

Alpha Course —on Zoom.

Pattern Church have invited us to join their next **Online Alpha Course** starting **Wednesday April 29th at 7.30 pm**. Ali Wiltshire has just finished the Alpha course and she and Raymond will lead the St John's virtual table on this one.

Each week there is a short talk and a chat at the end where you can share your thoughts and questions. If at any point someone decides Alpha isn't for them, that's not a problem. There's no pressure, no follow up and no charge. Ali says:

"I was with a wonderful group of people to watch the film and then explore our thoughts, questions and experiences. Everyone was at a different level on our spiritual journey. Some were not sure if they believed— others like myself had a strong belief in God but had only recently started attending church regularly."

You will hear more on Sunday at the service and an email will arrive on Monday which you can pass on to people who would like to know more—or sign up yourself <https://patternchurch.org/alpha>



Much Better News (please read the next page first)

Let's look at the positive side.

In the country of Malawi, north-east of Zimbabwe, last year's elections were widely rigged and won by the sitting president—to no-one's surprise. Corruption appeared to have triumphed once again.

Remarkably, the country's top judges took the unusual and courageous step of cancelling the fraudulent elections. New elections will be held this year, with the aim of ensuring that the people of Malawi get to exercise their democratic right to choose their president fairly.



People of courage

It is one of the world's least developed countries, yet Malawi is a beacon of hope in the world. Pray that the light might not be extinguished.

In Malawi, 40% of the country is under 14 years of age. Bible Society is currently focusing on young people and is providing Bibles to churches and Sunday Schools throughout the country. Let's pray for their future under God's Word.

Another Victim of Coronavirus—Freedom

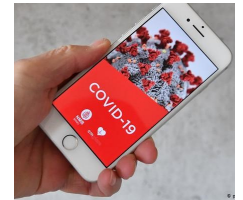


While we are focused on everything from home-schooling to ventilators, worrying things are happening in the world.

Authoritarian leaders are using this crisis to bring in anti-democratic measures and increase surveillance.* This applies in particular to **China and Russia**—but not just there.

In Russia, the quarantine is supported by a network of 170,000 cameras. The coronavirus is giving President Putin a convenient pretext for bringing in facial recognition technology. A tracking system will soon be introduced allowing the authorities to know the location of every person. Just to shield them from the coronavirus?

China was already the country with the strictest surveillance in the world. (The former head of MI5 described it on Radio 4 this week as a "surveillance state".) Its watch over its citizens by means of mobile phone technology is almost total. It watches Christian believers constantly.



In Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has closed the courts. A sensible precaution? Perhaps. But also extremely helpful as he is facing a corruption trial.

Even within the EU, President Orban of Hungary has used this emergency to give himself unlimited powers. He no longer needs Parliament, but governs by direct decree. How likely is it that he will give up these powers again?



Even in the United States, The Dept. of Justice is trying to suspend the law of *habeas corpus*. That is the right that of every person to have their arrest reviewed by a judge. "If this goes through, you could be arrested, put in prison, and never brought before a judge until they decide that the emergency is over," a defence lawyer recently said. So let's

- thank God for our democratic system even though it is far from perfect
- pray that it may never be undermined
- pray for those countries which suffer under authoritarian leaders
- pray for the United States which should be a bastion for liberty
- pray for democracy and civil liberty in danger around the world

(Information from German Podcast) *

Prayers: We are asked to pray for **the Branch family** in the light of Sue's death. Even more painfully, **Ted and Sue's 15 year old grand-daughter Evie died** earlier this year in tragic circumstances. Sue could not be told. So they have experienced two bereavements in a short time while protecting Sue from news she would have struggled to cope with. Pray for **Sue's wider family** as they watch the services from St John's and for people in the UK and around the world who are also listening in, encouraged by their families in Swindon. The Word of God is not locked down.

Tunisia Number 34

Tunisian Christians face discrimination and targeting that is often hidden to the public eye. It affects their day-to-day lives. Because of their Christian identities, many experience job insecurity, abandonment from family, friends and even fiancés; they are victims of verbal, mental and physical abuse."



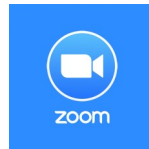
Christian believers all come from Muslim backgrounds.

Please pray for our church family

Mon	Carole Sawyer
Tue	David and Kathleen Selwood
Wed	Mike and Jean Sharp
Thu	Linda Simpson
Fri	Rosemary Smith
Sat	Make and Mary Southgate
Sun	Pauline Stacey

Zoom

Anyone can use Zoom free for up to 40 minutes. It is a great way to get a group of friends together for a face to face chat.



Two Services Next Week

Wed April 22	11 am	A Horse Like No Other	Raymond Adams
Sunday April 26	11 am	A Man Like No Other	Andy Hall



Sunday

April 19

Easter + 1



The Disciples Under Lockdown

Time	Service	Preacher	Readings
11.00	Morning Worship	Simon Robertson	Isaiah 2:1-5 John 20:19-end
11.45	Coffee on Zoom in small groups.	Just click on the email link	