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News

Baptists and Thy Kingdom Come

Many Baptists across the country were involved in Thy Kingdom Come events this year. Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement which invites Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ

Burlington Baptist Church in Ipswich joined in by having a 24/7 prayer room. Members prayed non-stop for 64 hours (day and night) by taking hour slots, said Claire Earl, a minister at the church.

The hour slots were filled by individuals, families, missional communities and other groups.

'We've seen a wonderful sense of God's presence in the space and many beautiful prayers prayed for ourselves, one another and our world,' said Claire.

An ecumenical service took place in Worcester Cathedral, which featured an 'inspiring preach' from Pete Greig (24/7 Prayer), said Amy Wearing of St Peter's Baptist Church. There was worship from the Salvation Army alongside contemporary worship, and more than 1200 people present from all flavours of churches.

As part of the service each person was given two puzzle pieces: one to represent them and one to represent those five people whom people had pledged to pray for to come to know Jesus. The puzzle was an image of the county of Worcestershire.

'It showed that while there are many many people who love Jesus, there is always space for more,' said Amy (pictured below), 'and we are trusting God that through our continued prayers those we pray for will come to faith.'

In Somerset, two little congregations - Montacute Baptist Church and St Catherine's Anglican Church gathered to pray Thy Kingdom Come on Pentecost Sunday.

Nailsea Baptist Church in Bristol set up an interactive prayer space for people to drop in; organised prayer meetings throughout the week, and encouraged its

congregation to participate in 48 hours of prayer from Thursday 17 to Saturday 19 May.

Rushmere Baptist Church, also in Ipswich, offered at least one activity per day during Ascension-Pentecost period. The activities ranged from a teddy bears picnic, community trail around the village, Celtic prayers, prayer corners and a wedding cake and bubbly to coincide with the royal wedding.

On Sunday evening, around 100 people from churches in the West of England Baptist Association gathered at Cambray Baptist Church in Cheltenham to pray for their local communities. They were encouraged to imagine leaving their own house, walk down their own street and into town, picturing the people they might pass and looking into their eyes, praying for each one as they came to mind.

This was just one of three prayer activities that provided the focus of WEBA's first Network Gathering for 2018. Those gathered also prayed in small groups, for all the 'disciple making' places and opportunities they have, for our world and areas of conflict, and for individuals.

There will be three more opportunities to pray with others in the WEBA network of churches during the remainder of the year: while the global Thy Kingdom Come initiative was focused on the week leading up to Pentecost, WEBA has made it a focus for the whole of 2018.

Baptist minister Hayley Young of Panshanger Church, Welwyn Garden City, was invited to preach at a Thy Kingdom Come beacon event in St Albans alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, Bishop Michael Curry and others.

**Divine windows - glimpses of God through life, the universe and everything
Dave Gregory unpacked his presidential theme during a seminar at the Baptist Assembly.**

The incoming President of the Baptist Union Dave Gregory used to work in the MET Office and launched a rocket as part of his induction at the Assembly. Needless to say, his seminar was equally fascinating.

The idea that science and religion are in conflict has long been an issue. However, Dave was encouraging people to reject neither science nor religion. Instead, he explored how Christians can use science as a divine window to see God through.

He talked about his own testimony, how science had initially led him away from faith, but the wonder of the universe had made him rethink whether there was a god.

The need for a dialogue and openness to seeing God through science was key in Dave's seminar. He admitted that apologetics is needed, but that we should also use science to see God and not see it as a challenge to there being a god.

The issue of climate change as an example of science challenging Christians also featured heavily in his seminar and he spoke about how it is our role as Christians to look after Creation. In a time of discussion, it was realised that showing a care for the world can act as a form of evangelism.

Here, he picked up on an issue raised by Kang-San Tan in the morning session, where he had talked about the world groaning and the church needing to listen. Dave challenged the seminar, asking, "Are we paying attention?"

Through his seminar, he emphasised three ways in which science can help us understand God.

The first was that science acts as an example of God's wondrous works. He echoed his message in the Baptists Together magazine, talking about the way the Hubble telescope allows us to see Creation in ways we were never able to before.

With this, he showed a startling video, zooming out from a woman's smile, to the west coast of America and to the entire Earth before shooting out and showing stars and galaxies. It then zoomed back, to the retina and optic nerve through which she is viewing them.

The second was how the messiness of science always becomes ordered, such as the random processes that make a snowflake. He likened this process to the mess of sin and the cross, brought into order by the resurrection.

The final way to view science is through play, how our imagination is needed in science to ask questions and find new experiments. He emphasised how experiments and series like Blue Planet explore the works and playfulness of God.

Dave said, 'There is a wonder and beauty in Creation ... that God revels over.'

He ended his seminar with a challenge, asking what symbol would show the connection between God and science. Suggestions included the rainbow, an egg and a Celtic cross.

'Encourage pioneers and pioneering'

Baptists need to be more encouraging of pioneers and pioneering if we are to reach people and make disciples in these challenging times

That was the message from Roy Searle and Simon Goddard who led a seminar called 'Becoming Beacons of Hope - Playing Your Part in God's Missional Adventure.'

Roy explained that in his role as Baptist pioneer co-ordinator he has heard some great stories – but the overall narrative is of ‘not much happening’.

‘The reality is we haven’t caught many people. The reality is we’re an ageing denomination. I’m not saying this to depress you, but to define reality.

‘Carrying on the way we’re carrying on is damaging, and wearying.’

But while we face enormous challenges, the problems can be opportunities: we need to allow the spirit of God to allow creativity and pioneering, Roy said.

And in order to do this, as Baptists we need to be more encouraging of pioneers.

He said God is raising up pioneers – these are our beacons of hope, but we need to give them more resources. Instead, we often try to put them in a box that won’t fit. Roy said he was aware of more than 80 Baptist pioneers who are no longer part of the denomination. ‘We’ve lost them,’ he said, before encouraging delegates to think if there were any pioneers in their church – people who think differently – and ‘be permission givers for experimentation.’ He also mentioned how the Anglicans had recently commissioned their 1000th pioneer – as Baptists we have only commissioned six.

Our task is not to build the church; it’s to go and make disciples. Jesus will build his church, Roy said. Pioneering is not restricted to age - it's about trying something different.

Simon led the second part of the session, and encouraged delegates that in order to take risks and step out, they must be prepared to give something up, ‘something familiar, which may now be unhelpful.’

He focused on the example of Abraham. He said that being a person of faith means stepping into the unknown, as Abraham did. It means imagining what can be – God stirred Abraham’s imagination of what might be, and as the church today, we need to let the imagination ‘stir about how people can thrive and flourish.’

It also means saying yes to God, as Abraham did. Simon cited the example of the Tubestation in Polzheath, Cornwall. It began when three ageing members of Polzheath Methodist Church were willing to release their building in order to reach the skateboarders outside it. They advertised for someone to lead the new venture. Baptist minister Dave Matthews received the call, and the Tubestation is now a café church in the former Methodist building which saw more than 200 people worship there this Easter.

‘I believe we have the resources within the Baptist family we need to resource ministry for the next generation; but we need to be able to release it.’

Concluding the session, Roy said, 'God is raising up pioneers in this space. I hope we can come back in a couple of years with stories of lots more pioneers.'

Open doors and open hearts

Our role is not to be bouncers for the Kingdom – but to welcome everyone to their seat there! That was the message from General Secretary Lynn Green during the closing celebration.

Taking Luke 13:31-35 as her text, she focused on the 'beautiful picture' of the mother hen in these verses. 'It gives us a moving and poignant insight into Jesus' heart as he shows us the Father's heart of compassion.'

God loves all people, not as a response to their affection, but because it is who he is. This image of the mother speaks of tenderness and a deep relational trust. The chicks know that under the wing is a good place, a safe place, a place to grow and be nurtured.

It is an image still so relevant for us today, Lynn continued. We live among so many who are lost and disconnected from their creator - yet Jesus longs to gather all these people and welcome them home in His Kingdom. Referring to King-San Tan's earlier address, she said 'That's the groaning of the spirit - it's not as it should be.'

Lynn spoke about her sense in recent years that God is waiting for us to stop still long enough to get a word in edgeways. It's why she has been calling us to seek God in prayer since 2015. She believes that God is looking for people who will 'fling open the doors of their hearts and lives; people who will experience the closeness of living under his wing.'

Because when we do, we in turn open wide the doors of our lives and His church. She said now is the time to welcome people into the Kingdom, because the door won't be open forever. She called on Baptists to have a greater sense of urgency. 'We need to seize the moment and not be left wondering what might have been. God loves and is longing for all people. Our role is not be bouncers for the Kingdom - but to be those who love, inspire, signpost, invite, pray and welcome everyone and show them to their seat in the kingdom!'

Lynn concluded her address by talking about the fire God is breathing on his church. It's a fire that fills us and changes us, but sends us out too.

She said that as she has been praying into the passage, a song has been in her heart with the refrain: 'Set a fire down in my soul, that I can't contain, that I can't control - I want more of you God.'

It has been her prayer in response, Lynn said, before leading delegates in a prayer of response using the song. 'We will use that song as a heart cry to God as we open our hearts and lives and churches to Him...'

Lynn was joined on stage by three colleagues as the session moved into prayer. Carl Smethurst, regional minister in the South West Baptist Association, led delegates in prayer for our cities and communities, and Thy Kingdom Come.'

Baptist evangelist Kwame Adzam prayed for fruitfulness, that people might come to know Jesus.

Majorie Allan, who leads The Well in Sheffield with husband Nick, prayed for leaders, and the raising up of new leaders. Following Marjorie's prayer, delegates were invited to receive prayer at the front of the stage.

'Create the conditions where peace has a chance to flourish'

Leaders of the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance issue joint statement expressing 'grave concern' over heightened tensions between Israel and Palestine

The statement spoke of standing in solidarity with those who have lost their lives; the desperate situation in Gaza; and the responsibilities of the international community to not inflame the tensions any further, but work towards a peace 'so that Israelis and Palestinians may live together in harmony and dignity in the same geographical space.'

It was signed by Tony Peck and Jenni Entrican, EBF General Secretary and President respectively, and Elijah Brown and Paul Msiza, BWA General Secretary and President. The statement can be read in full below:

As leaders of the Baptist World Alliance and the European Baptist Federation (which includes the Middle East), we want to express our grave concern over the heightened tensions between Israel and Palestine that have led to violence and many Palestinian civilian deaths, including those of innocent children, in Gaza in recent days.

As Christian leaders we stand in solidarity with all who suffer and who have tragically lost their lives. Especially we are concerned about the desperate situation inside Gaza. Even before the current medical emergency arising from the many hundreds of civilians wounded in the latest clashes, one of our Baptist leaders, who visits Gaza regularly, recently described the situation as 'virtually no electricity, water, money – or hope'.

We abhor the resort to violence from wherever it comes, whether by militant groups or state-sanctioned oppression. Violence begets violence and leads to both sides living in constant fear of the other. This cannot be the way to a lasting peace with justice.

We urge world leaders to avoid provocative actions and statements that serve to inflame the conflict and, instead, to restore the urgent priority of a process of negotiation towards a just peace so that Israelis and Palestinians may live together in harmony and dignity in the same geographical space. We believe that it is the responsibility of the international community to uphold the human rights of the Palestinian community and to seek to create the conditions where peace has a chance to flourish.

We stand in support of those Christian communities in Israel and Palestine, including our Baptist churches and similar evangelical churches that continue to witness to the Gospel of non-violence, reconciliation, and hope. We support those initiatives in both Israel and Palestine that bring Israelis and Palestinians together and seek the reconciliation and restored hope of God's Kingdom.

As Baptist leaders we share the heart cry of Jesus himself who, 'when he drew near and saw the city (of Jerusalem), wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"' (Luke 19:41-42)

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