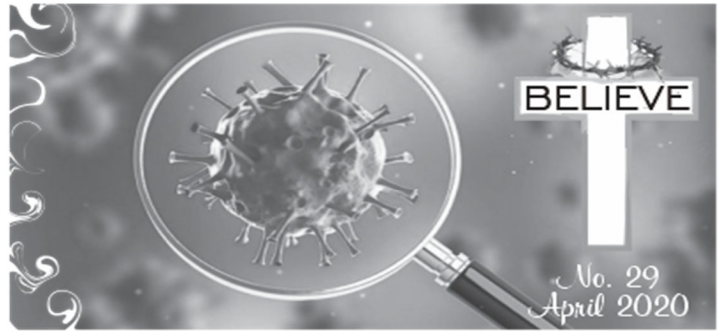


# MHA *on the Bay*

Easter 2020



***"The virus doesn't move, people move it. We stop moving, the virus stops moving, the virus dies. It's that simple."***

Dear members of the MHA family,

What were we doing this time last year?! Christians were joining other Christians across the world in preparation for Easter; schools were on holiday and families were planning time away at their chosen destination; some folk were joining the MHA retirement community, others were first-time home buyers; babies were born, and people passed away; ordinary hard-working men and women across the world had uphill struggles to deal with, or joys to share, in their own communities. Yes, some people faced unspeakable hardships, but life was, for most, quite normal, in the scheme of things.

There is nothing normal about today; tomorrow will be even more abnormal. One dictionary defines abnormal as *"deviating from what is normal or usual, typically in a way that is undesirable or worrying"*. It would be unhelpful to us in coping, and remaining positive, if we sugar-coated this reality.

I recently watched a CNN interview of a world-renowned grief counsellor; it helped me to understand where we are, as humankind, and for us to concentrate on a new dawn, a better tomorrow. This is some of what he shared on how he perceives this (Covid-19 pandemic) time in history:

- Around the world people are united in their sadness, as family members, friends and those in our community are affected or infected. Virtually everyone on Earth will feel its impact in some way
- People are showing signs of a heavy sadness; in effect, grieving a world we have now lost
- Our normal life, routines, seeing people, our work; everything has changed, leaving us disoriented
- We are faced with change we didn't want. Remember what airports were like before 9/11; or the world before Covid-19, when we used to hug and shake hands, and move about freely?
- We are a society that wants quick fixes; we want this over quickly, and get back to normal
- It is sinking in that the world won't go back to normal; the world we knew has gone forever.

Covid-19 is, in many ways, almost as bad as WWII; we are bombarded with an overload of instant information and updates, and a lot of fake news, about the global war being waged. This just adds fuel to the fire of uncertainty, fear, desperation, and grieving the world as we knew it, now gone.

So, now for the good news (at last!):

- ✓ Easter is a time for Renewal and Hope, even in the midst of all of what is going on. Amen to that!
- ✓ Mother Earth will emerge in far better shape than she is now; we need to nurture and protect her
- ✓ Communities across the world will behave differently, and better. We may even get to love one another, rather than wage wars, terrorize others, abuse each other, or create a mass of refugees
- ✓ We will begin to appreciate and support each other; reach out, really care, share what we have.

John Lennon's song *"Imagine"* has these lines: *"You may say I'm a dreamer/But I'm not the only one/I hope someday you'll join us/And the world will be as one"*. Let us not just dream of a better world; let us help to make it happen! In a bizarre way, Covid-19 is presenting us with a chance to change, to renew. On behalf of the MHA Board, Management and CovidCom, I urge everyone in the MHA family to remain strong, positive and healthy, to support one another, as we fight this virus together. Unity is strength.

**Malcolm Stewart** (who reminds us all: ***"Stay. Spray. Pray"***)

## **“Father’s child ?”**

Greetings to you all as you read this in, I expect, very different circumstances from what any of us might have anticipated. Unexpectedly being cut off from those we might have met with and shared with, in even the most mundane daily things, makes for reflection and maybe even recalibration. How much have we not taken for granted? How much ought we not to have been more aware of and thankful for? Not having the freedom and choices we once had makes for a variety of possible reactions. Depending on who you are and “how you are wired” and/or how you are placed, will affect this reaction.

With this in mind I take a look at Jesus and Scripture’s record of his journey to the cross and onwards to the empty tomb and beyond.

There is little doubt that whilst Jesus was determined to be faithful to the Father and with it a growing awareness of the inevitability of his death, Jesus came and held hard to being and doing what the Father asked of him. That this would mean his death and all that came with it was not His focus or the motivation for his coming. It was the horrible consequence of being obedient to the Father and doing the Father’s will. Not that the Father willed His son’s suffering or wanted some sort of appeasement for being rejected by sinful humans, I dare think. Jesus’ suffering and death were a consequence of Jesus’ choice to love and honour God and stay true in trusting God and standing against evil and injustice. It was for love of the Father. Even from the cross, his first and last words as recorded in Luke’s gospel (Lk 23:34 and 46) were addressed to “Father”. This points to the wonder of the resurrection. In the resurrection God, the Father, validated obedience and trust that transcends and stays true through even the most excruciating experience. We so want to be saved from the hard and the harsh – but what if we are saved as we endure through them, in trustful obedience?

Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane prior to his arrest, trial and ultimate execution shows how Jesus dealt with struggles and hardships. It was in prayer, conversing and connecting, with his “Father”. That relationship was the reference point for who he was and what he did. His identity, given the statement of the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved son in whom I delight”, was in being his Father’s. Even in Gethsemane his conclusion after praying, as seems his default in every situation of trial or important choice, was “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” (Lk 22:42). Actually in Matthew’s gospel there is more detail around this prayer encounter and there is a back and forth between Jesus and his disciples who cannot stay awake. When Jesus gets beyond “...please take away this cup” to “...if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” and ultimately to “Up, let’s be going. Look, my betrayer is here” there is a choice to trust in faith (beyond his knowledge or experience) in the Father. Beyond prayer is Jesus’ choice to trust and stay the course.

In John’s gospel (see John 20) the resurrection is first witnessed by Mary Magdalene, then by John and Peter. Standing outside the tomb crying, presumably after Peter and John had gone back to the others, Jesus appears to her. She thinks he is the gardener, and in conversation only recognizes Jesus when he calls her name. It is then that Jesus says (v 17) “Don’t cling to me for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father....’” This relationship, as child of the Father, is a thread running through all of Jesus’ life. Remember how as a 12 year old (Lk 2:49) Jesus asked, after his parents had lost him for three days, “Didn’t you know I must be in my Father’s house?”

My prayer would be that this Easter we re-examine our relationship with God. What is the foundation of it? Is it for what we can get or gain? Or is it really about knowing God as “Father”? Is it not in being a child of the Father? By God’s choice and empowering but, also, as a consequence of our ongoing daily choice. Our own experience of who we might have called father in our lifetime in human form may or may not help – but the grace and power to endure, the wisdom to know what to do, the wonder of even expecting life stronger than death or sin or any trial, viral or otherwise, all somehow hinge on belonging in God’s family and being a child of the Father.

In John’s gospel the first eighteen verses are referred to as the prologue. There John, speaking of Jesus, records “to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (v12). Therein is much more than a Happy Easter! Therein is an eternal inheritance starting here and now – a relationship and place in a family forever.

Blessings

**Rev Jonathan Hobson** (Walmer Methodist Church)