

Thought for the Day: 26 Oct - 1 Nov 2020

by Paul Attridge

Monday

Earlier in the progress of the pandemic, when tempers were flaring over the race relations issue that were present at the time, I posted a video of myself playing and singing the song 'Imagine' by John Lennon, which is a simple secular song for peace. John Lennon had many interesting, thought provoking and controversial things to say. My week of thoughts starts each day with a quote from John.

It would have been John's 80th birthday this month and we are approaching the 40th anniversary of his death, so this is a good time to listen to his words.



"We're more popular than Jesus now"

John Lennon was not saying he was better, more important or even more relevant; he was saying that The Beatles were becoming more present than Christianity in the minds of the young in the United States. He was greatly criticised, especially in the Bible Belt, and communities took to the streets to burn Beatles records in protest.

There was a certain truth to his words and, instead of criticism, thought should have been given to making the statement less true. It is often the case that many young people follow the example in the Parable of the Sower; the word of God grows a little and is then choked by thorns. There are many thorns in modern life, but maybe, just maybe, the lockdown is leading people in a different direction.

*We pray for ourselves and others when our fears,
insecurities, desires and self-absorption tangle like thorns
around Your grace and choke it into silence. Amen*

Tuesday

"Will the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? And the rest of you, if you'll just rattle your jewellery."

A comment from John Lennon on class, delivered with a wink to the Royal Box and to those gathered in the London Palladium for the Royal Variety Performance in 1965. There were two reactions: laughter and an intake of breath; he was saying what people did not say in those days.



There are many references to class and wealth in the Bible which can be uncomfortable to those listening in Hertford, a relatively wealthy town. I certainly feel uncomfortable as I look around at all the things I have. Wendy, last month, showed us her many teapots in

her sermon on a similar topic; I have much bigger collections that produce much more of an embarrassment of riches!

Bible verses on the subject give comfort but also a challenge to us:

'He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.' (Luke 1. 53)

'Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?' (James 2. 4)

We pray:

Jesus, we are different people, different backgrounds, different races, different education levels, different viewpoints, even different theologies; but we are gathered together in one name. One beautiful and matchless name: Jesus! Jesus, come into our midst as we pray today. Amen

Wednesday

“God is a concept by which we measure our pain”

How many people who lead secular lives talk about prayer when something terrible happens? When bereaved, how many of the same people talk about their loved one ‘looking down’ from heaven. We see so many people find God and Jesus Christ when they go through difficult situations.

John notes in this lyric that belief and faith are often measured by the pain we go through. As the famous ‘Footsteps’ story tells us, God always walks with us, when happy and sad, in joy and grief, depression and elation. When we struggle, he carries us.



How many of us who fight valiantly under the banner of Christ do the same? God for Sundays and hard times.

'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'
(Romans 8. 38-39)

*We pray that we are always beside you Lord,
whether life is easy or hard and in good times,
we care and pray for our brothers and sisters
who may need you more. Amen*

Thursday

“Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans”

We are lucky to have Alan to lead us in mindfulness sessions, as so much can be learned from this time in quietness with no distractions.



I certainly live a busy life and I imagine that I am not alone among my friends in spending more time in thought and prayer during this Covid-restricted 2020. Life so often passes quickly as we plan for the future and we wish things were better when often things are rather

good. We need to be more present and enjoy and appreciate the moment; the moment that is God's.

'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.' (Colossians 3. 2)

If we follow the meaning of these words, we will be more present.

We pray:

Let us be present to the now. It's all we have and it's where God will always speak to us. The now holds everything, rejects nothing and, therefore, can receive God, too.

Help us, God, to be present to the place we most fear, because it always feels empty, it always feels boring, it always feels like it's not enough.

Help us find some space within that we don't try to fill with ideas or opinions. Help us find space so you, loving God, can show yourself in that place where we are hungry and empty.

Keep us out of the way, so there is always room enough for you. We trust that you are hearing this prayer, and that you care for the answer more than we do.

We pray, therefore, not alone, but with the whole body of Christ in Jesus's name. Amen

Friday

“I'm not afraid of death because I don't believe in it. It's just getting out of one car, and into another.”

Although John was speaking of general spirituality, we believe the same thing; that our earthly life comes to an end and then a heavenly life begins.

Rev. Henry Scott Holland said it best in this poem:



Death is nothing at all.
It does not count.
I have only slipped away into the
next room.
Nothing has happened.
Everything remains exactly as it
was.
I am I, and you are you,
and the old life that we lived so
fondly together
is untouched, unchanged.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.
Speak of me in the easy way which you always used.
Put no difference into your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes
that we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.

Let it be spoken without an effort, without the ghost of a shadow
upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was.

There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is this death but a negligible accident?

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you, for an interval,

somewhere very near,

just round the corner.

All is well.

Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.

One brief moment and all will be as it was before.

How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

Saturday

***"Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace"***

These are the famous opening lyrics of John Lennon's most famous solo song. This is a song that seeks to remove division between all

people and usher in a time of peace. It is nearly 50 years since this song was written and it is as relevant and as needed today, maybe even more so. This is why, when there was so much division in the Summer, I sang this song and put the recording on WhatsApp.

We all hope that, in the end, 2020 and the trials that we go through will show us that we have more in common than we have that is different.

We need to love one another, despite what goes on around us with Brexit, Covid-19, racism, poverty, law and order. We need to demonstrate that love, however hard it is. This is the only way we will be Christ-like and bring the late Mr Lennon's dreams come true.



'I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.' (Romans 16. 17-18)

God, we pray this morning for unity in the body.

*Give us discernment to recognise strife and division in our midst
and the wisdom in how to put an end to it.*

*Continue to build humility in each and every one of us
with a total reliance on you and not our own understanding. Amen*

Sunday

***"Living is easy with eyes closed,
misunderstanding what you see"***



These lyrics from Strawberry Fields Forever speak more of spiritual revelation, somewhat promoted by pharmaceuticals. However, they stand in other situations.

A life without God is a one of blindness, with no joy in the love of God or appreciation of his grace in salvation. A limited, earthly life is all we see. Our life with our love of Jesus Christ, full of the holy spirit, is one lived brightly and in full colour. As the old hymn says: 'I was blind, but now I see'.

'So Ananias went to the house, and when he arrived, he placed his hands on Saul. "Brother Saul," he said, "the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." At that instant, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and his sight was restored.' (Acts 9. 18)

*Father, thank you for light that gives me sight.
I ask for you to give me boldness to shine my light in Jesus' name.
I don't want to hide my light under a basket.
Fill me with holy boldness in Jesus' name. Amen*