



Abington Pastoral Letter No.20 9.07.2020

Dear Friends,

How quickly the weeks come and go. It seems almost impossible that we have been living under the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19 since 23rd March. Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, Corpus Christi and Pentecost have all come and gone and now we are approaching the Fifth Sunday after Trinity. During all that time we have not been able to worship together in our church building but that has not meant that worship has been put on hold. There have been our weekly online services which many have been able to access. There are the Prayer Booklets that Revd Jun produced very early on. There are the monthly Children's Craft Activities. There are the Thursday Zoom Prayer Meetings. And, of course, there are a number of other services which can be watched on the television, or listened to on the radio, or found online. So, everyone can still feel that they are part of a worshipping community from their own home. It is important to continue to hold in mind that the Church is not a building of stone but is a living body of believers. St Paul puts it clearly when he writes in 1 Corinthians 12.27, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it."* And again in Ephesians 1.22-23, *"And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* The Church is still alive and active, and we are very much still part of it.

For some, this time of enforced isolation or solitude has led to a deepening of their Christian faith, with more time spent on reading the Bible and reflecting on it, and more time spent in prayer. For some, it has meant reaching out to others in whatever ways are still possible, from keeping in touch by telephone to collecting items for the foodbank. For others it has meant learning new skills, perhaps teaching children at home or learning new technology skills for themselves. But many of us have learnt something about ourselves during lockdown and Bob

spoke about this in his reflection during last week's Sunday Morning Prayer Service. For those who cannot watch online, here is the text of his talk.

Reflection on Matthew Chapter 11.16-19 and then verses 25-30

I have a long-standing friend, living with her husband, who is now suffering from dementia. He wrote, recently, describing living with her, saying that she is very much herself only more so, and that sums things up very well - rather more absent minded and more easily able to go off on a tangent. It can often be quite hard to keep up with her train of thought and, now, that is the case most of the time. But the phrase that struck me was that she was, "very much herself but more so."

I'm not sure how you have found being confined to home these recent weeks. I guess we've all had good days and bad days, days we have approached with purpose and other days when it's been hard to get going, or where we've lost purpose.

Most of us are coping, though for some, being confined has been too much and they have had to go to Durham, or employ some other such avoidance, but most of us have seen the sense in obeying the rules and can see the sense of physical distancing, hoping that the virus will pass us by.

For me the experience has been like being on a retreat. It is some years since I went on a retreat - a few days away from school or work or home - to spend time in one's own company and in the company of God, usually with some worship and perhaps directed reading or study or prayer.

*Retreats can be a time to meet ourselves, to listen to our heart and perhaps listen to God. The opportunity **to experience ourselves only more so** and I think these recent weeks have placed us there.*

It has been a time when the normal ways we cope with life and spend our time have been partially or completely stripped away. Watching sport, taking a holiday, coffee with friends, visits to the shops, going to meetings, all have been put on hold and so we are left with ourselves.

How have you found this time? What have you found out about yourself?

Well, I've enjoyed life slowed down, in particular, the spring and summer weather, having time to really look and see and to appreciate the clear air.

But I've also been aware of some less happy aspects of my personality: a grumpiness, being inexplicably short tempered; whatever anyone says wanting the other thing; being contrarian; being awkward.

I think Jesus has picked this up in the passage we have heard in our gospel reading. People criticised John for being too abstemious and Jesus for partying too much.

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!"

Part of the human condition seems to have a need to see the other as getting it wrong. A need to find fault. To say that we are right and the other is wrong. So, our unhappiness with ourselves is projected onto other people. We find it easier to find fault with them rather than to find the good in them. Easier to find fault than to recognise what both John and Jesus bring in their differing ways.

So, this is a good time to reflect and recognise these patterns. We can then take Jesus up on his promise in verse 28 and offer these burdens to him in prayer. Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'.

*So, let us use this time to grow in our awareness of ourselves, **to be ourselves only more so**, to recognise whatever causes us to labour, recognise our heavy burdens, and bring them to Jesus and then leave them at the foot of the Cross. Amen.*

Thank you for these inspiring words, Bob. I'm sure they will resonate with many people.

Thought for the Week

Mindfulness is a popular buzzword these days. It is a form of meditation where one tries to pay more attention to the present moment. It appears on the NHS website in the self-help and support section under Mental health and wellbeing. But it is nothing new. Many Christians have practised meditation for centuries and going on a retreat, as mentioned by Bob earlier, often offers such an opportunity. One pioneer of the Retreat Movement, who is particularly

associated with Pleshey Retreat House in Essex was Evelyn Underhill (1875 -1941). She was a Christian writer and philosopher and one of her quotations, which is especially appropriate here, says this: *"Never let yourself think that because God has given you many things to do for him, pressing routine jobs, a life full up with duties and demands of a very practical sort, that these need separate you from communion with him. God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive him there with gratitude in that sacrament; however unexpected its outward form may be, receive him in every sight and sound, joy and pain, opportunity and sacrifice."*

What a wonderful reminder that we can find God anywhere, at anytime, and whatever we are doing. Today we cannot be in church to pray, but God is here with us whether we recognise it or not. So, stop reading this letter for a moment and meet with God right now. Pause and enjoy the *Sacrament of the Present Moment*. Allow God to speak to you, to comfort you, to heal you, to take your burdens and then thank him for his goodness, his faithfulness and his love. And during the coming week, pause often, stop what you are doing and just 'be' in the present moment and in the presence of God. Meet him in the *Sacrament of the Present Moment*.

This is mindfulness!

Prayer Requests

We have received some very sad news from our friends at Abington Park View Care Home. Arun Vedd, the owner, sadly died of Covid-19 last week so please remember him in your prayers and pray also for his wife, Misha, and all the staff and residents at this time of deep distress. I have been in touch with Misha and she does value our prayers and support. May Arun rest in peace and rise in glory, and may God comfort all those who mourn.

Please pray also for Robert, Helen, Harriet and Emily who are in lockdown in Melbourne, Australia. May God keep them safe as they prepare for their new lives there.

Lastly, I would ask you to continue to keep Jun, Simona, Emmanuel and Elijah in your prayers at this time.

Please do pass on to me any prayer requests for next week.

Virtual Fête - Plants for Sale

Steve has the following plants for sale at £1 each. All proceeds will go to church funds. 16 White Geraniums (good for ground cover/bees); 6 Yellow, 6 Red and 6 Purple Cherry Tomatoes. If you are interested, please contact Steve on 07383 462002.

Communications

A reminder that 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. This time I will be leading it, so please pray that my technology works well on the day! 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 even more public places start to open up and remember, the virus hasn't gone away, so stay vigilant.

With love in Christ,

Liz

Liz Kelly (Licensed Lay Pastoral Minister)