



Abington Pastoral Letter No.34 21.11.2020

Dear Friends

I hope this email finds you well and safe as we enter the fourth week of lockdown. This second lockdown feels a little bit different from the first lockdown we had earlier this year. Abington Park often gets quite busy with people and families. Meetings and gatherings are held online rather than being all cancelled. Schools are open. And we now know that vaccines can actually work and some of them may be given to the vulnerable in not too distant future.

However, we have to remind ourselves and each other that there is absolutely no room for complacency. There are certainly positive signs and there is no doubt that we will eventually get through this. But we want to get to the other side all together safely.

When I was serving in the Korean Army, I went to this training course on squad management in battle and after battle. And the training officer said that the number of casualties seen after a battle can be often as significant as the number of casualties seen during the battle. It is partly because of injuries inflicted during the battle but also because more fatal accidents tend to happen as soldiers get complacent and less alert after the battle.

Yesterday we had 511 deaths from Covid-19 reported nationally, 2982 deaths in the last 7 days. Covid is not going away. Also not going away are the mental health effects of lockdown. Those mental health issues affect not only our mental health but also our physical health and even spiritual health. Over the past few months, I saw myself going through high levels of stress and exhaustion like I have never seen before. Perhaps you can relate. We lost a few of our dear friends in a very short period of time. More of us are having more health problems. And with all of that, we had to keep on going with all the restrictive measures.

This takes its toll. There is real suffering and real damage done to many people. We need to address them. This starts with each of us addressing our own wellbeing. God loves you. And he

wants you to love yourself. If you are struggling, don't struggle alone. Talk about it. Talk to a friend, our lay ministers and pastoral visiting team, or talk to me. We are all in this together. No one is going to think less of you if you show weakness or vulnerability. We all have cracks like clay jars. Many times people try to hide or seal those cracks. But it is through those cracks how the light gets in.

St. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians.

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;"... So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4.7-18)

About 1,900 years later, a Canadian singer-songwriter, Leonard Cohen, sang about this clay jar and a crack we carry in his song *Anthem*. It remains as one of my favourite songs. Perhaps his gentle and calm voice might give you some comfort. You can listen to him by clicking this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8-BT6y_wYg

Anthem by Leonard Cohen

The birds they sang

At the break of day

Start again

I heard them say

Don't dwell on what

Has passed away

Or what is yet to be.

Ah the wars they will

Be fought again

The holy dove

She will be caught again

*Bought and sold
And bought again
The dove is never free.*

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

*We asked for signs
The signs were sent
The birth betrayed
The marriage spent
Yeah the widowhood
Of every government
Signs for all to see.*

*I can't run no more
With that lawless crowd
While the killers in high places
Say their prayers out loud
But they've summoned, they've summoned up
A thundercloud
And they're going to hear from me.*

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

*You can add up the parts
But you won't have the sum
You can strike up the march
There is no drum
Every heart, every heart
To love will come
But like a refugee.*

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

Booking your seats for Sunday 6 December

We are making plans to resume public worship in our church building from 6th December assuming that the lockdown will be lifted on 2nd December. Of course there is no guarantee and things might change by then but there is no harm in making preparations.

If you would like to book your seats for the Sunday on 6th December then please give Dianne a ring between Thursday to Saturday 1 pm. If there is any change in plan then you will hear from me through the pastoral letter later or from Dianne.

Christmas Art and Nativity Trail,

Celia is currently working on our next Churchyard Art Project for Christmas. With this art, we are planning to introduce the Nativity Trail in the churchyard for children, young people and their families. The art and nativity trail will be open for everyone to enjoy from Sunday 6th of December. More details will follow in another letter later.

Christmas Services

It will be very difficult for us to gather safely for Christmas Services. But we will not just sit there and sigh. There are other ways of celebrating without physically gathering! We are planning creative ways of celebrating our Christmas this year, pulling all our abilities and skills together which we have developed over the last few months. Here are the dates.

Virtual Christingle Service: 13 December at 4 pm.

Virtual Carol Service: 20 December at 6 pm.

Virtual Crib Service: 24 December at 3 pm.

Christmas Carols Singalong on Zoom: 24 December at 7 pm.

All virtual services will be accessible both on the Church Youtube Channel and the Church

Facebook Page. St. Christopher's Care Home will join us virtually at our Christingle Service.

Friends of the holy land and Eve

At the last PCC, we have unanimously agreed to support one international charity and one national charity for this Christmas time. The Friends of the Holy Land is a charity which our Bishop regularly supports alongside his Holy Land pilgrimages. It supports the poorest members of the Christian community in the West Bank and Gaza. Their plight is worse than ever this year with the covid-related drying up of pilgrimage income. More information can be found here: <https://www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk/>

The national charity you support this year is Eve which is a Christian domestic abuse charity based in Northamptonshire. It provides refuge service for women and children who have escaped from domestic abuse and also recovery programmes for them to transform their lives after domestic abuse. More information can be found here: <https://eveda.org.uk/>

You can give by using our online giving page on our website. All donations made to the church between 20 December and 27 December will be match-funded and be passed on to these two charities.

Friends, our building might be closed but our work never stops just as our God never stops his work. And there is more work to do. As we pray for each other and try to be kind to each other and to ourselves, please let us remember and pray for all those who are suffering and the marginalised; the broken, the homeless, and the refugees, especially women and children.

God bless you all.

With love in Christ

Jun