

All Saints' Church

Cottenham with Rampton



Pastoral Letter #4

1st April 2020

Dear Church Family,

I do hope that this letter finds you well. It's been less than 2 weeks since Boris introduced the lockdown but for many of us it will already feel much longer, unable to see family and friends in quite the same way, travel freely, go to work, and worship together at church. I really struggle with seeing the doors of our churches locked as both have been beacons of hope to the villages they serve through many centuries. But close them we must, as our contribution to fighting the spread of the virus.

Many churches up and down the country are asking themselves the question: *'How are we to be Church when we can no longer meet together?'* My thoughts over the last week have turned to the people of Israel taken into captivity in Babylon about 600 years before Christ. Many of us will know Psalm 137 (on which the Boney M song 'Rivers of Babylon' is based), where the psalmist asks *'How shall we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land?'* With no temple, and in a land where other Gods were worshipped, the people of Israel were lost. But then, word comes from the prophet Jeremiah who says,

'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." And then we have those wonderful words of hope: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you"* (Jeremiah 29). And suddenly, a situation that seemed hopeless becomes hopeful as the people realise that their God has not left them at all, that he is very much with them in their struggle.

And it's the person of Daniel (of the lion's den) who gives us a glimpse of what this looks like in practice. In Daniel 6, unable to go the normal place of prayer (the temple), what does Daniel do? In verse 10 we're told that Daniel *'went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.'* And that's what we're called to do – to read Scripture and pray just as we have before, knowing that God is as much with us in this crisis as he was the people of Israel all those centuries ago.

Last week I posted online (and by post to those of you without Internet) a 'Prayer and Worship at Home' booklet. I hope you are finding it useful. But there are also lots of other

resources out there – your usual Lent material, various Apps, and both online services and those televised through the BBC.

This Sunday I hope to lead a short Service of the Word on Facebook Live at 10.30am so, if you haven't already 'liked' All Saints' Cottenham Facebook Page, now is the time to do it. I will preach my sermon for Palm Sunday – the last in our sermon series on Determined Discipleship, but this will also be on the website for you to read (and in paper form to those not online). The service will be live at 10.30am but can be viewed any time thereafter.

During Holy Week, we had planned some 'Reflections' at 7.30pm in All Saints' Cottenham, using Stephen Cottrell's book *'The Things He Carried: A Journey to the Cross'*. As these cannot now take place in the Church, I am inviting anyone who has downloaded Zoom (the video conferencing service) to join me in these reflections at 7.30pm each evening (Mon to Fri). Just let me know that you want to join in and I'll send you an invite. For Easter Sunday, I will plan another service live on Facebook (if the first one goes well!) and celebrate Communion on your behalf. For those not online, I will post out a service you can follow at home.

Thank you to Alison Wedgbury for connecting together our young families and producing material for 'Virtual Junior Church'. It's great to hear that our children and young people are still able to receive some teaching during this time.

Please continue to remember in prayer those who are currently unwell: Jean Wilmshurst, Pat and John Easterling, Martin Hudson, Rona Gardner, Brenda Morphet, Susan Gibbs (Peter Wilbourn's sister) and Barbara Wilbourn Smith (Peter's cousin). Please also pray for Sue and Mike Smith following the death of Sue's mother this week. Funerals are very difficult at the moment with restrictions on travel and numbers.

A few people have asked what to do about financial giving to the church whilst we aren't meeting on a Sunday. If you currently give through the plate or the envelopes and would like to move to the Parish Giving Scheme, then please let me know and I'll get a pack of information out to you. If not, please don't worry.

Do keep in contact with one another, offering prayer and support as needed. These are times for us all to both give and receive. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you need anything – my diary is unsurprisingly quite empty!

With love and prayer,

Lynda

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