



Abington Pastoral Letter No.19 3.07.2020

Dear Friends,

Congratulations!

First, I am sure that you will be delighted to know that Simona gave birth to a baby boy, Elijah, weighing 8lb 1oz, at 12.27 this morning and I know you will all want to join me in sending Jun, Simona, Emmanuel and Elijah our love and very best wishes. Jun is now on paternity leave until 20 July and he has asked me to compile the pastoral letters for the next three weeks.

For those who don't know me, I'm Liz Kelly and I have been the Lay Pastoral Minister at St Peter & St Paul since May 2010. During lockdown I have learnt several new skills. Some, like cross stitch and water-colour painting, are enjoyable and relaxing, and some, like how to lead a prayer meeting on Zoom, how to use the video on my mobile phone to record reflections for the online Sunday service, and how to live stream on YouTube, which are extremely scary! When Jesus calls us to follow him, we don't always know where that obedience will lead and, despite being afraid at times, and feeling that modern technology is not for me, by stepping out in faith and trusting him, God has provided the strength and support that I needed.

I expect that many of us have had to learn new things over the last three months and have had to be prepared to do things differently. Our weekly online Sunday worship is a perfect example. No one in their wildest dreams would have predicted this but it has brought many blessings and it is clear that the Holy Spirit has been, and continues to be, at work in ways that are amazing! If you have a story about what God has been doing in your life during lockdown, or a new skill that you have acquired that you would like to share with us, or something else to celebrate, please let me know.

Saints

Last week we celebrated our patronal festival and learnt some interesting facts about St Peter and St Paul. They were immensely influential in the early Christian Church and have a lot to teach us about following Jesus. However, today, 3rd July, the Church also commemorates another saint, Thomas. He is often known as 'Doubting Thomas' because of how he is portrayed in John's Gospel, chapter 20, verses 24-29.

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

I'm not sure Thomas deserves to be remembered as 'Doubting Thomas'. He was a man who always spoke his mind and wasn't afraid to ask the difficult question. Earlier in John's Gospel, when Jesus had told his disciples that he was going away to prepare a place for them and that they knew the way, Thomas was the one who bravely said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?" This elicits Jesus's wonderful reply, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14.5,6)

That he was brave is also shown in John 11.16. Lazarus had died and Jesus decided to return to Bethany from across the Jordan, where he had gone after the people had threatened to stone him. (John 10.31,39,40) The other disciples were not keen and reminded Jesus of the danger he was in if he went back but Thomas speaks up saying, "Let us also go that we may die with him."

I think these passages show us that Thomas is a man who thinks for himself. He uses his God-given intelligence to question things and reason things out. He doesn't just accept things blindly but wants to know for himself. How many of us would have believed what the other disciples said about Jesus appearing to them? How many of us find it easy to accept all the

teachings of the Christian faith? Do we have doubts sometimes? But look how Jesus responds to Thomas. He doesn't chastise him for his lack of faith. He doesn't tell him off. He gently gives Thomas what he needs in order for him to be able to believe. And once he understands, Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!"

Genuine doubt is not a sign of a lack of faith, but rather of a desire to know more of God and of a longing to be closer to him. Jesus will meet us where we are on our journey of faith if we search for him with all our heart and mind. He has told us that he is the way, the truth and the life and we have his comforting words, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." God is always there if we look for him.

Tradition has it that Thomas went to preach the Gospel as a missionary in India, where he died. Clearly, he had no doubts about Jesus then.

Churchyard

Even though the church remains closed the churchyard is very much open and is a perfect place for quiet reflection and prayer. It always looks beautiful due to the hard work of Janet and her small team of helpers, including her latest recruit, Jackie. Last Sunday Janet spoke movingly in the online service about life in lockdown and, for those who may have missed it, or who cannot access the internet, here is the text of what she said.

Life in lockdown at St Peter & St Paul's Church Abington May 2020

How our life has changed in just a few weeks. For me personally what I miss most is not being able to visit our grandchildren, George and Arthur, our daughter Katie and her husband David. We do FaceTime every day but I miss the hugs and kisses. Our friends too, especially the church family. No social gatherings, but thankfully we can operate Zoom meetings! As most of you probably know I love gardening, that has been my lifeline through these weeks of isolation. Initially I was not sure whether I should be allowed to garden in a public place. I contented myself with our own garden and doing more baking! Sorry Thursday Eucharist birthday cakes have had to go on hold! After two weeks into the lockdown, I thought well, the park gardeners are still working away, so with the consent of my dear husband John, I decided to give the church garden a makeover! I started by doing just one to two hours twice a week, In the early days Jun, Simona and Emmanuel were having their daily exercise in the park and

came through the church garden. I expressed my concern to Jun about me gardening, we agreed it was my daily exercise! As the weeks passed I continued to increase the time I spent gardening at church, enjoying every minute in the fresh air and the tranquillity of the church grounds. Very few people came through the church pathways in the early days of lock down, I did meet, at a distance, several people whom I knew and we would pass the time of day. Every visitor admired the wonderful display of "Faith, Hope, Love" made by our lovely friend Celia Irwin. I felt that visitors to the park were seeking a place of peace and tranquillity, maybe trying to shut away the reality of how life has become. I realised that more and more new visitors were passing by for their daily one hour allowed exercise. I feel they have found some relaxation in the grounds of our beautiful church. Unfortunately, I have not been able to see Gordon, a dear friend and excellent grass cutting companion. He has been mowing the church grass for many years now, but owing to health reasons he has been self isolating. I needed help to keep our church garden under control at this busy time of the year and recently my prayers were answered. One morning I heard a quiet voice say, "Can I do anything to help you?" I lifted my head and there stood Jackie! A very dear friend from our Church Family. Jackie has always looked after the rose bushes that were planted in the church garden to celebrate the Brownies 100 years in Abington Church. "What can I do?" Jackie said! What a leading question! During the last three weeks Jackie's talents in gardening have excelled, bless you Jackie. We are working together most mornings, always with a target to meet! God must be guiding us, we are getting there!! The most rewarding feeling for our efforts are the words of appreciation we receive from passers-by, most of whom we have never met before. We have been fortunate to see several members of our church family out for their daily exercise. Last week we had a small family passing through doing a treasure hunt, routes were drawn on the paving slabs and treasure hidden! Lovely simple fun. Then another family passed by with a work sheet, looking for certain nature items. "Have we seen a worm today?" they asked. Jackie and I were the only people they had seen digging so we were the most likely candidates!! Life may be difficult during this period of uncertainty but we should be grateful for the true value of nature. Listening to the birds singing, watching the flowers grow, maybe not wishing the grass to grow so quickly, but looking out for God's special creatures, like the very small blue butterfly we noticed this week. During this time of uncertainty I thank God that I am able to keep on with my passion for gardening, enjoying the open air and the wonders of nature.

Most of all I pray that we all keep safe from this terrible virus and that we will be able to visit our family and friends sometime soon. God bless everyone.

Thank you, Janet, for your inspiring words and for providing us with such a beautiful place to meet with God and his creation in our churchyard.

Children's Craft Pack

Alison has worked hard to produce another craft pack for children. It contains several fun activities based on the Bible story of 'The Lost Sheep.' It is attached to this letter. Thank you Alison.

Communications

Until Jun is back from paternity leave, Bob is acting as coordinator for all communications, so if there are any messages that need sending out, please email them to

bob.purser@abingtonchurch.org.uk

Also, if you have any pastoral concerns, please let me know and I will see if I can help. My email address is lizmk@outlook.com

And, finally, a reminder that for the next few weeks, the 10.00am online Sunday service will be streamed on YouTube only, so if you usually watch on Facebook please follow the link below to find us on YouTube and spread the word to anyone who does not receive these letters but who tunes in to join the service. This week's service sheet is attached to this letter and you will need either to print it out to use during the service or have it available to read on a device.

This is because the words will not appear on the screen. Many thanks to Bob for leading us on 5th July. You can watch on the same address as usual:

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCHk8eQzC5B6f-nH7H4SoVA?view_as=subscriber

Please stay safe in the coming week, especially as more public places start to open up.

With love in Christ,

Liz

Liz Kelly (Licensed Lay Pastoral Minister)