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Dear all,

Briefing 18: Wednesday 17th June, 2020.

***“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
This is what the ancients were commended for.” Hebrews 11 v1+2.***

From the statue of Edward Colson which was ripped from its plinth and thrown into Bristol docks, to the attacks on the statue of Winston Churchill in London, statues, monuments and blue plaques to famous (or infamous) people of the past have been much in the news lately. But what should we make of the desire to take down such monuments and wipe the memory of these people from the national consciousness? It's not an easy question.

On one side, I can understand how depressing it must be to walk past the statues of those who you feel were at least partly responsible for the oppression and enslavement of your forefathers. Even as a general rule, we wouldn't want to see monuments built now to people who had committed great evil. And if we wouldn't want to see new monuments to people like Hitler or Stalin or Saddam Hussein, why would we not want to rid ourselves of existing statues to such people?

Of course, it isn't quite that straightforward, is it? Nobody is perfect. Even the great heroes of our recent times, such as Winston Churchill, have dark pasts. They, like we, like all people, are not completely good or completely evil. Slave traders like Edward Colson gave vast amounts of money to the people of Bristol. Should every building he helped fund be ripped down? If so, Bristol Cathedral is for the chop! Since the wealth of slave traders built large parts of London, many of the buildings there would have to go, as would great swathes of Liverpool. Spring cleaning our country of its murky history is simply not going to work.

Interestingly, the week or so before this all kicked off in the press, our home group was talking about many of our Old Testament 'heroes'. I put that word in inverted commas because almost all of them had serious failings. Noah had a problem with drink. Jacob was a cheat and a liar. Moses was a murderer. Samson had a problem with women. David was a murderer and adulterer, and his son, Solomon, ended up with hundreds of pagan wives who led him to worship pagan gods. Even where the faults of Old Testament heroes aren't written in the text, they will have been far from perfect. No one is good, except God, as the Old Testament shows us.

But it would be foolish to rip out all of the accounts of these fallen, frail, sinful people, because these stories are there to teach us truths about our own fallenness and what truly matters. Just like these Old Testament heroes you and I are far from perfect. However hard we try, we will fail God, sin against one another and let him down. I hope there will be many times when we do the right thing, when we are loving and kind and patient. But as I said in the sermon last week, we will never be good enough to earn our way into heaven. And praise God we don't need to be!

What we must do is have faith in the one who can take us there. What we must do, is repent of our sin and place our hope and trust in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross in our place. That is what these ancient Bible heroes of the past were commended for. Ultimately, it was their life of faith that is the best example for us. A faith lived out, as will be ours, in a life where we continue to battle with sinfulness and guilt, but where our hope is in Jesus.

So what about these statues? Perhaps faith-filled humility would be the best way forward. Perhaps all people need to recognise that bad people do 'good' things and 'good' people can sometimes do bad things, and that we are no different. Let's do our best to learn from and emulate the good we see in one another, from the characters in the Bible and in more recent history, so we grow more like Jesus. But let's make sure we also learn from the sins of the past (ours and those of others) so we don't fall into the same trap.

Yours in Christ,

Dave

Notices and Updates...

READING FOR SUNDAY: If you want to read the passage ahead of Sunday, it is John 1: 1-18

OPENING THE CHURCHES: From last Sunday, churches are now able to open for private prayer. But, after chatting with my wardens, we have decided NOT to open the churches at the moment. St Mary's is off the beaten track, and when we opened the church for private prayer at the beginning of the lockdown there were no takers. St Nicholas, on the other hand, is still not quite ready to welcome visitors. We are hoping that the government might allow churches to open for services within the next 3 weeks or so, and are beginning to plan for that. We will give you more details of that when we know what's happening.

WALKING AND TALKING AND COFFEE: With lockdown restrictions now somewhat eased, why not take the opportunity for a socially distanced walk or chat or coffee in the garden with some folks from the church family? But do remember to keep telephoning those who are shielding- so no one feels forgotten. And while you're queuing outside all the newly-reopened shops, why not have some words ready to speak about Jesus. The world is getting back to normal, but people still need to hear about Jesus and the hope and security he alone can bring.

HELPING MONITOR THE VIRUS: In order to support ongoing investigations into COVID-19 please consider using the ZOE Covid-19 app on your smart phones. This app only gathers the data that you give it; it does not automatically take information from your phone. By using this app you're helping the NHS and contributing to advance vital research on COVID-19. By combining user reports with software algorithms, the organisation is able to predict who has the virus and so track COVID infections across the UK and now other countries, without the need for mass testing. Over 3 million people in the UK are sending data to this study. This app has been up and running successfully for around 3 months. You can find out more on this website <https://covid.joinzoe.com>

SOMETHING FOR YOUR SOUL...

VIDEO of the week: Join Rico Tice for a Covid-19 spiritual health check. <https://youtu.be/EZW4KKCM67c>

SONG of the week: All who are thirsty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBocRFwzxS8>

BOOK of the week: **The Creaking on the Stairs by Mez McConnell.** I've just finished reading this harrowing, beautiful book. Harrowing because as Mez unpacks the gospel, he shares his story of systematic and heart-wrenching childhood abuse. Beautiful because as he does so, we see how the gospel can bring light and hope and freedom to even the most wounded soul. If you have suffered abuse of any kind, this book will point you to Jesus in a wonderful way. If you haven't, read it anyway. Weep over all that Mez suffered, and rejoice at the mercy, love and power of the saviour who died for him and who changed his life and who can change yours. You can buy the book here:

<https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/25350/the-creaking-on-the-stairs>

THE LATEST VIDEOS: If you have missed any recent services, all our videos are available at our YouTube site which can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAaIRTsJuKFRBvkLjAtQ> There won't be an all-age service this week, but do check out these videos of Aussie songwriter Colin Buchanan at home, singing many of the songs we love to sing at church.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBdazzg9Pi4bmb4IC1ZOpq1GWZ2J12_oo.

COMMUNITY SURVEY: Healthwatch Hertfordshire have asked for our help getting as many people as possible to complete a survey of their coronavirus experiences. If you would like to take part, you can find the survey here: <https://www.healthwatchhertfordshire.co.uk/covid-19-surveys/>

REMINDERS...

PREVIOUS LETTERS AND INFORMATION: These can all be accessed via our websites or Facebook pages.

KEEPING IN TOUCH: Please do keep going with the **4UP/4DOWN** challenge and call people regularly and let me or Lynda Matthews (Pastoral Team leader) know of any concerns you have. Let's not let 'lockdown fatigue' stop us from loving one another.

SERVICE DOWN A TELEPHONE LINE: A reminder that our '*service down a telephone line*' is now up and running. The message will be updated every few days with services and the Sunday sermon. Simply dial this **local number 01438 907143** (you'll need the area code as well), and listen.

NEED HELP? Do ask! We are a family after all. If you or a neighbour need help that you can't provide, contact Herts Help on 0300 123 4044 or via <https://www.hertshelp.net/hertshelp.aspx>.