

## What has God been saying to me? *Reflections from 24 leaders (refer article "What is God up to?" in June 2020 Christianity Magazine : please see Hugh if you'd like to borrow this or any back-copies)*

Many have been aware of these last 4 months a **gift**, time they may well not have again, and time above all to **rediscover their identity** – not in their roles as leaders, but as **children of God**. How about you?

Perhaps the most common thread was in so many leaders reflecting on how they and their churches have had **more time to pray**, and how the crisis has driven many to a **greater dependency on God**.

Many leaders such as *R.T.Kendall* quoted Joshua 3:4, where God tenderly asks Joshua to trust him in leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land, on **a way that they'd never been before - a bit like us!**

He says the crisis has challenged him both to **rely on God** and be unashamed of the Bible as never before.

*Jennifer Rees Larcome* was one of those who has rediscovered the Lord's priority for us, not just to be his servants but to **be his friends**. And she talks much of her 'soul-refreshing' at this time.

If you haven't already done so, listen to the '**Blessing**' song sung across many denominations that has swept the nation, and blessed so many – including the prime minister, who has spoken of it. John has featured it on our website, top central in yellow.

*Rapper Guvna-B* echoes this, sharing how God has led him into a better work-life balance, how he has been taught to **rest more in God**, and how he's now **much more connected to his church community**.

The encouragement is to realise that there has been **a far greater openness and hunger for the gospel** over lockdown, as confirmed by *evangelist J.John* and others. **Many have found faith** in this time, and many have attended online worship services who'd never consider walking through church doors.

This has also been a **time for 'un-learning'**, says *Carl Beech, President of Christian Vision for Men*. At one point in lockdown, he felt a steady small whisper encouraging him to throw away all he'd ever noted down from God, saying "You need to unlearn. **See I'm doing a new thing**, do you not perceive it?". This very much echoes the Lord's words in Revelation ch5

But it's not just about us. *Tanya Marlow*, pastoral theologian and author, challenges us to be churches who commit to asking the questions "**Who is not here?**" and "**How can we fully include them?**" This has to be a question for each of our team churches.

*Marilyn Baker* talks much of the real message of hope that Jesus has given us to share to a frightened and confused world that is hungry for security and meaning. She talks of a '**contagion of hope**' that we are called to share in the midst of a contagion of fear

And *Gillian Cotterill of the Salvation Army* has recognised this as a **time for greater boldness** and a **greater 'stepping out'**, trusting God who "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" quoting Ephesians 3:20-21. Yes, our God is able...

And it's our *Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and the Dean of Canterbury Cathedral* who say that perhaps we have **finally understood what it is to be the church**, immersed in our communities, rather than 'going to church'.

That's certainly been my impression as well, as we have joined in united worship on Zoom, and as many of the deanery churches have engaged incredibly hard in providing practically for their communities.

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### So what does the future hold for St Mary's?

- Our hope is that we will be able to start a new pattern of services on Sunday and through the week as we move into autumn
- Some have advocated a 'Café-church' style of worship, enabling us to share together more
- Many have also expressed their desire to retain the benefits of a team-centred Sunday worship via Zoom. How could this best be achieved?
- Could you join in a united approach as we join St George's visiting every home on the new Earlsfield Estate in the autumn? What an opportunity!
- What about running another Alpha course for all who are searching for meaning and connection?
- And how are we going to re-engage with our families, for instance resuming 4x4? Keep praying