

# Learning in Lockdown #4

## Gaining Access

by Rev Dan Balsdon, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020 | read online at [www.revdanbalsdon.com](http://www.revdanbalsdon.com)

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On the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 we moved to Queens Foundation, Birmingham where I was to begin my training. As we'd only got a small, 2nd floor flat for the 4 of us, college had offered us a garage, and, at first, we parked the car in it.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016 we took a trip to the supermarket. We got back, unloaded and I shut the garage door – it was quite stiff to shut, but I kept pushing, thinking, I must get some WD40 for that... until I realised I never locked the car...or shut the boot. I went to re-open the garage door to discover that the boot and garage door were now hitting each other – I couldn't open the garage door beyond a few inches.

I spent about an hour trying to work out how to solve the puzzle. In that time, I met various other students and members of college staff, their first introduction to me was seeing a stranger trying to break into a garage...thinking back I'm not surprised those conversations started with some suspicious looks.

Eventually, I managed to reach through the top gap of the garage door get some rope tied to the car boot, then reach through the bottom gap and pull it down to get the garage door open. The car boot had a few scratches, but at least I'd got access.

### Default 'church'

Before lockdown, my experience of church communities is that our default way of people accessing 'church' was by attending a church building. Within these buildings we hold services of worship, community drop-in's and coffee mornings, prayer groups and bible studies, toddler groups and quiz nights.

As lockdown came in access to all these things was stopped. Our buildings we're locked as part of the nationwide effort to reduce physical gathering and push down the spread of COVID-19.

So during lockdown, our default way of accessing 'church' – by gathering in a church building – was suddenly blocked from us – just like my car was when I foolishly shut the garage door.

This led to two things – firstly – **creativity**. Utilising post, email, phone, blog posts, YouTube, video and telephone conferencing and more. Creatively developing lots of different ways for people to engage with church without the building. – to be a scattered church

Secondly – it led to **greater self-responsibility**. What do I mean?

Well I mean that because accessing 'church' has not been about gathering in a building, individuals have had much more responsibility themselves as scattered church for nurturing their faith and relationship with God. The format moved from what could perhaps slightly



crassly be described a passive attendance to active engagement. People had their own space and freedom to choose how to engage, how to be church.

Not only that, but people who for one reason or other were much more cut off from the worshipping community, for example living in care homes, working on Sundays or caring for relatives, feel they are included and connected to the worshipping and spiritual life of the church community in ways they never did before.

### **Matthew 19:13-15**

In the gospels we read the familiar story of people bringing children to Jesus for him to bless them. The disciples try to stop it – children, it seemed didn't matter. But Jesus rebukes them and says let them come to me – the kingdom of God belongs to them too.

It is a passage that's often used within infant baptism, that vulnerable, innocent children are welcomed by Jesus.

But I wonder, if we take a step back from the story itself, and see it in light of Jesus wider ministry, healing the blind and crippled, spending time with tax collectors and zealots, the excluded and the vulnerable, this passage may take on even more meaning for us.

I wonder if this passage might challenge us as worshipping communities to reflect ourselves on where we might, intentionally, or un-intentionally, be excluding people from being a greater part of the community.

### **Developing an attitude of access**

Lockdown has forced me to look differently at our church communities and makes me wonder if we may have fallen into the trap of letting buildings become too central to our common life together. It makes me wonder how passive we've allowed that life to become - and how it unhelpfully and unfairly excludes those who for one reason or other, cannot access it.

But it's also show me that there are simple ways to begin to redress that balance and build a more accessible and inclusive community. That there are ways access can be achieved for those who are excluded – in part by having **a little less focus on buildings**, and **a little more on discerning how best to connect with people where they are**, not where they are not, with our **focus on the kingdom of God**.

And it's also shown me the fruit that is borne when individuals have more active self-responsibility for their worshipping and spiritual life.

### **What may all this mean for the future?**

I sense a strong challenge from God – challenging us to not build up ours walls in a way that they keep people out, but to build up one another in a way that allows us to bring people in.

**What walls may we need to allow God to break down so that we can grow into a more inclusive and active community that keeps the kingdom of God at the centre?**