

26.03.2021



Dear friends

This letter is going to be a bit longer than usual, partly because I didn't send out the letter last week but also because there is a lot happening and is going to happen in the coming weeks.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of National Lockdown**

Earlier this week, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, we remembered the first anniversary of the national lockdown. It still feels very raw and current for many of us to step back and reflect. That moment might come a bit later and yet it is still important to mark this first anniversary and take a moment to lift up all of which we might be carrying to God. This coming Sunday (Palm Sunday), we will take a short moment to mark the first anniversary of the lockdown during the main service. A single bell will ring 12 times to mark the last 12 months past in the pandemic and lift up all those who suffered, died and lost their loved ones during that period to God.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary at Abington**

Interestingly, it was the same day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, when I was inducted as the Rector of Abington 2 years ago in 2019. Exactly 1 year after that day, the country will go into national lockdown. My 2 years in Abington is precisely divided by before lockdown and after lockdown. How little did I know what I was getting into and what would be lying ahead when I was inducted. It feels like providential. God sent me to Abington and allowed me to have exactly one year to work together with you to prepare for the crisis that was going to happen a year later. I am grateful for that first year before the lockdown during which you and I worked together to build His Church. I am grateful for the second year after the lockdown during which you and I worked together to Be His Church. It is true what St. Paul said about God's faithfulness and how we discover that in times of trial.

*"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor 10.13)*

## **The Ground of all hope**

Many of you might remember that we were going through a sermon series on Prayer last year during Lent. It was unfortunately interrupted by the pandemic. Some of you kindly told me how much they appreciated the sermon series on Prayer. It will return when the time is right. Instead we have a short, new sermon series for this passiontide titled as The Ground of All Hope. It is a two week series about how we could find hope in times of uncertainty. The second part will be preached on the Palm Sunday. I am sharing here what I preached last Sunday.

### **The Group of All Hope 1: 3 directions to look in times of trouble (John 12.27- 33, 17.1-5)**

For this Sunday and the next, we are offering a short two weeks sermon series: ground of all hope. If you come to the churchyard, some of you may have seen this already, you will see our Easter Churchyard Art installed by Celia and the message of this art says this: 'There is always hope.'

We chose this as the message for our Easter Art because we really need some hope at this time. Don't we? We really need some hope as we try to find ways to recover from this third lockdown which was the most difficult and painful one. Out of all three lockdowns, this one was the worst. And friends, you know, I have been saying to everyone, 'Let's keep going' but I want to tell you the truth. There were moments when I felt I was really struggling, when I just felt and knew that I was not in a good place. And I know this was true to you too, mentally, spiritually and physically. For everyone, the fatigue is very high and the energy level is low. What has been happening throughout the pandemic is taking its tolls.

For the last several months, it seems like I concluded every conversation or signed off every email with two words. Stay safe. But recently I have been wondering whether I should add another two words; stay sane. Stay sane. Not easy to do in these crazy times, is it?

I want to talk to you about living in these profoundly challenging times. Not knowing what lies ahead, is there a way that you can bring peace to your inner self and even begin to find hope and healing for the bruises that you have sustained over the last few months? The inner bruises; those bruises to your soul and you and I have received them. We have. We have. You have been through so much over the whole year and more. And perhaps you don't even know. You may not yet even know where you are hurting. It seems to me like all of us were running out of a burning building. Somebody sees us on a street and say, 'Hey, are you okay?' We say, 'Yes, I am okay.' Then that somebody says, 'But don't you know you are bleeding?' We look and say, 'Oh, I didn't know I was.'

I think a lot of us are bleeding or hurting and we don't even know it because we are caught up in the adrenaline, in the emotion and in the challenge. And it is very important for us not only stay safe but also stay sane.

This Sunday is known also as Passion Sunday. From today, Passiontide begins until Holy Saturday, the season where we focus on the passion of Jesus Christ. It's the last two weeks of Lent. It reminds us of those last days of Jesus' life up to his crucifixion: the most challenging and painful period in his earthly life.

In the reading today, we see Jesus saying this. *'Now my soul is troubled.'* (John 12.27)

Can you imagine? The one who raised the dead; the one who healed the sick; the one whom even the sea, the storms and daemons obeyed, says, 'My soul is troubled.' Can you imagine? I think you can. For you know what it is like to be troubled.

I wonder where your eyes would head towards when your soul is deeply troubled though. Would they look at those problems that are troubling you. Or would you close them so you won't see anything. Or Would they just look downward because you are just caught up in the sadness. I know do. But how about Jesus? Where did he look when his soul was troubled? I want to talk about the three directions that he looked. This might give us where we need to be looking to get through tough times.

First is this. Look upward. Jesus looked upward when he was entering the most painful time in his life. *John 17.1, 'After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said "Father, the hour has come."*

Look upward. Look upward with gratitude. Look upward with hope. Paul said about the importance of looking upward. *1 Thessalonians 5.16, 'Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.'*

Look at the totality in those terms. You will remember when Jesus had his last supper with his disciples before his death. You remember what he did during the supper. He gave thanks. He gave thanks. 'The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, he gave thanks.' (1 Cor 11.24)

Gratitude is always an option. Here is what gratitude does. Gratitude banishes anxiety. They do not exist in the same heart and gratitude always wins. When anxiety is in a heart and gratitude shows up, anxiety leaves. Gratitude is always an option. Look upward.

I love the story from Matthew Henry, a biblical scholar and minister from 18th century. One day

he was robbed by thieves and they took his wallet. He wrote these words in his diary.

*'Let me be thankful. First, because I was never robbed before; Second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; Third, because they took my all that was not much; And fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.'*

My friends, when our souls are troubled, let us look upward with gratitude. One of my favourite gifts that I have ever received is this tiny paper. It was given by a child. And the child who gave it to me said, 'This is for writing complaints.' This is for writing complaints. So I said to the child, now we should create a huge paper upon which we can write down our blessings. You and I know there is a plenty of reasons to complain. Everybody else is complaining. Let's not be among them. Find reasons to be grateful. Guard our souls. Look upward with gratitude.

Then, look outward. Look outward with grace. Jesus looked outward with grace when he knew that trouble was coming. He saw those people around him, for whom he gave his love and time, were going to betray him. *Luke 22.15, 'When it was time, he sat down, all the apostles with him, and said, "You've no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this meal with you before I enter my time of suffering.'*

He said, I am so glad you all are here. And what did he do? He washed the feet of each one of them. Imagine, those feet will be the very feet that will abandon him and run away from him. But Jesus wanted them to remember when they looked at their feet, when they stopped running and looked down while catching their breath, he wanted them to remember that he washed the same feet; that he still loves them; that he forgave them already.

Jesus could have given them a reprimand or a stern warning. He could have left a cross memo, 'I told you so' hidden in their sandals. But instead, he gave them kindness and forgiveness. Friends, many are giving hostile looks, aggressive, criticising comments these days. The division is attacking not only the country but some of our families and neighbourhoods. Look outward with kindness and grace when our soul is troubled. Do something good for others. Reserve judgement.

And then, look forward with prayer. Here is what Paul said, *Philippians 3.13-14, 'I am focusing on all my energies on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.'*

I focus all my energies on one thing that that is to look forward. Friends, we are future facing

people. We were made to be future facing people. This Bible is future facing book. Life will not make sense if all your doing is living in the here and now. It does not mean here and now is not important or we all just forget the past. But by looking forward, Paul drew strength to press on and to live here and now. Look forward with hope. Look forward with prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ will give you the strength to find energy that you didn't know you have.

He understands you. He has been through what you are going through. And he never fails you. For he is the ground of all hope.

## **Holy Week 2021**

Sadly, this year's Holy Week will still with restrictions which means the traditional liturgy for the Holy Week such as the foot washing on Maundy Thursday or the veneration of the cross on Good Friday is not possible. I know those more traditional elements of worship are missed by many members of the congregation. I do appreciate them and they will return when we can have some normality back.

For this year, we think it is a good opportunity for us to experience the Holy Week in a fresh way, a way that will remind us what is at the heart of those liturgies. It is also a good opportunity for our lay ministers to lead the service on one of those days that are regarded as most special in the Church. So I am delighted that our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Service will be led by our lay ministers while I am providing a technical support. Those services will be simple, creative and reflective service which will help us to walk together with Christ in these extra ordinary times. Here is the detail.

**Maundy Thursday Service:** 1 April at 8.30 pm online (Youtube and Facebook)

This will be an **online only** service, livestreamed on Youtube and Facebook.

Prester will lead this service. Order of Service will be sent via email.

**Good Friday Service:** 2 April at 2.30 pm at church

This will be an **offline only** service in the church building.

Liz will lead this service. Order of Service will be available in the church building. **Please do let Liz know if you are going to attend this service in person at [lizmk@outlook.com](mailto:lizmk@outlook.com) or 01604636947.**

**Easter Vigil Service:** Holy Saturday 3 April, St. Ragener's Chapple at St. Christopher's at 6.30 pm

This year's Holy Saturday service will be offered at St. Ragener's Chapple at St. Christopher's. We

will have a simplified but still meaningful Easter Vigil Liturgy. There could be some spare seats available so if you wish to attend this service, then please do let me know via email or phone. It is likely that we may not be able to accommodate everyone for Easter Sunday service (I will explain this further down) so if you are not going to attend the Easter Sunday Service for whatever reasons, you may consider coming to this Easter Vigil Service or any other services mentioned above. This service will not be livestreamed.

## **Easter Sunday**

Our initial plan was to have our Easter Sunday Service out in the churchyard. Unfortunately this seems to be unlikely. According to the weather forecast, it seems the weather is going to be warmer than Spain before Easter and then around Easter it will drop. Of course, this may change but as things stand now, it seems there is going to be a cold wind from the North on Easter Sunday morning. **It seems very likely that we will have our Easter Sunday Service inside the building.** This means we can have only maximum 40-50 people in the building while still keeping the social distancing measures.

As the numbers are very limited, if you are able to access the service online, then please may I ask you to consider the possibility of kindly giving the seats to those who are not able to access the service online or to those who have not been able to come to worship for a long time. I know most of you haven't been able to worship in the church building for a long time. So I am aware this may not be an easy ask. I hope that the services offered during the Holy Week will help you to attend at least one service in person. We just have to be kind and gracious to each other, look out for each other in these very difficult times. If you have already booked your seat and if you would like to offer your slot for others in case there is no more seats available for others, then please do let Dianne know so she can prioritise her list.

As we come out of the lockdown, we will be able to increase the numbers gradually which you can see it in the recovery plan that I sent you a few weeks ago. I am very sorry that we will not be able to see everyone in worship particularly on Easter Sunday. But I am confident that even if we cannot be in the church building, the risen Lord will come to us just like he did when his disciples were unable to go out.

## **After Easter Sunday**

After Easter Sunday, our Sunday service will be in the church building. We will still aim to go out and enjoy the outdoor space while worshipping together but this might come a bit later when the weather will be warm enough. In the meantime, please book your seats in advance with Dianne. Please note that the booking phonenumber works from Thursday 9 am to Saturday 1 pm.

### **Easter Trail**

Our Easter Trail, beautifully written by Susie and installed by Children and Youth Committee is available now for everyone to enjoy. You can follow the story of the first Easter told by different characters who were part of that great story. Those who complete the trail will be able to find a hidden treasure beautifully made by Celia. We will offer also Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday 3 April in the afternoon. If you are interested in this, please contact Cathy at [cathytinsley18@gmail.com](mailto:cathytinsley18@gmail.com).

### **Peter's message on livestreaming**

Peter wrote recently about his experience on livestreaming our services. Here is his article.

*Jun asked me to write a short piece for the newsletter, I suppose to give the view from behind the camera as we worship each week. I wanted to explain the issues that we have faced since we have come back to church and to give some reassurance that we are trying to tackle the problems that we face, and tackle them we shall!*

*It seems that we have become rather sophisticated in how we delivering our live online service and it requires a certain amount broadband. Unfortunately coming back to the church building has meant that we have a lower width of broadband as instead of a lovely fibre optic service we have an old copper telephone line. Each time we bring someone in from another location, this takes up more of the bandwidth along with the cameras and the microphones that we have in church.*

*The crack team of parish people are working on how we improve the broadband as we intend to keep streaming services even when we are all allowed back. In the short term, as Jun has explained, we are taking steps to maximise the online experience and will only be streaming in You Tube.*

*Thank you all for tuning in each week, it is lovely to see your comments, and have your help to*

*let me know when it is going wrong. I am sorry that we have not yet achieved anything like perfection yet, but hope that the 'authentic' online experience adds something to your week. Jun and I have learnt an awful lot through this time and have also had a great deal of fun, even if there have been some rather stressful moments. My most memorable experience was losing the broadband signal when the Bishop was with us. I did apologise profusely and I am pleased to report that he is still talking to me.*

*From where I have been sitting it really does feel like we have held our community together and been able to share something special, even though we are not in the same place. I really look forward to those hellos on a Sunday morning and cannot wait to be saying that hello to you in person soon.*

*The service each week is a genuine team effort from a lot of people who have had to learn many new skills in a short period of time, a huge well done to that team and thank you again for bearing with us whilst we have worked this all out.*

### **Prester's Lockdown Musings: Perseverance**

Prester continues to write his musings. Here is his latest contribution.

*Like many people, I have tried to keep fit in lockdown by walking round the area near my home. It's surprising what and who you may see out and about. From the lesser spotted PCC member to the greater spotted warden, there is a wonderful variety! But one of my favourite sightings in recent weeks lacks legs (or wings) for its mobility. It's white, about the size of a puppy, and in its way is as appealing. It gets around on wheels, guided by GPS navigation. It is in fact a robot, sent out by a local supermarket to deliver smaller orders. I believe those who use the service find the robot, like its owners, cooperative.*

*The technology involved is clearly sophisticated. To watch it cross a busy road, waiting at a crossing before continuing its steady progress, is a fascinating exercise. Everywhere it goes people stop, look, take photographs.*

*My favourite moment is when it gets to a kerb. Here things become more difficult. It stops. The front wheels ascend, with some difficulty. The middle wheels struggle to engage an obstacle almost as tall as they are. The rear wheels push forward. It takes time. Often multiple attempts are needed. But it persists. It doesn't give up.*

*It occurs to me that I would do well to emulate that robot. Right now, as I try to deal with some*



*unpleasant side effects following recent treatment, I feel like I am coming up against obstacles which I need to surmount. I need to keep going. I need to persevere.*

*If you had told me at the start of the year that God would use a robot to illustrate a spiritual lesson I would have looked at you with at least one eyebrow raised! But perseverance is a common theme in the New Testament. My concordance shows there are thirteen references to it in the epistles. Perhaps the most challenging is in the Letter of James. It begins "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds." Really? Why? "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. "*

*James is saying that we should respond positively in difficult circumstances. "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete."*

*If we wish to have a mature, rounded faith and character, then we need to display perseverance. We need to have faith that, though it may take time, God is doing something in us.*

*We may have concerns that the obstacles may be too steep, and may defeat us. I have, just once, seen the robot get to a kerb and try to climb it, only to fall on its back. Momentarily, it was helpless, like an overturned beetle. Then the person nearby picked it up and set it back on its way. And I believe that if we were to find ourselves knocked back God would intervene in a similar way. "God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13.)*

## **Chaplaincy at St. Christopher's**

I am delighted that once again Revd. Rachel and I will restart our chaplaincy work based on weekly basis. A communion service for the residents will be offered every Thursday at 10.15 am. Rachel and I will take part in the lab test programme weekly and do the lateral flow test prior to our visit to the home.

## **Roy Horner**

It is with great sadness that I announce that our friends, Roy Horner, died last Tuesday night. He departed peacefully in his sleep. May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Our prayers and condolences to Judith and his family.

With love in Christ

Jun