

24 March 2020

Dear Friends,

I think we are all in a state of shock after the announcement from the Prime Minister last night, however much we thought it might come to this.

We know from the experience of countries around the world that this is only the next stage in an unfolding crisis unlike anything we have seen in our lifetime.

Please listen for the updated guidance and look at the diocesan website every day; our Director of Communication Jim Butterworth is doing a great job in getting the right information to us quickly as soon as it becomes available. A [dedicated web page](#) has an archive of key statements, policies, and information, and a newly created bulletin, Coronavirus Briefing, will be sent out to the diocese on a regular basis to keep you informed. If you haven't ready subscribed to this, [please do so here](#).

The great truth is that though the church buildings are closed and our movements restricted, the church of Jesus Christ is never closed. In fact, the church is more open than ever. To see some of the live streaming from last Sunday and hear the stories of what is going on in communities in very different places is a gift of real hope.

I'm praying as we are now at home, that home itself, around a table perhaps, will become even more the centre of worship and prayer. Just reading a psalm or other part of the Bible together and praying would be great. We are hoping to let you know about more resources very soon, including resources for children and young people.

Today's psalm set for the Holy Communion in the Church of England's daily readings is Psalm 46, which could not be more appropriate.

*"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble."*

And especially verse 2

*"Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea."*

The well-known hymn "O God our help in ages past" is based on this psalm, and the more modern chant based on verse 10 of the psalm "Be still and know that I

am God” and the other two verses of that song “I am the Lord that healeth thee” and “In You O Lord I put my trust”.

These words are still true, and not just for us, so please, when we pray, can we pray them for those in our link dioceses in Melanesia and Aru and Boga in DR Congo.

Whatever these days bring, and however the Lord calls us to show his love and care, and however we may support those in the front line of our care in the NHS and other places, these words that close Psalm 46 remain his promise to us,

*“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge”.*

With love in Christ,

+Keith