

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
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Dear Friends,

"It's not fair!" The cry of the playground has been heard repeatedly on news coverage in recent days, as the focus switches from coverage of the pandemic itself to one of its impacts here in the UK – the awarding of A-level and GCSE results to pupils who have not been in a classroom since March and not sat any exams. The system has been announced, then an appeals process announced, then withdrawn, then the whole system changed at the last minute, leading to massive confusion and despair for many. There have also been cries of "it's not fair" from workers and businesses who don't meet the criteria for government support, or who are not able to access help they need because of the pandemic.

Now at one level, these people are right – it **isn't** fair that this generation of young people have had their education disrupted. Some will come through it well enough and things will even out in the end. Others may have lasting consequences as a result. Those who come from more affluent homes are likely to have had more parental support during lockdown than those from poorer backgrounds, exacerbating the inequality which already exists. Those who are poorer, living in more crowded conditions, those who work in occupations which cannot be done from home, are more likely to catch Covid-19, more likely to have severe disease, and more likely to die than those who are well-off, live in comfortable spacious homes and are able to work from the comfort of their spare bedroom. The older you are, the more likely you are to become severely ill or die with Covid, with the risk doubling approximately every 6-7 years of age. Does that mean that Covid is unfair?

I am reminded of Jesus' words when the disciples remonstrated with him over the woman who poured expensive perfume over his head in Matthew 26:6-13. They complained that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and Jesus responded "You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me." At first glance, that seems a rather cold response, especially in the light of the frequency with which justice and mercy are mentioned in the Bible. As Christians, we are meant to care about injustice, and to fight it – to care about suffering, and try to relieve it. However, although the concept of fairness is very important in our culture, it is not a part of the original design. We are all different – in terms of our genetic inheritance, parentage, upbringing and the time and place of our birth. There is no conceivable way that we could all end up with exactly the same experience of life or opportunities to flourish.

The biblical concept of justice is not about everyone being the same or having the same. Rather, it is about preventing those who are powerful from taking advantage of those who

are vulnerable. And the biblical concept of compassion does not mean that no-one must ever suffer; instead it asks us to understand and support those who do.

As soon as Covid-19 became widespread, it was inevitable that many people were going to suffer. That suffering is not limited to those who actually catch the disease and their loved ones, nor even to those who have endured the exhaustion and trauma of treating the very sick patients. It affects everyone whose diagnosis or treatment for other conditions was delayed; everyone who has missed seeing family and friends; children's education and social development; vulnerable elderly people, whether in care homes or their own home, who have gone downhill quickly because of reduced social contact; everyone whose mental health has suffered; businesses and whole economies are faltering and some will not recover.

None of this is fair. And while some of it could perhaps have been avoided if authorities and individuals had acted differently, there was never a way of getting through a pandemic without a great deal of pain. We all have to live with its consequences, because there is no undoing what has been done.

There is, however, hope for the future, because it is in the nature of human beings to recover from even the most grievous blows. And one of the things which helps us to do that is the loving support of family and friends. If you have a young person in your life who has been affected by the exam results fiasco, it may be worth reminding them that everyone in their year is affected, that universities still want students and employers still need staff, and that they are so much more than their exam results. And if the pandemic has hit you or someone you love particularly badly, remember this: it is not only the poor you will always have with you, it is also God.

Another major area of impact for us of course has been our ability to meet as church. Some of the churches in our circuit are preparing to meet for worship again – others are deciding the time is not yet, while still others are questioning their very existence. Traumatic events can be life-changing. Sometimes going back to what before is not possible because of the trauma; but sometimes the trauma forces us to re-evaluate what we had, and decide that we want something different for the future. If you are a church council member wrestling with the decision over opening and weighed down under the complexity of risk assessments and procedures, spare a thought for the government and officials who have had to make similar decisions for the whole country. If you feel underprepared for this responsibility, so were they.

As we continue to observe developments, to ponder and to pray, do not forget that God can handle our feelings, whatever they may be, and if often helps us to express them.

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.
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