

## More useful resources from <https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/>

Although today is a little cooler and more overcast than recent days, I've just come indoors from a tea break in the garden! While I can't see much of the garden from my default work spot at the dining room table, I can see a swathe of wallflowers and tulips, in bright oranges, pinks and yellows, planted in pots just by the window. As a result, even when I'm stuck inside there's something nice to look at!

What are the bright spots on your horizon at the moment?

It feels like a while since we've encouraged you to get in touch with us to let us know what you, your church and your local community are up to at the moment, but this seems like a good time to make such a suggestion!

With the recent - or imminent - relaxing of restrictions in most parts of the UK, with more churches re-opening for embodied services and with longer, (mostly) warmer, sunnier days, it would be great to hear how these things are starting to impact and shape the lives you share as families, churches and communities.

Why not drop us an email and share your story?

Go well!

*Louise, on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre*

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## Hope Springs

### Bible readings

#### *Psalm 95*

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,

and the sheep of his hand.  
Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
when your fathers put me to the test  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.  
For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, 'They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways.'  
Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
'They shall not enter my rest.'

### ***Mark 14:26-31***

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' But he said emphatically, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same.

### **Reflection**

In both of our readings today we should, I hope, see the importance of praising God for who he is, and all that Jesus died in order for us to receive. In this season I have had an increasing sense that God is calling us to occupy a different space to that which we've maybe settled in before. Over the last year we have, in many ways, been yanked out of our comfort zones and dropped into unfamiliar territory. Many of our usual coping mechanisms have been stripped away and we have had to find new ways to be church and to engage with those around us.

It would be a deep shame, I think, if we were to retreat back to the spaces we inhabited before the pandemic rather than asking God what new areas it might be calling us to press forward into in the coming season, especially as restrictions are eased and we are able to begin meeting in larger groups from 17 May (in England). We have a unique opportunity that we may well not get again to seek the Holy Spirit and explore the new ways in which God might be being calling to engage with our local communities and partner with other groups in our locality.

Psalm 95 outlines the fact that all things are created and held in our Heavenly Father's hands and all that we need is to be found in him. There's also a clear instruction not to harden our hearts; in my experience this includes being honest about our disappointments and struggles when things haven't turned out the way we hoped.

In being honest with God in prayer about what he already knows, we enable the Holy Spirit to come into those things that are hard and open ourselves up to the possibility of something new springing up in its place. What might God be calling us to give thanks for, even in the midst of challenges? Psalm 30:5 says, 'Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning'.

The hope and joy grounded in all that Jesus came to fulfil is what we carry within in us. Being grounded in the truth of who God is and who we have known the reality of him to be in our lives. But how will those who don't yet know him experience the reality of that if we don't provide spaces for them to encounter him. The task ahead of us is through prayer and seeking his discernment for our lives and those around us to know the reality of that hope breaking out into every area of our lives and their lives too!

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, will you reveal your plans  
and purposes for our communities  
and those around us?

Show us what you are calling us to pursue,  
and give us the wisdom and trust to obey.

Amen

### **Response**

COVID-19 has now been a part of all our lives for over a year, and everyday we hear more about the 'hidden' impacts of the pandemic. Many of us will be increasingly aware of the toll the events of the last year have taken on mental health; many of us will be experiencing that impact for our ourselves or in our families and churches.

In my own church we are exploring the possibility of opening a Renew Wellbeing space ([renewwellbeing.org.uk](https://renewwellbeing.org.uk)). This involves creating a safe space for people to come where its 'Okay not to be okay'. In setting up these spaces an environment is created in which peace is cultivated and individuals feeling vulnerable in themselves can be held not only practically through the sharing of creative activities but also in prayer. The training and support offered by Renew wellbeing is free and accessible online.

What might you and your rural church do to engage with the mental health impact of COVID-19 in your community?

*Revd Suzan Williams Head of Rural Ministries New Wine*