

Weekly News

NEWBURY BAPTIST CHURCH
19 MARCH 2025

Table Theology and Other Thoughts...

Last night I met with some of our cohort who are on The Learning Collective course, to discuss what they've been learning this month. The topic was 'practical theology', and (as always) we enjoyed an interesting and thought-provoking time together.

Practical theology is the discipline of reflecting upon our practice in order to understand what our practices say about our beliefs, and to examine how we might bridge the gaps which often exist between theology and the lived experience of Christian life.

I found my mind turning back to some half-baked thoughts I had last Sunday, after we shared communion. You may have spotted we brought the communion table back onto the stage, and from my perspective it was an interesting experience. On the one hand it was good to be more visible and central as we broke bread and shared wine. On the other hand, I felt a greater distance from the congregation, with that separation seeming to emphasise my "priestly" role; something which sits a little at odds with the Baptist emphasis on the priesthood of all believers.

There is an interesting avenue of thought regarding church stage design and layout. The prominent features are often indicative of what a church believes and prioritises. For example, a large, high pulpit may reflect the importance placed on preaching the Word of God. A statue of Mary reveals certain theological beliefs. A stage full of musical instruments points to an emphasis on sung worship, and if you breakdown the type of instruments on the stage, you'll get an idea of what style of music to expect.

Of course we have recently completed the first part of our stage redesign, so this is particularly topical for NBC. At the moment the stage feels a bit sparse, with our musicians huddled together, largely due to logistics of the current AV setup, with a view to some further technical changes enabling greater movement and better use of the space. Perhaps you have noticed that the baptistry seems to be more obvious - cleared of musicians and cables, and benefitting from several fresh coats of wax.

With the smell of new carpet still fresh in the air, we are still getting used to the scale and openness of the stage. Which brings me back to the communion table. A practical theologian might say that there is something significant about the table placed centrally, over the baptistry. It is a coming together of the only two sacraments most baptists recognise (a sacrament being a rite or ritual instigated by Jesus). In baptism people make their public declaration of faith. In Communion we return to Christ and have our faith renewed by him as we humbly share, remember and look forwards.

There is undoubtedly practical considerations at play when deciding what goes on a stage. You need to be able to see the preacher or lead singer; you can't very well put the double bass in row 3 and a violin in the welcome area! But we also consider what our stage says about us. What is elevated and placed front and centre tells us something about what we think is important. Worship of God. The Word of God. Baptism. Communion. Who is "allowed" onto the stage? What does that say about us as a community of believers? As we settle into the new layout and space in the coming weeks and months, pray that our faith and practice might align, in a demonstration of 'good' practical theology.

Peter

Notice board

Building Project Update

The building project is nearing its final stages! Between 7 and 11 April, the Hall floor will be sanded, treated and finished. Our snagging list is getting shorter, with mirrors due to go up in the toilets soon and kickboards fitted to the double doors into the Hall.

Meanwhile, we have decided to postpone the re-painting of the welcome area, pending a potential phase two of building work (watch this space!)

Unfortunately, the new Hall partition has been delayed. We are currently seeking further quotes for the work, due to some unforeseen costs, and would ask that you pray for the smooth completion of this key element of the project. Once the partition is in, we will be able to improve the acoustics in the Hall as the final piece of the jigsaw.

Sonrise Christian Resources

Many of you will know Steve, who used to manage Shoemakers Christian Bookshop. He now runs his own Christian resources business called *Sonrise*.

He has a very good website: sonrisechristianresources.co.uk and is offering NBC a special 10% discount code to be used on all of his products.

The code is **NBCmember** and you can enter this at the checkout by click the 'discounts and vouchers' button, entering the code into the 'Discount Code' box and clicking 'Apply coupon'.

Prayer Room Update and Request

Our new prayer room is getting closer to completion! It's had a coat of paint and the grimy windows have been cleaned! This is all working towards it becoming a thoughtful, calm space where people can connect with God.

We will be creating some artwork based on favourite verses and would love your contribution:

Is there a verse that is special to you?

One that has seen you through tough times?

Or one that informs your prayer?

If you'd like to share a verse then please email Jo - jo@newburybaptistchurch.org

From the Prayer Room Team,

Peggy, Allison, Hannah, Jo & Jo

Keyholder Policy Agreement

We have been working to develop our various policies and procedures, and have recently agreed a simple keyholder agreement for all who have key fobs and/or access codes to the church.

If you haven't yet signed yours, please speak to Tim D.

DO YOU HAVE NEWS TO SHARE?

EMAIL: OFFICE@NEWBURYBAPTISTCHURCH.ORG

Prayer Space

Lent Week 3 Prayer

Often the focus for prayer in this section is around petitions and intercessions. The following offers a prayer of celebration and blessing from the Iona Community written for Lent, using the inspiration of nature and creation.

With mountains, hills and valleys;

With trees and all green-growing;

With oceans deep, rivers and sparkling streams; WE PRAISE AND GLORIFY GOD, OUR CREATOR.

With swooping eagle and all birds of the air;

With lion and rabbit, and all that runs or crawls on land; With leaping dolphins and all that swims in the waters; WE PRAISE AND GLORIFY GOD, OUR CREATOR.

With all people, old and young;

With all races, short and tall;

With different faces – in all our wonderful difference and diversity; WE PRAISE AND GLORIFY GOD, OUR CREATOR.

With all creation, we praise God by being as we were made to be. AMEN.

Update on Ellis

Last week we asked for prayer for a six-year-old boy called Ellis, who was due to have heart surgery yesterday (Tues).

We are pleased to share that despite some complications, the surgery appears to have gone well, and Ellis is now recovering. His family are very thankful for all the prayers they have received.

Please continue to pray for Ellis as he recovers, particularly as there will be the need for further major heart surgery down the line.



Church Family Prayers

Please pray for the following people:

John P who is now home and recovering following a period in hospital.

Jonathan E awaiting a rescheduled operation

Brian C and family

Beryl R currently in West Berks hospital

Jeanette H

Mary H

Nigel B and family

Naomi in the Middle East

Arthur & Reeta in Asia

The Mahon Family in Peru

Pray for the 4 teenagers beginning baptism classes this week.

Prayers for the World

Lord, we pray for all who are affected by natural disasters and issues of climate change that are having such a detrimental effect on people's livelihoods and putting many lives at risk.

We pray that people living through such difficult times would find comfort and hope in you. Please provide the practical aid people need in times of emergency.

Help those amongst us who have plentiful material resources to be generous in sharing what we have with others, and to be mindful of how our actions have an impact on the environment and on creating fair societies.

We pray for those people who are the victims of war, and whose homes and communities have been destroyed. We pray for lasting peace, appropriate support for the work of rebuilding to take place, and for patience and persistence throughout this time.

We bring the prayers to you in Jesus' name, amen.