**North East Circuit of Independent Methodist Churches**

**Devotional for Sunday 17th May 2020**

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**Introduction**

* I don't think any of us will read that word "pestilence" in the Bible quite so casually again
* We have entered yet another period of what will be for many a time of frustrating inconvenience and anxiousness, but for a good number, a heart-breaking and a drastically life changing experience.
* We look at one of the most devastating plagues recorded in the Bible. What might it teach us?

**Hymn: At even, ere the sun was set (MP 43** abridged**)**

At even, ere the sun was set, the sick, O Lord, around they lay;

O, in what diverse pains they met! O with what joy they went away.

O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel, for some are sick and some are sad;

And some have never loved Thee well, and some have lost the love they had.

O Saviour Christ, Thou too art man; Thou hast been troubled, tempted, tried;

Thy kind but searching glance can scan the very wounds that shame would hide.

Thy touch has still its healing power, no word from Thee can fruitless fall;

Hear in this solemn evening hour, and in Thy mercy, Heal us all

**Bible Reading: Extracts from 1 Chronicles 21**

**Satan, setting himself against Israel incited David to take a census of the people. Joab, the king's chief officer, said, "Even if the Lord should increase his people a hundred-fold would not your majesty still be king. Why should your majesty want to do this?" But Joab was over-ruled…. The LORD sent a pestilence throughout Israel and 70,000 Israelites died. David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. David fell to the ground and said to God, "It was I who gave the order to count the people, it was I, the shepherd who has done wrong, but these poor sheep, what have they done?" The prophet Gad told David to go to the threshing floor of Ornan. Ornan was busy threshing wheat when he looked up and saw the angel and the king approaching and falling prostrate in front of him. David bought the threshing floor from Ornan and sacrificed a whole-offering there. Then at the LORD's command the angel sheathed his sword. David said, "This place is to be the house of the LORD God, an altar and a temple of whole-offering for Israel."**

**Devotional:**

* The pestilence became the motivation for David to make preparations for his son, Solomon, to build the great Temple at Jerusalem.
* We are told that it was filled with the very presence of God, the same presence that had accompanied the people of Israel on their journey from Egypt travelling through the wilderness. The Temple becomes a place of worship where earth and heaven meet.
* Due to the unfaithfulness of God's people, Jeremiah and Ezekiel record that the presence of God left the Temple when it was destroyed in 586 B C.
* Although new temples were built the presence of God never returned until Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday – only to be rejected and crucified by his own people within a week.
* But this is not a negative thing – it was all part of the plan toenable the whole world to know and experience God in a new, rich and personal way.
* Is there anything good about viruses? Apparently there are. They are part of God's creation and like all creation, things which are not treated respectfully find themselves in the wrong places at the wrong time, causing big trouble.
* The hope is that all of us, especially those that claim to be Christian, will learn to listen to the Creator more carefully, and come to a sober realisation that worship is not a fringe benefit, but an embodiment of heaven joining with earth to enable us to live our lives in faithful responsibilty as fragile and fallen beings in a fragile world.

**Prayer:**

Lord, in your faithfulness, be gracious to us and in your great mercy wash away our sins for we are weighed down with them and we know we have failed. Create in us a pure heart; grant us a loyal and willing spirit. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and speedily enable us to re-unite in faithful worship.

We pray for protection, comfort, wisdom and resilience for all those caught up directly in this pandemic and in finding ways to bring it to an end: locally, nationally and in every part of Your world.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

[ For those with access, a link to a little parable to reflect upon - suitable <https://youtu.be/wkekVD00ets>