

13.02.2021



Dear friends

I hope you are all keeping safe and well especially in this cold weather. This winter seems to be a bit colder than the previous ones not only in the UK but in other countries. For example, Seoul, South Korea, where my parents live, the temperature dropped down to -15°C (the average winter temperature there is around -5°C).

Ash Wednesday Service: Online, Wednesday 17 Feb at 8 pm

You may remember last year this time, many of us were following the news, not knowing that the very first national lockdown was going to come upon us within a few weeks time. As we continue to journey together in this third national lockdown, our Ash Wednesday Service this year will be a simple reflective service offered online on **Wednesday 17 Feb at 8 pm**. Obviously, the Imposition of Ashes is not possible but hopefully this simple reflective service will help us to remind ourselves of what is at the heart of Ash Wednesday. I think this music by Tony Conry summarises beautifully what is at the heart of Ash Wednesday and what message it gives to us today. I will share it with you during the service.

Ashes by Tom Conry

We rise again from ashes, from the good we've failed to do.

We rise again from ashes, to create ourselves anew.

If all our world is ashes, then must our lives be true?

An offering of ashes, an offering to You.

Then rise again from ashes, let healing come to pain.

Though spring has turned to winter, and sunshine turned to rain.

The rain we'll use for growing, and create the world anew,

From an offering of ashes, an offering to You.

Prester's Lockdown Musings: How long?

How long can this go on? How much longer? How long?

Many people have been asking this over the last year. When lockdown hit, and our liberty was first restricted, most people accepted the situation.

But then the numbers grew, and the restrictions tightened. It got tougher, especially for those whose work or education was disrupted. How long can this go on?

The summer months gave welcome respite. Some enjoyed the novelty of subsidised meals out. Others thought it risky to promote closer physical contact in a closed environment, when all previous advice had been to the contrary. We knew vaccines would be on the way eventually; but normally they seem to take years to develop. How long can this keep going on?

We looked ahead to Christmas. The hints were that this would be fairly unrestricted. When the announcement came, it only permitted contact with one part of the family over a few days, not including New Year. At the last minute, facing soaring infection rates, this was reduced to one day. One day when you could not even give a proper hug to the loved ones you could see. How long could this possibly keep going on?

It's a vital question. Politicians and their scientific and medical advisers seem wary of an answer. Partly this is because we are in uncharted territory. Predictions change each time circumstances change, or a new variant emerges. Any answer is a partly educated guess. How much longer?

People will, I suspect, be asking this question for an uncomfortably long time yet. But I wonder, when we ask the question, who we are actually asking the question to. Is it just to ourselves? The people we live or "bubble" with? Friends on Zoom? Or can we – dare we – address the question to God? I believe not only that we can, but that we should. The Psalm writers didn't hesitate to address their "how longs" to God - no fewer than four times in the opening three verses of Psalm 13, for example.

Some of us may feel uncomfortable at the idea of bringing negative emotion to God. We have the notion that our inner life must be fully sorted before we come to prayer. But careful reflection shows that cannot be right. God knows everything. As Psalm 139:4 says, "Before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely." God desires truth from us (Psalm 51:6.) If the truth is that we are definitely fed up, He knows that already. We don't have to pretend we are more "spiritual" than we really are. When we realise that He knows – but does not reject us – we bring ourselves into a place where we can receive strength to cope with the concerns of the day.

It's instructive that the psalms of lament (such as Psalm 13) almost invariably end with the Psalmist in a better place. If you look at Psalm 13 itself – only six verses long - you'll see what I mean. After initial complaints (verses 1 – 2), the psalmist makes his prayers to God (verses 3 - 4). He doesn't want to "sleep the sleep of death". He doesn't want others to gloat or "rejoice because I am shaken." He thinks back to what he knows of God: especially His "steadfast love" (verse 5.) And that brings him back to a place of rejoicing (verse 5.) He will praise the God who has been good to him (verse 6.)

The God who will be there for us at the end of lockdown is the same loving God who was there with us before it started. That same God longs for relationship with us now. He doesn't mind if we start with a complaint.

Prester, 2 Feb 2021

Zoom coffee and catch-up: every Sunday after the morning service

Coffee and Catch-up Session is continued to be offered to anyone who would like to just have a chat and say hello. You are also welcome to invite your friends. So please do feel free to share the meeting ID and the passcode. The Meeting ID (which is 863 7839 1972) and the Passcode (which is 355688) will always remain the same every week. If you do not have the internet, you can still join via your landline or mobile phone by dialing the number provided below. If you have any questions or need any help please do feel free to give Bob, our Lay-Chair, a ring at 785836 or email him at purser.bob@btinternet.com. He will be happy to take you through the process.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86378391972?pwd=MIlwWVh6WFFCUFJEMFo1TEI0RERHZz09>

Meeting ID: 863 7839 1972

Passcode: 355688

One tap mobile

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+44 203 051 2874 United Kingdom

+44 203 481 5237 United Kingdom

Meeting ID: 863 7839 1972

Passcode: 355688

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcYkiPeUNF>

Zoom prayer group

Zoom Prayer group meets every Thursday at 10 am. If you are interested, then please do contact Liz Kelly, our Lay Pastoral Minister on lizmk@outlook.com or 07745 604591 or 01604 636947.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81580208528?pwd=Z3dSWlIFcEFEd0ljTFZ6OThKY0drZz09>

Meeting ID: 815 8020 8528

Passcode: 409450

Zoom Lent Groups

Bob Purser will offer a group on Mondays at 7.30pm starting 22 Feb

Alison Barnes will offer a group on Tuesdays at 7.30pm starting 23 Feb

Liz Kelly will offer a group on Wednesdays at 10.00am starting 24 Feb

Please let us know if you wish to take part by emailing Liz Kelly at lizmk@outlook.com or telephoning Dianne Ward on 01604 281264 and telling us which group you want to join.

With love in Christ

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