



Whatever your view of Christmas and how you spend it, this one will be like no other. We live in a new world, learning a new vocabulary, new behaviours and facing previously unseen challenges. In the middle of this people are asking what will Christmas be like this year? **The answer is that it will be what we choose to make it.** We cannot & should not forget the loneliness, despair, suffering & loss that SO many people in our nation & across our world have endured. To try to forget the last 9 months & do 'Christmas as normal, would be as insensitive as it is unchristian.

Rather we should seek to come alongside those who are suffering and to come together (digitally or with whatever other remote safe social distancing means you have at your disposal) as God's people to celebrate that at this time of year we do have good news. We have a message of hope, a

great Light to share. The angel said in Luke 2, *"Do not be afraid! I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah"*. On the first Sunday of this most unusual Advent season we know that we have news of hope, that there is someone, Jesus Christ, the Messiah who is the Redeemer of all the situations that we invite Him into. We remember His birth.

John wrote in 1:4-5 *"In Him was Life, & that Life was the Light of all mankind. The Light shines in the darkness & the darkness has not overcome it"*. These reflected prophetic words from Isaiah 9:2,6,7 *"The people walking in [utter] darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* **Our good news in this pandemic year is that the darkness has not overcome the light, and it NEVER will.** This Christmas, in

word & deed, with hope & love, (as suggested by CPO whose imagery we are using), we should all seek to **"SHARE THE LIGHT"**. As well as the huge array of readily accessible online resources for outreach or as bridgebuilding tools, TCF will be distributing 'Bags of Blessing', Time Traveller families will be getting Christmas parcels & there are 170 smaller bags going to all the children & families in Pool House. **But this is also a personal challenge to us all. During this COVID Christmas, how can I bring hope? How am I able to SHARE THE LIGHT?**

Sometimes a female sheep, the ewe, will give birth to a lamb & reject it. There are many reasons she may do this, but if the lamb is returned to the ewe, the mother may even kick the poor animal away. Once a ewe rejects one of her lambs, she will never change her mind. These little lambs will hang their heads so low that it looks like something is wrong with their neck. Their spirit is broken. These lambs are called "bummer lambs" & will die rejected & alone unless the shepherd intervenes. So the shepherd takes the rejected lamb into his home, hand-feeds it & keeps it warm by the fire. Often he will wrap it up with blankets & hold it to his chest so the bummer can hear & feel his heartbeat. Once the lamb is strong enough, the shepherd puts it back into the field with the rest of the flock. That sheep never forgets how the shepherd cared for it when its mother rejected it. After that every time the shepherd goes out to the fields & calls for his sheep, it is always the bummer sheep that runs to him first. It's not that the bummer lamb is loved more, but it knows intimately the one who loves it & it trusts him because it has experienced his one-to-one love & care.

As we share the light & reach out with hope, maybe there is someone that you know (a family member, neighbour, former-work colleague, someone from your social or sports setting) who may be broken by this pandemic. This is your opportunity to come alongside them & love them the way that Christ loves you. Not to judge them but simply to be there for them, to bring them hope, allow them to hear your beating heart & feel your love & care. Some of us may be bummer lambs, rejected & broken, but yet knowing that the Good Shepherd cares for our every need. **May God help us to love & care for others similarly & bring them hope this Christmas season.**

SOURCES OF HOPE – A FEW SUGGESTIONS

PERSISTENT PRAYERS BRING HOPE



- Mick continues to recover from COVID & daily is getting stronger – praise God
- Susie is making significant progress & Sylvia's wrist plaster cast has been removed – praise God
- Phil & Brenda are improving weekly & whilst still facing many challenges are thoroughly enjoying feeling part of the TCF family who meet online on Sunday mornings with Phil Jump & the wider NWBA family – praise God

Who am I persistently praying for & bringing hope into their lives?

ENCOURAGING WORDS BRING HOPE



Following our recent members' meeting I received the following encouragement which I have already shared with the TCF leaders,

"Hello Hazlett. Before the meeting around 6pm I went into my bedroom to spend time with God. As I sat down I had a vision. I saw the front of my house path & street as if I were stood at the door looking out & everything was covered in thick grey ashes & dust. The path, cars, the hedges, the street. I felt the Lord say this is the end of life as it was but the new is coming. Isaiah 44:3 came to mind, 'For I will pour water on the thirsty land & streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants'. I asked the Lord to let these rivers of living water wash away the ashes & bring the in new as He wants it to be & expose what's in our hearts. I saw the street & path & hedges becoming new & clean. Yesterday I looked up about 2 sisters from the Hebrides who prayed & revival came. I discovered this verse was the one they prayed & held up to God & waited for its fulfilment. I declared that I too would start to pray this verse over my Church, my City, my Nation, my World. God Bless You. Feel free to share this if appropriate."

Who am I encouraging by sending them messages of hope?

PRAISE & WORSHIP BRING HOPE



Several people this week told me stories about difficulties they faced. Neither knew what to do but both felt led to turn on some worship music & to praise God. In doing so the focus moved from their problems to God & in a short time that praise became a weapon of defence against their enemy's attack. Facing a battle with his enemies in 2 Chronicles 20:21-22 *"Jehoshaphat appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the LORD & praising Him for His Holy Splendour. This is what they sang: 'Give thanks to the LORD; His faithful love endures forever!' At the very moment they began to sing & give praise, the LORD caused the armies of Ammon, Moab & Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves & they were defeated!"* Praise is a mighty weapon. Let us focus on God & allow Him to resolve our problems.

Who or what have I released to God as I praise Him?

PRACTICAL WAYS TO BRING HOPE



CAP – Christians Against Poverty – if someone has financial difficulties CAP's anonymous help is freely available. The local CAP Debt Centre is in Fulwood Free Methodist Church. Linda McGuinness is the Debt Centre Manager. Russell Hartley is the Debt Coach. To chat with them ring 0800 328 0006 – all calls are free. Their offices are open 9.30am-5pm Mon-Thur & 9.30am-3.30pm Fri. On their website www.capuk.org they have stories of lives changed by their help under the banner **"Journeys of Hope"**

Who in crisis can I bring hope to by telling them about CAP?