

Thought for the day - Wednesday 17 June

Silent frogs, silent stadiums

Today, the 17th of June, is an important day. And not just for those who have an issue with noisy frogs in their garden. Although as today's the festival of St Herve it's a good chance for those frogs to be silenced by his wagging finger and beautiful harp playing - apparently one of the attributes of this sixth century saint!

Today will also be important for millions of football fans, with the first Premier League games since March taking place this evening.

You might have really felt the absence of sport over the last few months. Or maybe it's not something that's bothered you at all. But some of the problems that football has been wrestling with are similar to some of the questions affecting the church.

Foremost amongst those was the sudden and complete restriction on fans coming together to watch games. The weekend ritual of congregating at 3pm on a Saturday stopped. There was a switch to playing back historic matches, or to shows discussing the top players of all time. Some people made the jump to watching Belarussian football instead, as one of the few top flight leagues still playing in the world. Others innovated with virtual matches.

As the initial coronavirus peak passed, attention turned to how quickly some sort of "normal service" could be resumed. The debates weren't without controversy. And many will feel that the games being played today just aren't the same - the lack of spectators meaning it's not a "real" match.

Churches can now open for private prayer - although there's an open acknowledgement that for many it may not be the right thing to do.

And at some point, services in churches will also be allowed again, though almost certainly with limited numbers, no singing, and other restrictions. That may provoke debate - is it right for some of the congregation to be able to worship in person whilst others can't? Is a spoken service without communion the best way of sharing our faith? How much extra pressure does a partial reopening put on ministers who've already spent several intense months helping their congregations adapt to online worship?

The answers will be different in different places. Just as France's Ligue 1 was terminated, whereas the Premier League restarted.

There was huge pressure on football to resume. Mostly to do with money and broadcasting rights. But also because the energy, the interest, and the involvement of fans all rely on the latest results, the current league position, the speculation about transfers. Football without live matches and constant news would wither away.

There will also be huge pressure on churches to resume worship in person as soon as possible.

And of course that will happen at some point. But as Christians we believe that God is in each and every one of us. We see God's hand in every situation. And we can worship individually or together, in person or online, at church or at home. We are blessed with a living faith that extends far beyond a church building. We can be with God in every part of our lives - including watching football and listening to noisy frogs!

For with God, every part of every day is important - and a chance for worship.