Dear all, **Briefing 19: Wednesday 24th June, 2020.**

***“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them…. And God saw all that he had made and it was very good.” Genesis 1:27 and 31a***

The protests and rallies for Black Lives Matter have continued this week, and they have been given an extra boost in publicity by the restart of the Premier League. If you’ve watched, listened to, or read any of the posts I’ve suggested over recent weeks, I’m sure you’ll agree with me that there is much work to do in our nation, and many others, to ensure that people are not judged, victimised or abused because of the colour of their skin. The lives of black people do matter. As do the lives of Asian people, South American people, and white people. And if we are harbouring racial prejudice in our hearts and minds, we need to acknowledge it and ask for God’s help to change.

Why is that? What reason do we give? The verse above gives us all the reason we need. All people, everywhere, whatever their colour or language or gender or age or disability or education or religion or wealth deserve to be treated with dignity because, whatever we may think of them, they, just like us, have been made in the image of God.

We may agree with that in our heads, but sometimes our upbringing or experience may have shaped our hearts differently, and they may be out of step with the scriptures. Take Jonah, for example. He would almost certainly have believed these verses from Genesis 1; he was a prophet of God after all. But he had a blind spot. For Jonah the dignity and worth of all people only stretched so far… and it didn’t include the Ninevites!

Do we have such blind spots I wonder? Do we find ourselves saying things like ‘I’m not being racist but…’? Do we always look for a seat on a bus or train near someone who looks like us? Do we only invite those with a similar skin colour or background out for coffee or a meal? Do we think that God’s love and pleasure shines on all people… except *those people over there*? If so, we need God to change our hearts because such thoughts and feelings are contrary to the gospel and reflect very badly on the God we claim to follow. As we’ll see on Sunday morning, the family of God is beautifully wide and made up of people from every language, colour, nationality and class across the globe. Let’s embrace this reality and reject ungodly fears and prejudices.

But whilst the evil of racism has taken the spotlight in recent weeks, there is another blind spot which we are often loath to confront. The value of the unborn child and the horror and shame of abortion.

Anyone who reads Psalm 139 cannot but be confronted by the words that God knit us together in our mother’s womb, and that all of us, even before we come to birth, are fearfully and wonderfully made. And yet we as a church have turned a blind eye as government after government has brought in more liberal abortion laws which have made the killing of these unborn babies easier than ever.

The numbers are shocking, as this video reveals: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJufWVgRsPQ&t=35s> During the epidemic we’ve been rightly horrified as the numbers of deaths have grown from a few hundred to well over 40,000. And yet over the last 6 months there have been 100,000 abortions in this country, there will have been 200,000 by the end of the year, and those deaths will continue long after the epidemic has passed. Worldwide the numbers are even more staggering and horrifying with some **40 MILLION** abortions a year.

What can we do? We can pray for governments to see the value of these precious children, and pressure those in power, through letters and action, to change the law. Why not write to our MP or the Prime Minister? Why not support the campaigns of <https://christianconcern.com/> or <https://righttolife.org.uk/>. Black lives matter to God. Unborn lives matter to God. All lives matter to God. May the LORD remove our blind spots so they matter to us too.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

*Notices and Updates…*

**VIDEO MESSAGE FROM DAVE:** If you are from St Nicholas Church and you’ve missed Dave’s important video message, don’t forget to take a look. You can find it here: <https://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk/blog/an-important-message-from-the-rector-to-the-church-family-at-st-nicholas-24th-june-2020/> The video contains some vital information about the building project and church finances at St Nicholas Church, and the urgent need we now have. It also gives a call for a day of prayer next **Wednesday- 1st July**. Do watch it and respond. A letter with more details will be coming out on Friday.

**READING FOR SUNDAY:** If you want to read the passage ahead of Sunday, it is Mark 10:32-45

**OPENING OUR 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. (*more on that below*)

However, other churches in the town ARE open, and you’d be welcome to go and pray there if you so desire.

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|  | St Martins Knebworth | St Hugh &  St John | St Marys Shephall | St Peters Broadwater | All Saints  Pin Green | Holy  Trinity | Christ the King | St Andrew & St George |
| Mon |  | 10.00-11.00 | 10.00-12.00 | 10.00-12.00 |  |  |  | 12.00-16.00 |
| Tues | 14.00-16.00 |  |  |  |  |  | 14.30-15.30 | 12.00-16.00 |
| Wed |  |  |  | 10.00-12.00 | 10.00-12.00 |  |  | 12.00-16.00 |
| Thur | 9.30-11.30 | 18.00-19.00 | 14.00-16.00 |  |  |  |  | 12.00-16.00 |
| Fri |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 12.00-16.00 |
| Sat |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sun |  |  |  |  | 10.00-12.00 | 14.00-16.00 |  |  |

**GEARING UP FOR REOPENING OUR CHURCHES.** Further to the Prime Minister’s announcement yesterday, work is under way to prepare for the resumption of services in our 2 churches from Sunday 5th July. Please pray for the team involved that we do all things well. We recognise that not everyone will be able or willing to come along and meet physically, and right now, we’re not sure what forms those services will take- we’ll give you an update on that next week – but we can assure you that there will still be a virtual service of one form or another.

For St Nicholas, a lot of practical work is needed to prepare the church for the resumption of services. This includes some decorating, plenty of cleaning, unpacking etc. Steve will be sending a letter out in a day or so detailing the various jobs. Do watch out for it and volunteer where you are able.



**GOOD NEWS!** Yesterday morning, Kate (part of our worship group) and Mark, were thrilled to welcome their son, Isaac, into the world, weighing in at 5lbs 13oz. After a rather sleepless night, mum and baby are doing well! Here’s a little picture! 🡺

**SOMETHING FOR YOUR SOUL…**

**VIDEOS of the week:** Letitia Wright was one of the stars of the Marvel film Black Panther. Watch this short video (and the longer version too if you like) to hear how Jesus changed her life, and how he used a friend’s telephone call to bring her to that point of decision.You can find her 2 minute testimony here<https://youtu.be/ky9LIpIJoOg> and the longer version (10 mins) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hZqpSTdFfU>

**TALK of the week: What Matters Most in Life:** Want to refocus on what truly matters? Have a listen to this talk by Ian Garrett from Jesmond Parish Church. <https://youtu.be/NOiB2uvu3Cs>

**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.

**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](about:blank).