



Abington Pastoral Letter #5 27.03.2020

Dear friends

It is the second weekend we spend staying at our homes, not being able to visit our friends or families. It is going to be the second Sunday without gathering under the same roof of the church building. Sadly, it appears that there will be more weekends and more Sundays like this at least for a while. Many of you may have heard that the Prime Minister and his Health Secretary has tested positive for the virus. The virus continues spread across the country and the world.

The gospel reading for this coming Sunday tells us the story of the death of Lazarus (John 11.1-44). He was a young and healthy man. But one day Lazarus got very ill and died a few days later. We are not told what exactly the illness was but it is possible that Lazarus contracted a virus like COVID-19 and died very quickly from it. The problem was that Lazarus was a very close friend of Jesus. Many of those who knew Lazarus asked 'How could God let this happen?' This is what his sister said to Jesus when he finally showed up a few days after Lazarus' death.

*Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died...' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again... I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11.21-23, 25-26)*

What happens after this is even more heartbreaking.

*When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. (John 11.32-35).*

Just as Jesus wept with Lazarus' friends, God shares our sorrows and pains. He notices when we

are afraid, sad or anxious. There is more. The story continues.

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' ... When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'You unbind him and let him go.'*  
(John 11.38-39m 43-44)

It was Jesus who called Lazarus to come out. But we must remember that it was Lazarus' friends who moved away the stone so he could hear Jesus' voice and came out. When Lazarus came out of the tomb, it was again, his friends who freed him from the bindings and let him go.

There is no page in the Bible that says we will be immune to any harm or illness. But every page of the Bible tells us that God is with us even in the midst of sufferings. More importantly, God works through all the bad things to do good things. Because he is at his heart is a good God. That is why our Pocket Prayer starts with this sentence. 'God, you are good.'

Although things may feel hard now and may get even harder in the following weeks, there is no doubt that this situation will come to an end. We will get through this just as we did with the Great Plague, Spanish flu and with other pandemics. The question is, who will we be when all this was over? What story will we be able to tell to our children and grandchildren, nephews and nieces? Could it be that we are now taking part in the story of Lazarus of our times?

Just like Lazarus' friends, we too are all called to join in God's work to give hope to those who are in despair, to share the love and warmth of God with those who are isolated. Last night, I was deeply moved by so many people clapping for all those who are working in hospitals, emergency services, care homes and many other places. There have been 600,000 people who volunteered to help the NHS. All this is the goodness and grace of God shown by the people of this community and this country. So many people of our church and our community are looking after the vulnerable and the elderly, so many of us are helping each other by doing what we can. So many people have said how much they appreciate the help and support they receive from the church and community. I applauded last night and I applaud again tonight to say thank you to you for all that you do and for all the encouragement and inspiration you give to all of us.

As we encourage each other with all the good news around us, please may I ask you to remember the Northampton Foodbank. The food distribution point at St. Alban's Church continues to be open but are facing greater demands. They are really struggling to get supplies

and there are less volunteers who can go shopping due to the new restrictions. If anyone who is able to donate supplies (e.g. tinned meat, long life milk), you can leave them at Malcolm's front door at 19 Squires Walk, NN3 6AL or you can ring him on 01604 493732 so he could collect from your doorstep.

There are hard copies of Worship at Home still available, please contact me at [rector@abingtonchurch.org.uk](mailto:rector@abingtonchurch.org.uk) if you or your neighbour require one. There are other ways of worshipping in your homes of course by watching or listening to a service. Here is the list of what is available.

Sunday Worship: BBC Radio 4, Every Sunday morning at 8.10 am.

Choral Evensong: BBC Radio 3, Every Wednesday 15.30 pm

Service led by the Archbishop: <https://www.churchofengland.org/>

The list of live streaming services or prayers: Click [Here](#)

For me, I have chosen to talk to you in this way with a simple letter. It is much easier for you to access and for me to reach out further than using a live streaming service via Facebook. But please do say if you think we also need to do the broadcasting or if you have any good ideas as I constantly review our ways of communication and ministry in this situation.

On this Sunday, wherever you are, whatever way you choose to worship, we will be worshipping together as a church in the same Spirit we received from our heavenly Father.

Let me conclude this letter with a sentence from the third letter of John in the Bible. May God bless you all. May he empower you and refresh you each day in all you do. May we see Christ who is working with us and through us in the midst of this all.

*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. (John3 1.2)*

With love in Christ

Jun

Parish Priest

P.S. Thank you very much for sending me all those lovely photos. I have put them all together and made a collage. Please do keep sending them to me and I will share with others in this letter. It doesn't necessarily have to be a church photo. Please also send me anything you would like to share with others. It can be your thoughts, a poem, a passage from the book you read today.

