

Resurrection

The last year has been difficult for many to endure. Fear of catching Covid, along with government regulations, has brought loneliness and frustration, especially to those deprived of their usual family support. The easing of restrictions on April 12th offers a ray of hope that life may become brighter soon, but the prospect of disappointment casts a dark shadow and we dare not allow thoughts to stray to the freedoms promised from June 21st.

It seems likely that social attitudes have changed during this last year and will not return to what they were in 2019. Exactly what long term impact there will be can only be guessed at, but whatever it is, our church will have to be alert and adapt as the changes become clear. Comparisons with the post World War I period are being made. There was the influenza pandemic in 1919, in which millions round the world lost their lives. There was an economic depression world-wide. There was mounting pressure on the government in the U.K. to address the gap between the rich and the poor.

Judith and I have been talking about the early days of Parrs Wood Road Congregational Church. Manchester City Council adopted a policy of building “homes fit for the heroes of the Great War”. Specifically, it acquired land in the area around Fog Lane in the early 1920s and drew up plans to move families from the poor housing stock and living conditions of the inner city. This plan was quickly put into effect and a new estate established by the mid 1920s. The new residents soon set about creating community, and for some a church was an essential component. In 1927 the Lancashire Congregational Union bought the land and the following year 26 local people signed the covenant to set up the church. Among these were the parents of those born in the 1920s and early 1930s who were running things when Judith and I joined in 1990. The church was almost exclusively the focus of their lives and provided for them most satisfaction. This generation has mostly passed away or moved out of the area. Colin Kennedy is the only one still associated with Christ Church. I think that, just as World War I brought in a new era in, the Covid pandemic will lead to radical change in Manchester.

In Biblical terminology, the founders of the church in the 1920s came into a wilderness quite alien to them. They had faith to build a church and create a community that was a shining beacon to the residents of the new estate. Their strength and resilience depended on the suffering of the war years and the hardships that followed.

The last year, similarly, has been a wilderness for the church; it is in alien territory, with changes in community interaction. Planning for the future is difficult because we do not know the direction the community will take. There will be changes.

Lent is a season of contemplation and preparation for the glorious revelation of God’s plan for mankind. We wait, watch and listen for God’s leadership in the wilderness, as the founders of Parrs Wood Road Church waited, watched and listened for God’s leadership in alien territory. If we believe in the Easter message, we cannot but believe that guidance will come and, in faith, we will build again a shining beacon for a renewed local community.

Robert Lock