



St Peter  
& St Paul  
ABINGTON



Abington Pastoral Letter No.35      8.12.2020

Dear Friends

### **Advent Message**

It is the last month of the year 2020. I wonder how that makes you feel. I wonder whether you are in need of some peace right now. As your world is so disrupted and changed as you continue to walk in this long and challenging winter. You might wonder whether this Christmas would even feel like Christmas. Glory in the highest and peace on earth, it says. But where is peace to be found when the world seems to be in so much pain and plunged in to darkness? If you are feeling somewhat this way, I have good news for you which Jesus left with us.

I once had an opportunity to work for the Mission to Seafarers. I was an intern at this port in the southern part of South Korea, facing the Pacific Ocean. And I came across this term while working there. Do you know what seafarers describe the tempest that no sailor can escape? They call it the perfect storm. Not perfect in the sense of ideal but perfect in the sense of combining factors. All the elements such as tornado force winds, a thunderstorm, cold, downpour of rain, all those elements work together to create the insurmountable disaster. The perfect storm.

The winds alone would be a challenge. But combining the wind plus the cold plus the rain, it is a perfect recipe for a disaster. Now you don't have to be a seafarer to experience a perfect storm. All you need is a combining set of factors. The pandemic plus the recession plus a job transfer plus health issues of yours or of your loved ones. You can handle one challenge but two or three or four. One thing after another. One gale force wind followed by a thunderstorm. It is just enough to make you wonder, 'Will I really survive this storm?' 'Will I ever get through this?'

Jesus understood that. He knew that our life on this earth comes with some serious times of

trial and challenge. No exception. He himself went through the same kind of trial and suffering. So he says this in John's Gospel Chapter 14 as he is about to face his own crucifixion.

*"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give you not as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled or do not let them be afraid." (John 14.27)*

There are many things that people do to find peace these days. Some people find peace from meditation or from exercise or from going for a walk. But this peace that Jesus mentions above is a bit different. This is not a peace from Jesus. It is the very peace of Jesus.

"My peace I give you" he says. This kind of peace is not a human achievement. It is a gift and grace from above. Jesus gives His Peace to you. The same peace that calmed him when he was falsely accused. The same peace that steadied his voice when he spoke Pontius Pilate. The same peace that kept his thoughts clear and his heart pure as he carried the cross on his shoulder. This was His peace. And my friend, this can be Your peace.

This peace according to St. Paul guards your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

*(Philippians 4.4-7)*

Christ gives his peace. And he gives us not as the world gives. Even when we are in the middle of the storm, we don't lose this peace. We should be worried but we aren't. We should be upset but we are comforted. Even when you are in isolation, you are not alone. You belong to God. And because of that you can talk to God. You see, the path to peace is always paved with prayer.

You may remember that earlier this year at the beginning of Lent, we committed ourselves to prayer. So many of you put the faith stones at the high altar of the church as a sign of your commitment to prayer. Since then those stones remained there all the way through the two lockdowns to today. In the same way, you have remained faithful and prayed earnestly throughout the pandemic. You brought everything to Christ and by doing so you invited Christ into your hearts, into your home and into the lives of those whom you met and cared for.

So I want to thank you. And I want to encourage all of you including myself, to reaffirm our commitment to prayer as we go into this time of Advent. As we prepare to close the year 2020 and open the new year 2021, let us remind ourselves of this promise that Christ has given to us.

*"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give you not as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled or do not let them be afraid."*

Let us continue to pray and bring everything to Christ. God will give you his peace and he will give you the strength you need to do what is right. He will inspire you and fill your heart with his warmth to care for those whom you love and those who are in need. He works through you, in you and with you. He touches the hearts of people through you even though you may not realise it. That's the power of prayer. We make space for God and his peace, his power, his loving presence is made visible to others through us as we pray. God's love and peace can be revealed through a smallest and tiniest act of love and kindness. The tiniest act from a sincere heart can touch the hearts of others.

My friend, remember that God is closer to you than you can ever imagine. You are never alone. You have never lived one unloved day. God is with you today to give you his peace. And he gives you the strength and inspiration you need to reveal his love to the world. Even though the road ahead seems to be long and hard, let us just focus on following Christ moment by moment as we pray. He is with you today. He was at the beginning of your story and He will be there at the end of our story. That is the ultimate hope of Advent.

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (The Book of Revelation 21.1-7)*

## **Bishop Donald's Advent Message**

Just like you receive letters from me, the Clergy of the Diocese and I also receive letters from Bishop Donald which I always appreciate and find very sustaining for me. He has recently written to us about Advent which I share with you here.

*I love the Advent collects. The first three in particular are powerful theological prayers (the third was written by John Cosin for the 1662 revision of the Prayer Book, and the first two of course by Thomas Cranmer over a century before). A long time ago (when I was a boy) churches used to encourage their people, even their children, to learn by heart the collect of the week, and pray it at home. That is good church discipline, good disciple-making, even good Anglicanism!*

*I love Advent – and how appropriate its themes are as we continue with a fairly high degree of lockdown, and confusion and delays on vaccines (and on trade deals!) Advent is both a penitential season, and a time to speak of hope and joy. It brings together the brokenness of this world and our lives, with the joy of God's promises and the hope of redemption. At present that is mirrored with the horror of covid-19, over sixty thousand deaths in Britain so far; then the joy of scientific advance in creating vaccines, and the hope of their eventual deployment and the end of this scourge.*

*I know we have to prepare for Christmas, and be doing Christmas things this week and next, but please don't let that necessary stuff get in the way of the real nature of the Advent season. Last week I heard a fellow bishop fall into the trap of describing Advent as a time of preparing for the coming of Jesus ... at Christmas. Oh dear! Yes, the incarnation is important. Christmas does matter. But Advent is about so much more. It may be about Christ's first coming, but it is about his second coming too. It may be about the excitement of shepherds and angels, but it is also about the final angel-assisted ingathering of all God's people. It may be about God's kingdom coming here and now, but it is also about the perfection of the new heaven and the new earth. It may be about our penitential struggles in this life, but it is also about our ultimate and certain hope of full redemption. It is so much bigger, and about so much more, than Christmas.*

*Sermon over! Continued blessings for Advent, our great season of hope.*

## **Message from the Lay-Chair on the finance of the church**

This year has been very challenging to all churches especially in terms of finance. But thanks to your outpouring generosity and sacrificial giving, we were able to carry out our mission and work for the Kingdom. A huge thank you to all our givers. Please find the following message from Bob, our Lay-Chair of the PCC.

*At the last PCC meeting, Damian Pickard, our Treasurer reported on the parish finances to the PCC. He said that this has been one of the unusual years in church life that anyone can remember and COVID has interrupted many areas of parish life including our finances. Although we have been blessed by the novelty of on-line giving, many of our sources of income such as wedding and funeral fees, money in the plate and in the wall safe as well as income from letting the church rooms have completed dried up.*

*Fortunately, many activities and areas of work where we spend money have also reduced although it has been particularly important that we continue to pay our parish share. Emerging from all this uncertainty, Damian anticipates that we will end the year in a stronger position than at the end of 2019.*

*It was recognised by the PCC that the stability of the parish finances arises from the commitment of church members through regular giving either through the Parish Giving Scheme, a Standing Order through the Diocese or by giving by envelope. The PCC therefore asked I write to all members of the church to thank them for continuing to maintain their giving during this most difficult year.*

*One of the benefits of being part of the Parish Giving Scheme is that members can opt to increase their giving by inflation (2.7% this year). Those choosing (about 35 of us) to do this have increased the income of the church for 2021 by over £1,000 and any members of PGS can sign up for this. If you still give through the Diocesan Standing Order and wish to transfer to the PGS Scheme please talk to Damian Pickard or Bob Purser.*

*The PCC wants to continue our on-line services and will need to invest in equipment to continue to do this. If you would like to make a one-off donation towards this, please speak to Damian Pickard.*

## **Christmas at Abington**

You may have seen the beautiful Christmas Art in the churchyard. A big thank you to Celia and Derek. It goes together with the Nativity Trail which is for everyone to enjoy. You can follow the story of the first Christmas and find out what the hidden message is. You may even find a hidden treasure at the end of the trail. The Nativity Trail is up until the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2021. A big thank you to Susie who wrote and designed the trail, the posters and flyers. Please do invite your neighbours and friends to come and look at the art and take part in the trail. I have attached the flyers that include all the information about Christmas at Abington. Do please feel free to share them with others.

## **Advent Packs for Children and Young people**

We created the Advent Pack for children and young people in the parish. It comes with lovely craft kits, gifts and Christmas card from the church. Now they are being delivered to around 60 families in the parish. Our big thanks to Susie, Cathy and all our delivery drivers who spread the joy and hope of Advent and Christmas in the community.

## **Joint Christingle Service, 13<sup>th</sup> December at 4 pm, Online only.**

Christingles have been made and they are going to be delivered to the children in the parish. Our thanks go to Grace and Alison who kindly made and will deliver the Christingles. The Christingle service will be this Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December at 4 pm. It is an online only service and you can join on Youtube or Facebook. I am particularly delighted that we will be able to share this service with our friends at St. Christopher's. So please tune in on 13<sup>th</sup> December at 4 pm. You can make donations towards Children's Society on their website:

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/how-you-can-help/donate>

Or if you made a collection, then you can pass it to Cathy by contacting her at [cathytinsley18@gmail.com](mailto:cathytinsley18@gmail.com)

## **Christmas Carol Service, 20<sup>th</sup> December at 6 pm, Online only.**

This year's Christmas Carol Service will be on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December at 6 pm. Like the Christingle Service, it will be an online only service livestreamed from the church with the pre-

recorded carols sung by our choir. By joining this service online, you can sing those lovely carols freely at home without having to worry about the social distancing restrictions or just listen to our beautiful choir's singing. It will also include some special contents created by the parishoners.

### **Crib Service, 24<sup>th</sup> December at 3 pm, Online only**

This year's crib service will be online only service. More details and Order of Service will follow closer to the date.

### **Carol Singing, 24<sup>th</sup> December at 7 pm, on Zoom**

In addition to the online carol service, we offer a carol singing time on Zoom. This will be a very relaxed and social occasion where you can actually see other people on zoom and sing your favourite carols (even with a glass of wine perhaps if you like?!). It is organized by Tim, our Director of Music. He wrote the following.

*With Christmas being different this year, we wanted to give everyone a chance to sing those favourite Christmas carols. Here's how it is going to work:*

*The problem with Zoom (in common with all available systems) is that there is a time lag between what is broadcast and what you hear. So you will not be able to hear the other people. But our wonderful church choir (and band) have been busy recording carols and so you will be singing along with them. The great thing is you can sing like no one's listening (because they aren't)! If you are not familiar with Zoom it's really easy. We will send instructions beforehand to get you ready. You will just need something to listen through (headphones or speakers) and a device (computer or phone) connected to the internet. Or you can join by phone from your landline if you prefer. In order to control things a bit we would like you to register your interest in order to get the Zoom details sent to you. Please do this by emailing Tim Dolan [tim.dolan@abingtonchurch.org.uk](mailto:tim.dolan@abingtonchurch.org.uk)*

### **Christmas Services**

Christmas Service will be on 25th December at 10 am which will be livestreamed from the

church. You will need to book your seat in advance. We also offer the Sunday Service on 27th December at 10 am as a special service with carols sung by the choir. If you couldn't book your seat for the service on the 25th then you can come to the service on the 27th.

### **Booking line working hours**

Please note that booking line working hours is from Thursday 9 am to Saturday 1 pm.

As you can see a lot is happening even in these strange and restrictive times. All these reflect the fact that our God is the same God who loves us, blesses us and leads us to green pastures even when everything seems to be changing and uncertain. He loved us so much that he gave us his only Son who was laid in a manger as a naked baby on that first Christmas night. He is our light in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome the light.

With love in Christ

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