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ANNUS HORRIBILIS

At last!! The year 2020 has gone – possibly the worst year in living memory. To quote Her Majesty, The Queen (of 1992) “it has been an Annus Horribilis” – a horrible year.



The last twelve months certainly taught us many things – about ourselves and about other people. New words & phrases entered our vocabulary – “Coronavirus”, “Self-isolating”, “Bubbles”, “Lockdown” and “Pandemic” to name but a few.

Right back at the beginning, it was all quite simple really “Stay at home, Protect the NHS, Save lives” but then it changed to “Stay alert, Control the virus, Save lives” and now, at the time of writing is “Hands, Face, Space” – it might even have changed again by the time of publication.

However, one thing that has remained constant through it all is “Social Distancing”. The need to remain 2m apart (or 1m with “mitigations”) and that has impacted all our lives.

The intimacies of life have gone. I still automatically hold out my hand when meeting someone new, then realise that I must not shake their hand. **There have been so many times over the last year that I would so dearly have loved, just to give someone a pat on the shoulder, a peck on the cheek – or even a hug - but such luxuries are, for the time being, a thing of the past.** As I said, the intimacy has gone. Life has become “Keep your distance, stay away from me, don't invade my personal space”.

We have got used over the last few months to putting up a barrier (albeit a hypothetical one) between ourselves and other people. It has become an almost natural reaction to step away when someone gets too close to us. We are afraid to get too close to others or to let them get too close to us.

I have been wondering though, if we have become guilty of doing the same with our relationship with God Have we put a protective barrier between us and Him? Are we guilty of saying to Him “Keep your distance, stay away from me, don't invade my personal space?” Have we lost that intimacy with God?

*Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His word?*

We need to regain that intimacy with God. Think back to the time when you first became a Christian and that deep love you had for Him in your early days as a Christian. Are you as thrilled today

ANNUS HORIBILIS (continued)

as you were then? Someone once said, *“If you have ever felt closer to God than you do today, there is something wrong”* and that is so true.

Today, to a certain extent we are reluctant to let other people get close to us or to allow ourselves to get close to them. We are afraid of the consequences if we do. Let’s not be frightened to allow God to get close to us. Let’s not be frightened to allow ourselves to get close to Him. Let’s endeavour to restore that intimacy which we once had with Him. He is waiting to put his loving arms around us and give us a big, warm, welcoming hug – something essential in any relationship.

That intimate relationship with God will turn out to be something to be welcomed and embraced – not feared or dreaded.

I leave you with a verse from the book of James (4:8) *“Come near to God and he will come near to you”* (NIV)

May 2021 be a better year for you than 2020 was and may you rekindle that intimacy with others but, more especially, with God Himself.

Rev Colin Braithwaite (WRU President)

ZOOM CONFERENCE 2020

We were blessed to be able to hold our 171st Annual Conference of the Wesleyan Reform Union of Churches via Zoom. The circumstances led us to change our plans several times and finally hold it on November the 21st 2020.



Seeing each other on the screen, rather than in person, was not the same! We missed a handshake, a hug and a stroll around the Conference Centre gardens, a conversation that made us laugh, even a sigh of relief with a cup of tea in our hand after a long session of meetings. But nevertheless, it was a blessing!

smoothly chaired the meetings, and I continued to press the right buttons at the right time until it was over. Alongside all the business items on the agenda, we managed to have a fairly lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of ever having a female President. At break times, some people even managed to squeeze in a personal conversation here and there.



Despite the technological challenges, we managed to complete our business sessions without a glitch. President Rev Colin Braithwaite confidently and



Overall, it was a blessing to see each other, be it over the screen and not in person. **People say, where there is a will, there is a way! I am sure that we will find a way to overcome our upcoming challenges as we follow God’s guidance.** May all our challenges in the New Year become a blessing and not a burden!

Alina Taylor, WRU Admin Manager

ISAIAH 58:11

'And the Lord will guide you continually'.

The Lord will guide you continually. **Set your eyes on the word 'will'**. 'The Lord WILL guide you.' That is a certain guarantee. He will neither leave us nor forsake us.

God's precious 'wills' are far better than man's guarantees. We can depend completely on all God's promises. He will never fail those who put their trust in Him.

Now notice the adverb 'continually'. We are not to be guided sometimes, or even most times, but at all times. We have a constant and always reliable guide. All He asks of us is that we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow close on His heels. If we do so, we shall not go astray, but be led in the right way to our heavenly destination.

Have you ever tried to find your way through a maze, such as the one at Hampton Court? If so, you will know how difficult it is to find your way to the centre.

Life at times seems like a maze. The days in which we are now living are bewildering and confusing to many people. But Almighty God can see it all. He, who rules over everything He has created, looks down from above, as a

person looks down upon a map. He sees the complete picture from beginning to end.

If we only keep our eyes upon Him, and remain in constant communion with Him, we shall not go astray and will eventually come to the goal of our hopes, which is to be with Him eternally.

Most mazes have one entrance. We enter the Christian life through one door, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:9) and we aim for one destiny - heaven.

Wrong paths lead to a dead end when we fail to obey our guide. Sometimes we find ourselves going round and round in circles and getting nowhere. We need at all times, to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus, and although He may lead us around, He will never lead us astray.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - **'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and HE WILL direct your paths.'**

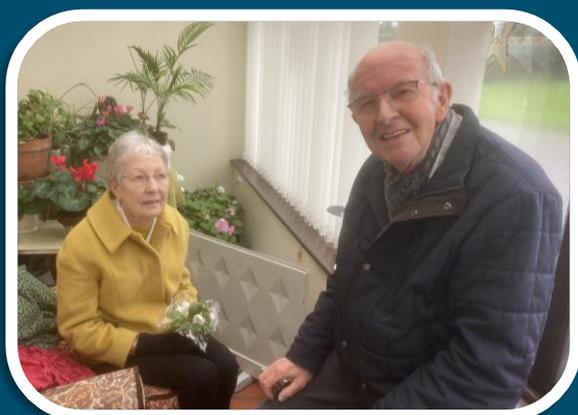
With kind permission of Day One Publications who in the Summer of 2021 hope to publish a book of 365 daily readings entitled 'Thoughts for the Day' by John Roberts

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY



DIAMOND WEDDING ANNIVERSARY December 3rd, 2020

Marjorie and John Wood (Ibstock WR Church)



We met each other at Newtown Linford Church (Leicestershire), where John was a member of the bell ringing team. I worked at Roecliffe Manor Convalescent Home for children.

We were married at Ibstock WR Church and

later were made members. I taught in the Primary department under the guidance of Rev. David Cartledge.

Our daughter, Beverley also became a teacher and was also married at Ibstock.

Marjorie and John

EASTER IS COMING!!

Happy New Year! Can I ask - was your 2020 Christmas, cancelled? I wonder how worried Boris was, of going down in History as the one who tried to cancel Christmas, along with Scrooge, Cromwell and King Herod.

Many people were saying "they would cancel Christmas till Easter!" **But you can't have Easter, without Christmas.** I wonder what "Cancelling Christmas" meant to different people: **To the Treasury** - an ever shrinking economy and growing furlough scheme; **to shop owners** and industry - possibly closure and unemployment; **to Children** - no Santa Clause or presents under the tree; **to families** - no get togethers, hugs from your loved ones, Christmas dinner and all that cheer.

King Herod tried to cancel Christmas, as it says in the Coventry Carol "Herod the king in his raging, set forth upon this day, by his decree, no life spare thee, all children young to slay."

Oliver Cromwell, it could be said, for honourable reasons, cancelled

Christmas, so that the gospel might not be lost amongst the revelling.

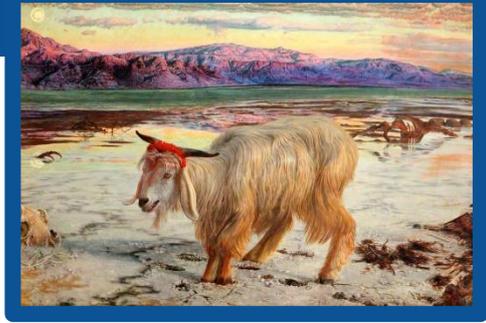
Scrooge tried to cancel Christmas with a "Bah-Humbug!"

But to cancel Christmas, so we can celebrate at Easter? My friends, **EASTER** is coming, because Christmas happened!! Herod couldn't stop God sending His Son to earth, and at Easter, ironically, trying to stop Jesus by killing Him, fulfilled the very reason He came!

Easter is Coming, and it brings us hope for so many reasons.

In our society the "Scapegoat" is used to describe how someone with power has avoided punishment, by letting someone weaker than them take the blame. Often it's an employee, but also immigrants, and people on benefits have been blamed for the economic failings of a country or even a whole nation has been used a scapegoat to deflect criticism.

The Bible tells us that two goats were brought. They were two sides of the same coin, used to illustrate why Jesus



came. One would die for the sins of the people, and the other would be released to carry their sins away, off into the wilderness.

It was a multimedia illustration of Easter. Two goats revealing what Jesus would do. This was not the powerful using the weak, but the exact opposite. Jesus, Son of the Living God, would become our Scapegoat. John in the wilderness cried out "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

We hope the vaccine will take away the threat of Covid- 19, but what happened at Easter 2000 years ago, takes away the threat of guilt, sin and death for those who trust and receive the Love of Christ in repentance.

Pastor Andy Wilcock



As we step into another year, there are two topics which are going to feature in the headlines again; namely coronavirus and racism. **The CESA committee have decided to consider racism in the Values Day material for February, especially considering how it appears in the Bible.**

Racism has been a feature throughout most of human existence since the fall. We read of the racism of the Egyptians long ago in Genesis 43:32 which says, "The Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that was detestable to them".

LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE

I don't know how racism impacts on many of our readers. I know for myself that I can remember in the late nineteen nineties, Leicestershire Education Committee had a big drive to integrate children from different ethnicities. I was head teacher of a rural village Infant school and I was invited to take four children to a large primary school in the centre of Leicester. There was not a single white child on roll. We prepared a few songs and dances, and I had one or two stories up my sleeve. It hadn't occurred to me that I had chosen one girl with long flowing fair hair and a boy with auburn hair until we got out of the car. We had a rapturous welcome. The teaching assistants gazed at the girl with fascination and were just longing to touch her beautiful hair and the children had so many questions and jostled to get near to these fascinating white children. We all went in the hall and we performed our party pieces

and the audience erupted in applause, so much so that my children were quite overwhelmed. Play time was a joyous occasion as my four children were whisked out into the playground and they all played together like the best of friends.

I decided that maybe staying for school lunch was a step too far, but the hosts had boxes of special goodies for the children and we eventually, reluctantly left with everyone waving goodbye until we turned a corner.

The love that had each group had for the other was palpable and so precious. They portrayed the truth that all humans are made in the image and likeness of God. This means that every human life has value, meaning and purpose.

Daphne Hodgkinson (CESA Secretary)

Cheddar Wedges

Ingredients

- 225g (8oz) self-raising flour
- Pinch of salt
- Level teaspoon dry mustard
- 50g (2oz) butter
- 110g (4oz) strong cheddar cheese, grated plus extra for topping
- Approx 150ml (1/4 pint milk)



1. Preheat oven to Gas 7/220C. Lightly grease a baking sheet.
2. Sift flour, salt and mustard into a bowl and rub in butter.
3. Toss in grated cheese and mix all together with milk to form a soft but not sticky dough.
4. Divide into two rounds, place on baking sheet and mark each into 6 deep wedges with a knife.
5. Sprinkle extra cheese on top.
6. Bake for about 20-25 minutes until golden then cool on a wire rack.

Best served on the same day, split and spread with butter. They also freeze well.



With the theme for this issue *Onward Christian Soldiers* the only recipe with a possible tie-in was boiled eggs with toast soldiers... Hmm...

So instead, here is a simple, ever-popular antidote to all that elaborate food you may have indulged in over Christmas!

Simplicity is something I've come to appreciate in a year when I couldn't celebrate a Big Birthday, meet up with friends or even make and bake for a fund-raising Coffee Morning at church. Instead, I've made cards, knitted reindeer for gifts and

re-learned to crochet. And Ernie and I have enjoyed watching *The Repair Shop* and *Money for Nothing* together on afternoon TV. Both programmes promoting restoration or recycling in this throwaway age.

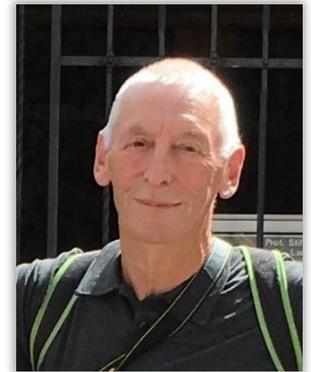
So, my thought for the New Year is to think and act more simply, to soldier on and to celebrate Jesus in all the good things of life and share them with others.

A plain and simple life is a full life. Proverbs 13:7b
(The Message)

Sue Over

WHERE ARE THE MEN WHEN WE NEED THEM?

It might be just my imagination (which is probably doubtful since I don't have much of one), but it feels that our churches are more and more being populated by women.



Now I don't have anything against that (although I know that there are intimations in scripture that roles in church should be allocated according to gender), but I do have a concern that men in general don't seem to be as inclined to meet in worship and in with all the activities that a church occupies itself with.

I don't necessarily think this is a new phenomenon, after all there have been women's meetings for years - our own denomination has had a Women's Auxiliary for years. Now renamed Women of Action, it has become a powerhouse in our denomination's desire for renewal.

So where is the men's equivalent? Good question. And where are the men to accompany our women into the everyday fellowship of our churches? When, I wonder, was the last time any of our churches had a man come along and say that he'd like to join our fellowship?

Maybe church is just not 'manly' enough and we are stuck in a mould of 'tea and biscuits' Christianity. How sad if that is the case if for no other reason that we are selling the gospel so short.

The reality is that it takes courage to be a living, breathing, witnessing and affirming believer. And can I suggest that it is often our women who are doing it.

So, come on you men, you husbands, and you singles, you 'I'd love to come to church but the lawn needs mowing' men. Young men and old, take up the challenge and fight the good fight of faith along with the rest. As the prophet Joel said "... I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions". **Age is no hindrance - let's see some dreams dreamt and visions brought to fruition by a new generation of churchmen.**

Cliff Darby (Griffydham WR Church)

SEEING THE INVISIBLE

A LESSON FROM COVID-19

“Don’t touch that!” These familiar words echo in childhood memories. They warned of dangers to be treated with care – a sharp blade, a hot kettle, a stinging insect.

“Don’t touch that!” The same words ring out their urgent and strident warning today. Don’t touch that contaminated surface and definitely don’t touch your face with unwashed hands. Don’t touch! Dealing with a visible danger is one thing; but an invisible virus, how can one deal safely with that? The Government’s answer: stay at home; only go out for essentials; stay safe!

Like many others, this Government has applied stringent, wide-reaching and costly measures just to reduce the spread of this invisible threat because of the risk of infection and death. Covid-19 has been taken very seriously, and rightly so.

There is another pandemic that is even more sinister than Covid-19. One that infects all people without exception and in every case, it brings certain death. No-one is immune, no-one can escape, nothing can protect; it affects everyone! **The Bible calls this pandemic – sin.**

COVID is an invisible threat. Its presence in a human body is only revealed when symptoms occur, but then it is too late to avoid it. Sin, too, is an invisible threat that produces symptoms, for the wages of sin is death. **Not the natural death caused by COVID, but spiritual death – separation from God, the Creator, who is the only source of life.** COVID is a serious threat to life and well-being, but surely sin is more so.

A vaccine is the one sure way of overcoming the COVID virus and research chemists around the world are exerting all their skill, all their expertise, all their knowledge and all their resources in the search for one. Only a vaccine will

provide reliable security from infection. **On the other hand, the needed protection from the effect of sin has already been made available to all humanity, through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.** Just as the vaccine for COVID will have to be taken by each person individually, so the saving grace of God must be received personally and individually. If the deadly effect of sin were taken as seriously as that of COVID, then surely more people would turn to Jesus for salvation.

Through COVID, I have come to see the horror of sin more clearly and as a result **I am taking it more seriously. But more than that, I see anew the amazing grace of God. He gave his only son that I may have life in his name. What mercy, what love, what cost, what grace. What can I do, but bow down in worship and bless his holy name?**

John Hayes (Jump WR Church)

WHAT'S ON

WORSBROUGH COMMUNITY PANTRY



Some time ago, we at Worsborough reported that we were going to open a “Community Pantry”. Well, it finally opened its doors to the public in mid-November

and the interest was amazing. We had so many expressions of interest that we have had to introduce strict criteria for eligibility and have a waiting list. There have also been some very generous donations towards the running of the pantry – and we are grateful for everyone who has helped in this way. Please continue to remember this project in prayer.

Since writing the above, we have been asked (and agreed to) act as a “spoke” for the local Food Bank and this will run alongside, but at different times to, the Community Pantry. These are exciting opportunities to strengthen the links between the community and the church. This is something that we have felt the Lord directing us to do for a long time which has finally come to fruition.

HAVE YOU GOT YOUR MASK?

They are everywhere! In my pockets, my handbag and in the car. Of course, I am talking about face coverings or masks. We are urged to wear masks on many occasions in order to limit the spread of Covid-19 and I have bought a delightful array of colours to support a selection of charities as well as the standard blue ones which are a backup when I am in a hurry and I can’t find the others. Mind you, there are some very gruesome ones about with pirate faces and toothless grimaces. Not for me, thank you.



When I think of face coverings, my mind goes back to Moses and there was a time when he wore a face covering and he wore it for the protection of others. We read about it in Exodus chapter 34. Moses has been on the mountain with the Lord for forty days and forty nights. Now he didn’t know that when he spoke with the Lord face to face, his skin shone and

his face became radiant with the glory of God, so much so that Aaron and the children of Israel were afraid to come near him. They didn’t know what had happened to him and so Moses wore a face covering or a veil so that he could speak to them and give them God’s message.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, **Paul describes how someone who does not know the Lord Jesus, has a veil over their mind rather than their face.** The Gospel means nothing to them, but when they turn to the Lord the veil is taken away. The Holy Spirit opens up their understanding. 2 Corinthians v 38 *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

Daphne Hodkinson