



Abington Pastoral Letter No.23 30.07.2020

Dear Friends

### **Staying safe**

As you may have heard, the infection rate and the number of confirmed cases are increasing in Northampton. We are all advised by the local government to strictly keep the social distance. The official guidance is as follows.

*"Cases are rising in Northampton, you and your community are at risk, act now".*

- Limit contact with others outside of your household or bubble*
- Work from home if you can*
- Keep 2 metres from others at all times, use a face covering where you are less than 2 metres apart*
- Avoid using public transport or car sharing, wear face coverings if you cannot avoid these*
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms, stay at home, self-isolate and get a test*
- Avoid meeting those outside of your household or bubble in an indoor space*
- Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly for 20 seconds each time*
- Do not share items with others outside of your household or bubble*
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms, do not go to work, either work from home or report sick, self-isolate and get a test*

Unfortunately this greatly affects our plan for re-opening of our church building for public worship. Our hope now is that we hold the Eucharist in the church building on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> of August. However this will depend on how things improve in Northampton by that time. There will be a booking system. I will be able to you confirm you and tell you more details closer to the date whether we can have the service in the church building on that day or not. Please pray for our borough, NGH and the parish church.

## **Making it sustainable**

We all kind of knew and had a sense that this pandemic won't just disappear overnight. There is a difference however between knowing it and living it. I think we are now entering into a stage in which we all find ourselves living with the reality which is we are in this for a long haul.

When I was planning our first online worship and writing the pastoral letter at the end of March, I didn't expect that I would be doing the same at the end of July. But here I am, writing the 23<sup>rd</sup> letter to you.

If we are going to be in this for a long haul, then we have got to prepare ourselves for that. We have to find ways to make our life sustainable so that we won't burn out by putting too much on our shoulders, physically, mentally and spiritually. Sometimes we do that to ourselves because we want to be good and helpful. But God does not want you to burn out. Christ told us "love your neighbor as yourselves." If we don't take care of ourselves then we cannot take care of others either. I say this to myself because I know that is one of the areas that I sometimes struggle.

For me, it could begin by finding a sustainable model for our online worship and pastoral letter. So in the future we may not get Creative Bible Drama every Sunday or nice outro presentation every Sunday as it has been for the last 17 weeks. The pastoral letter may not always be 6 or 7 pages but could be a bit simpler and shorter with practical information and updates. I will be also looking at what the church could do to support those who are in need so that we can help them in making their life sustainable in this pandemic.

I hope that you may also find your own ways to make your life sustainable, hopefully with more space and time for family, for self-care, for prayer and for God. If you have already found and established your own pattern then well done to you. Please do feel free to share your experiences and tips with us.

## **PCC discussions**

Last night we had a good discussion at the PCC meeting. A big thank you to Bob who led the task of presenting the policy draft and to Dianne and Donald who supported him.

We looked at the possibility of having a service in the churchyard if gathering inside the building was not possible. The PCC agreed that it could be a good thing that we can try but also agreed that we have to be careful about the timing of it.

We also agreed that we should not lose what we have gained through our Online Worship. When we are back in our church building for worship, we will be looking at ways to put online and offline worship together. This might involve some major work with our building and some fresh approach to our worship. We don't need to be too ambitious to begin with though. We can start off with things that we already have.

The PCC also has agreed that we can have 30 people inside the building to begin with. And there will be a phone booking system which will be managed by Dianne. This means you will have to book first if you plan to attend the offline service in the church building. Our aim is that we gradually expand the number of people we can have in the building to the point where we would no longer need a booking system.

If you have any good ideas or suggestions please do feel free to share with me.

### **Alison's Reflection on Romans 8.26-39**

Alison led our online worship last Sunday while I was providing technical support. Here is her reflection if you didn't have the chance to watch the video.

*This reading from Romans is one of my favourites, one I come back to again and again. It not only speaks to us about the depth of God's love for us, but also reminds us that God is in control and that however bleak things may appear, God will have the final word. We are safe in his hands.*

*It's a message that we may need to hear over and over again, especially at the moment. It's all been very strange and often a bit scary hasn't it, and we've had to adjust to so many "new normals" that it sometimes feels like things will never be the same again. And indeed they might not. Although that may not be a bad thing.*

*I know that many people have found that the lockdown period has been a time of spiritual growth – with lives being a bit less frantic, finding time to spend with God in prayer and Bible reading has been easier. But you may have found that the lack of your normal routines and structures, and maybe the lack of any solitude at home, with partners or children always being around, have actually made it harder to find time for God. If this is the case, know that you are not the only one.*

*In those times when finding God seems hard it is good to remember what Paul says – that Jesus sits at God's right hand, interceding for us. Paul acknowledges that we can find it hard to pray, indeed, that we don't always know what to pray for, but he reminds us that the Holy*

*Spirit takes our prayers – both formed and unformed – and turns them into something worthy of the God to whom we try to pray.*

*Paul is clear that life doesn't become easy, just because we are Christians. In fact, often the opposite has been true. But he does remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God – not hardship, not personal difficulties, not uncertainty over our futures, not lockdown, not churches being closed, not even death, and certainly not a virus – NOTHING can separate us from God's love. We are safe in his hands.*

*We may also need to remind ourselves of just how deep God's love for us is – and that he loves despite, not because of, what we are. As psalm 139 – paraphrased in this morning's first hymn – tells us, God searches our hearts and knows our deepest, darkest thoughts, yet loves us nonetheless.*

*However, this should not make us complacent. It's not an excuse to think "oh well, it's all ok, it doesn't matter what I do, God loves me anyway". We can't be casual or cavalier with God's love. We can't take it for granted and treat it shoddily. Instead we need to accept it humbly and gratefully, with repentance for our failings and a desire to do better, not to make God love us more, but because we want to please him.*

*In his hymn "In Christ alone", which we will sing later on, Stuart Townend writes how the power of Christ in us means that we have "no guilt in life, no fear in death". So whatever this coming week may bring – and the months ahead – we can hold on to the knowledge that whatever happens, nothing can separate us from God's love. We need not be afraid. We are, now and always, safe in his hands.*

## **Children's Craft Pack No.9**

Alison Canfield very kindly has put together the materials and resources for our children. It is attached to this email. Thank you very much Alison for putting this together and Cathy for delivering it to families. Please do feel free to send the photos of you or your children using the craft pack.

That is all from me. Stay safe and may God bless you and your family.

With love in Christ

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