



Abington Pastoral Letter No.18 24.06.2020

Dear Friends

Re-opening of the church building

You probably have heard the news that church buildings will be allowed to open from 4th July. This is another positive step forward and a good news to those who have been missing one of the most important spaces for them. There will be different responses to this as always and concerns. And we will have to listen to all of them, respect others' views and still work together in keeping ourselves and others safe.

As I have announced in my previous pastoral letter, the re-opening of our church building will come a bit later than 4th July. As I said, I have already started the planning process with our churchwardens, deputy churchwardens and our lay-chair. I am very grateful for their support and their hard work. They will continue to develop the plan to a point where we can have the first extensive draft for the PCC to have a discussion. That discussion will happen when I am back from Paternity leave. Much thought and prayers will be needed. I would be very grateful for your patience, support and prayers. Please pray for me and for the leaders of our church that God will grant us wisdom, creative mind, courage and patience. We may be coming out of the lockdown which was like being trapped in a swamp but we are not out of this forest yet.

In the meantime, we will continue with our online worship. The Church of England's Guidelines also suggest that the online worship should continue. And we have indeed discovered so many positive, creative and fresh ways to worship our God over the last few months through our online worship. We must treasure them and learn from them. In a way, since the lockdown began, the public worship has never stopped in Abington. It just moved from the church building to everyone's home. We saw an increase in number in worshipping congregation and welcomed new people. It has been however a big loss and pain for those who couldn't join our online worship;

those who had to be shielded; those who had to rely on only pastoral letters. The offline worship that we are going to offer in the coming months should be available for them first.

It is very likely that given all the conditions that are attached to re-opening of church buildings such as no singing etc, the offline worship could be much simpler than the online worship that we are now used to. It will be more focused on sharing the holy communion and keeping the sacramental life of the church going rather than gathering all together as a big church family.

So we have so many things, challenges, questions, lists at the moment to consider, to check, to think about, to pray for. One of those many questions is this: How are we going to join together our traditional worship and some of the new ways of worship that we have learnt over the last few months? How are we going to make the online worship and offline worship co-exist? It will require some creative thinking and prayerful discernment.

Many compared the experience of living through the pandemic to the experience of living through the Second World War. The world changed after the Second World War. The world is changing and will change through this pandemic. And when there is a big change in the world, when there is a big crisis, God always calls his faithful people, like Noah, to listen to him, to build an ark, a sanctuary where new hopes can be found and new life can be nurtured. I believe, my friends, that is our calling. It is a big challenge. Imagine building an ark on a sunny day. How Noah and his family must have been mocked by other people at that time. I am sure there were moments even Noah himself and his family doubted whether what they were doing was the right thing. But they patiently and faithfully followed the calling from God no matter how long it took (Noah was 600 years old when he finished building the ark!). May we too continue to follow our calling from God faithfully and patiently as Noah and his family did in these challenging times.

Peter's homily on Matthew 10.24-39

Last Sunday, we had a plan for Peter to give us a homily during the Sunday morning service. That couldn't happen due to technical difficulties and I had to give one instead. Later we could speak to him during the service which was lovely. Since then, Peter has very kindly sent his script for his homily. Thank you very much Peter. It's based on Matthew 10. 24-39.

24 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25 it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of

the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

26 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. 30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

*35 For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Peter wrote,

The Gospel reading for today is taken from Matthew chapter 10. It is the second of five blocks of Jesus' teaching that Matthew records in his work, and each compels our attention with a different theme. At the end of each, is a statement that begins, "When Jesus had finished saying these things - "; marking the end of that particular section, before he continues the next part of his story. The theme of the first block of teaching is discipleship. We know it better as the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5,6 and 7. It explores what it means to be a follower of Jesus. This morning however we turn to chapter 10, and focus our thoughts on the work he came to do. We can give it the title, "Jesus' Mission and Our's."

The chapter begins with the idea that Jesus' mission is a shared activity, shared that is with the twelve disciples, who are treated as partners in what he is doing. It as if they were serving an apprenticeship, learning from what he said and did and putting into practice what they had

learned. As they followed in his steps, they were set apart as he apostles, a people sent to share the message he is giving to the world. It is his mission, his message and they share in it, as also of course, do we. Jesus however not only calls them and sends them but he also equips them. He gives them his authority and the gifts necessary for all that lies ahead of them. Their task will be to declare and demonstrate the arrival of God's Kingdom. He gives them specific instructions and outlines his strategy. He gives clear warnings of the dangers they will face and the opposition that marshals its forces against them on all sides. "Be on your guard," he warns them. It reminds us of Jesus' own ministry and of the hostility he himself faced. Jesus said to them, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called prince of demons, how much more the members of his household!" There is a continuity between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of those who follow him. If it was demanding for him, so too it will be for them and so too it will be for us.

But there is here a word of great encouragement to cheer us on our way. Three times in the middle of this chapter Jesus tells his disciples, "Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid!" These words are repeated often in the pages of both Old and New Testaments and always with the purpose of encouraging the servants of God in difficult times. This period of lockdown has proved such a time for many people and as we look to the future, still with some uncertainty, these words speak again to us with a measure of reassuring power, Jesus says, "Do not be afraid!"

Each repetition carries its own frame of reference. First, do not be afraid but keep your witness bright.

Jesus said, "For there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known" and that includes your faithful and courageous witness." What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."

Second, do not be afraid but keep your confidence firm. Even if life itself seems threatened there is One to whom we are accountable and our confidence in him both now and at the last, is sure.

Third, do not be afraid but see your infinite worth before him. Sparrows are sold, two for a penny and are held in the Father's care. You are worth more than many sparrows. Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Whatever the past, present or future, do not be afraid. Your God stands with you and he will not fail. This chapter contains much more than we have time for this morning. However, Matthew's final words of this section are to be found-at the beginning of

chapter 11. "After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee." Lessons learned on the road would be relearned again and again in the ongoing ministry of Jesus as they would in their own ministry and as we shall in ours. May we be quick and thorough in the learning, and faithful in the doing. Amen and amen.

Praying for the victims of Reading attack

We have to remember those who lost their lives not because of the virus but because of hatred and division. Please remember the victims of Reading attack and those who lost their loved ones in your prayers. Please pray with me that through these tragic events we may be strengthened and become even more confident in love.

Patronal Festival Service

Our patronal festival service will be on 28 June. It will be the Eucharist with the Agape Meal. But it can change if our second baby chooses to come early. If that happens, a service will be led by Alison on Youtube. We also have a plan for covering online worship while I am on Paternity leave. It will be broadcasted on Youtube but not on Facebook.

Photograph of flower or your garden

If you haven't sent a photo of a flower or a plant to Sarah, please send it to her at sarah.may@rathlin.net. It is still not late and it will help her to create another wonderful outro which we can all enjoy. Here is her message.

Following the success of our Church Family photos I thought it would be nice to have another photo slide show. Perhaps you could send me one or two pictures of either a flower in your garden, or a picture of your garden, and if you haven't got a garden, perhaps a flower or plant that you have seen while out and about that you enjoyed seeing. We can then share all of this beauty!

Wedding Anniversary!

Monday 29th June will be the first wedding anniversary of Grace and Andrew. Many congratulations to Andrew and Grace! May God bless you both and your marriage in his love and grace.

If you have any special anniversary or birthday or messages for me to mention in this letter or during the online service on Sunday, please do feel free to contact me.

John and Jo are moving

Our friends, John and Jo Kidney are going to move to Bournemouth on 10th July. They have been wonderful friends, active members of our choir and most of all, faithful fellow disciples of Christ. We have been so blessed to have you as our church family members. We pray that God will guide you always no matter where you are and that he will reveal his glory through your lives, following Christ. May God bless you and please come and visit us!

Creative Prayer Exercise

Liz Kelly has kindly shared with us another creative prayer exercise. This time, it is prayer tree! Thank you very much Liz! It is attached to this email.

Again, 6 pages. I should stop. It is so warm today and tomorrow apparently is going to be even warmer. Please take a good care of yourself and stay safe. May God bless you and those whom you love. May you find his love and his amazing grace each day in a fresh way in your daily lives.

With love in Christ

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