



Our experience of 2020 has not been one that anyone could have predicted. The strange 'new normal' brought about by the pandemic has left many people feeling isolated, vulnerable and fearful - and some have had to bear the added pain of coming to terms with the loss of loved ones. On top of it all, the world's headlines continue to reveal imbalance and injustice all around us, as we read of the increased prevalence of radicalisation and on-line grooming driven by the lockdown. Those unwell with non-covid conditions have had treatment delayed,

No Fear of Bad News

jobs have been lost - and we cannot but be acutely aware of the shock-waves travelling around the world following the tragic death of George Floyd.

Writing recently for our weekly update, circulated to the church congregation via email, I quoted from Psalm 112 'He will have no fear of bad news' (verse 7) - which seems a strange, and perhaps even offensive, declaration in the light of these experiences. How can we not have some sense of fear, both of the bad news we see and, for some, the bad news we experience?

The answer to those questions and the reason the Psalmist can make such a confident declaration is not because the world in his day was a better place, (conflict, disease and injustice was everywhere), nor from some sense of blind arrogance or denial, but rather because of the place in which he put his trust. If we were to read the Psalm from

the beginning, we would discover that it starts with these words: "Praise the Lord. Blessed in the person who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands." (verse 1).

'Fear' is a word used to describe the right response to God - one of awe and admiration - and that 'Lord' in whom the Psalmist trusted finds his supreme revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, described in the New Testament as the "exact representation of his being". (Hebrews 1:3). He is the one who is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). It means that if we look to Jesus, we too are able to join the Psalmist in those extraordinary words, to have hope in the midst of darkness, security in the midst of uncertainty - and no fear of bad news. There is blessing and comfort, even in the face of bad news, as we put our trust in him.

Rev. Simon Austen

Our doors may have shut, but we are still open!

Join us on Sundays for our online services at 10.30am. Click on the symbol for the link to our YouTube channel.



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In this issue of LENS we share with you the experiences of some of our members over the past few months.

Working Through the Pandemic



Owen and I have been fortunate to both remain working throughout lockdown, writes *Emily Lewis*.

Owen is a scientist for the Met Office and has been adjusting to home-working. We have turned our attic room into his office, so his morning commute now consists of one flight of stairs! He seems to have endless virtual meetings, but is definitely missing seeing colleagues in person.

I am working as a doctor at the RD&E as part of my training to be a GP. Thankfully the hospital has not been overwhelmed by Covid-19 as we have seen elsewhere in the country. However, I have found the frequently

changing departments and work rotas to be unsettling at times. We have both been very thankful for [Online Church](#), as well as having our usual small groups over Zoom to keep us focussed on Jesus during lockdown. We've also found the last three months have given us a much-needed slowdown in the pace of life. It has taught us our need for proper rest, as well as enjoying more time together at home. Sometimes we have felt frustrated when our own plans for the year have been cancelled. However, through this time, God has reminded us of His complete control over everything and our need to fully trust and lean on him.

How I've Discovered Greater Freedom

Exeter has been my home for nearly five years now, writes *Jan Porteous*. I'm an oldie, living alone with only my black lurcher, Yoshi, for company. The few relations I still have are based in either Hampshire or London, so it has been a joy for me to be part of the church family at St Leonard's.

Life was full and interesting before the lockdown. I had some regular commitment every day of the week. I led Bible studies, mentored two students, visited someone in a care home, and got together with friends from time-to-time. I also had to exercise Yoshi twice a day. For someone of my age, it felt rather as if I was hedge-hopping through life from one deadline to the next.

Then all that activity came to a halt overnight. Suddenly I had time - and no more deadlines or commitments. I decided that I would regard the lockdown as a kind of retreat. There would be no more morning dog walks, and so I could spend as long as I wanted reading the Bible and praying. Since my teenage years I had what people call a 'quiet time' in the morning and some of those times had been wonderful; but this was different. I read the Bible much more slowly now, turning over each verse, taking time to go deeper, and soak myself in the very basic truths of the gospel – God's infinite greatness and sovereign rule over everything, his forgiving love in the Lord Jesus Christ, his promise to change our lives from the inside by the power of his Holy Spirit. As I read and prayed, I realised that hard-trodden attitudes were being broken up and



changed. I was being set free from things that had weighed me down, and I had greater freedom in prayer and worship. Then I started to look up some of the beautiful old hymns I had grown up with. Now, I sing them or read them as part of my worship time. They are a powerful reminder of the Lord's goodness to me over a lifetime, and they help me to come into his presence with singing.

What do you hope for?

We're running a virtual course to enable you to look into the claims of Jesus.

Click on the Christianity Explored icon for more info or contact office@stleonards.church



Life in Lockdown: The Hawkins Family

2020 was supposed to be a big year for us as a family, but CV-19 comprehensively blew plans out of the water, writes *Freddie Hawkins*. It has meant cancelling GCSEs, cutting in half a gap year in Australia, abandoning participation in a motorsports event in Kenya, and cancelling the family holiday.

We are, though, highly fortunate. Despite several of the family being immunosuppressed we've kept free of illness, and the amazing weather has enabled us to enjoy our garden and a small coterie of animals, including piglets Joe and Carole (named after the Tiger King characters) and a hive of bad-tempered bees.

There have also been moments of tremendous fun: VE Day celebrations, birthdays, and we've got into a habit of hosting weekly evenings celebrating particular countries, with food, outfits and activities from different places. This has included evening celebrating all things Texan, African, Indian, Spanish and even Serbian.

The VE Day celebrations served as a reminder that whatever

hardships we've faced pale into insignificance compared to what our forebears had to endure.

But we have also been encouraged by going way further back in time, almost 3,400 years in fact, and looking in the book of Psalms. That ancient book contains some amazing truths about the human condition in the face of danger, and where we can find sure hope. Some of its songs and poems are straightforward laments, asking where God is to be found in the face of misery and oppression. Others marvel at the overwhelming generosity of a creator God of whom the heavens declare his glory and skies proclaim the work of his hands.

In the CV-19 crisis, one Psalm nails the key issue for us, as we try to make sense of it all. Psalm 20 begins with a prayer – “May the Lord answer you when you are in distress”. Its author, King David, was one of the most impressive soldiers of his era. Yet surprisingly he warns us against trusting in chariots or horses – the very tools of his trade as a warrior and king. Those who do, he says, are ultimately “brought



to their knees and fall”. In other words, the things we think can bring us safety and comfort – our homes, jobs, wealth, hobbies, even our health – are simply not up to the job.

In contrast, King David writes “but we trust in the name of the Lord our God”. Narnia author C.S. Lewis restated this ancient wisdom when he wrote of God as the source of ultimate joy: “God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

The Psalms are not a self-help manual, and they don't always offer easy answers. But they have been a terrific source of encouragement when so many of life's certainties have proved to be anything but.

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress. Psalm 20.

Life in Lockdown: The Tolhurst Family

In common with many others, our family greeted the commencement of lockdown on March 23 with feelings of trepidation and uncertainty, writes Yvonne Tolhurst. We couldn't imagine what our days and weeks would look like with the sudden prohibition of all those activities and social interactions which had previously defined our lives.

My husband immediately stopped his daily commute into Exeter for work, and instead started working full-time from home. I paused as much of my part-time work as I could in order to look after, and attempt to home-educate, our three boys, 5, 8 and 10, who were now all at home... all the time!

Reflecting back over the past few months, there have been challenges and difficult days, but also much to enjoy and savour about our lockdown experience.

Maintaining good family relationships, particularly between siblings, remains a challenge. Missing the tonic and refreshment of other people's company and outside entertainment, it has been hard to escape each other when bad moods surface or when we need some peace and quiet. We've all had lots of opportunities to practise loving one another even though it has not felt easy!

Trying to convert the family home into a classroom has also been a challenge. My pupils,



each following a different school-supplied work program, didn't appreciate the change of teaching personnel. They are often difficult to engage and reluctant to take advice from Mum whose knowledge of fronted adverbials and subordinate clauses apparently doesn't pass muster for Key Stage 2! I've battled feelings of inadequacy: not being the teacher I thought I might be, and not being able to "do enough" with three very different children. I remain in awe of teachers!

There have been many highlights too. Being able to spend good time with our boys and each other, reconnecting over more leisurely meals or games without having to rush off has definitely been a positive change. We've been able to pray together more regularly throughout the day, and bring Jesus into conversations around school topics or whatever is going on in our day. [The Kids' Church weekly videos](#) are eagerly anticipated by our boys who enjoy learning the memory verse and making the craft. My husband and I have felt hugely encouraged by the [Online Church services](#) and devotionals

as well as Zoom Homegroup and Women's Bible Study meetings. Our faith has felt more embedded in daily life as we hold onto the Sovereignty of God in the pandemic and the eternal, unchanging truths of His word, the Bible, in a world where many other absolutes have fallen away.

We've been hugely blessed by the exceptional weather we've enjoyed since lockdown too. We have discovered lots of wonderful new walks and rediscovered some old favourites. Seeing the beauty and infinite variety of God's creation in and around East Devon has definitely been one of my highlights. I don't think we've ever walked to see so many bluebells, and our natural history knowledge has improved enormously!

Overall, we reflect with huge thanks, that despite the many residual anxieties and uncertainties of lockdown, we remain safe together as a family. When the boys have asked questions about what will happen, it has been wonderful to tell them: "We don't know...but God does!"