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/coronavirus-and-isolation-supporting-yourself-and-your-colleagues/) from a variety of different organisations and charities. <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/coronavirus-and-isolation-supporting-yourself-and-your-colleagues/>
* Some helpful books and resources are also available from [Sacristy Press](https://www.sacristy.co.uk/books/coronavirus-church-resources) at [https://www.sacristy.co.uk/books/coronavirus-church-resources#](https://www.sacristy.co.uk/books/coronavirus-church-resources)

**Go to church this Sunday (virtually)**

You can watch (and rewatch) the Church of England's virtual Sunday services [here](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online).

**Time to Pray**

The Church of England's [Time to Pray app](https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/time-to-pray) is now free to use.

The *Easter Pilgrim* app is also available for 40 days after Easter.

**Are you rural?**

The Arthur Rank Centre, an ecumenical Christian charity, has launched a [resource hub](https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/coronavirus/arthurrankcentre.org.uk/together-apart/) to support rural Christians and churches, covering many aspects of rural Christian life.

**What we should do in this crisis**

Crises bring out the best in people. What has become immediately apparent over the last few weeks is that the reserves of kindness, generosity and love for each other are often far deeper than we could have imagined.

One of the challenges of this specific crisis is how inactive and intangible our help and selflessness must be. We can’t lean in, lend a hand and be present in the ways we would normally try to. Distance is a form of kindness and yet feels very unnatural. We have huge admiration for those in the NHS or other critical services who are on the physical frontline treating patients and at greater risk of exposure to the virus, but for most of us there is a sense of helplessness as the most beneficial thing we can do is wash our hands and sit on the sofa.

And we must pray. Pray for medical professionals, and government decision makers. Pray for those who are already isolated and concerned about cutting off vital connections. Pray for people who are at greater risk of more significant consequences of becoming infected. Pray for miracles. And pray for the witness of the church of Jesus Christ.

This is from the EA website at:  [https://www.eauk.org](https://www.eauk.org/)

**Danny Webster,** Evangelical Alliance

**Coronavirus: a lesson from the past**

‘So many people died that cities and villages in Italy … were abandoned and fell into ruin.’

That’s not a report about the impact of coronavirus, but an epidemic of smallpox that infected the Roman Empire in 165 AD. A second, equally devastating plague, possibly measles, swept the empire less than 100 years later.

Rodney Stark’s work [*The Rise of Christianity*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Rise-Christianity-Rodney-Stark/dp/0060677015) *looks at the* way Christianity spread in such a difficult context. The question is: How did this happen? Stark gives three reasons:

Firstly, Christianity offered a more satisfactory account of the world – and a better hope for the future – than the dominant pagan and Hellenic philosophies of the day.

Secondly, the Christian values of love and charity which characterised the early Christian community were also ‘translated’ into social service and community solidarity.  In other words, those early Christians took care of the sick and vulnerable.

Stark quotes the early bishop Dionysius: ​“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead…” And the Romans marvelled at these Christians.

Thirdly, during the epidemic people lost the ‘social bonds’, the peer pressure, that had previously discouraged them from rebelling against prevailing ideologies and embracing the gospel.

Stark goes on to note that frequently in human history, crises produced by natural disasters have translated into crises of faith where the religion of the day is considered inadequate to the reality of people’s life-experience. In response to these failures of religion, societies often look elsewhere and adopt new faiths.

Of course, this all raises an important question: in light of coronavirus, how should Christians respond today? Inspired by those who have gone before us, perhaps I can offer three suggestions:

Firstly, we should use this period of ‘social distancing’ to *reacquaint ourselves with the big story of the Bible*. In the unfolding story of God and the world that we see in the Bible, we are presented with a robust and life-giving account of who God is, what the world is like, and what it means to be truly human.

Secondly, we need to *‘translate’ the Bible into our everyday lives*. We need to practically live out ‘love of God and neighbour’. We should support our neighbours by offering to do shopping, collect parcels, post mail, and ensure they have someone to talk to on the phone.

Thirdly, we need to *be sensitive to the fact that the current situation will unsettle people* and, uninhibited by their social bonds, prompt them to think about God and the purpose of life, perhaps for the very first time, and we need to be ready for conversations about this.

In the second century, the Christian community responded to the smallpox epidemic not by being anxious or fearful, but by being courageous, prayerful, and deeply, and lovingly practical. We need to do the same, secure in the fact that ‘God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.’ (Psalm 46.1, NIV)

This may be found on the Bible Society website: <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/coronavirus-lessons-from-our-past/>

**Paul Wooley**, Bible Society