

Welcome to the vicarage

How rapidly things changed

Last week I was inviting people to come to church.

This week I'm telling folk to stay away....it's great grief....but nothing to the challenge of what we are facing and if this is the cost we can pay it.

Even a few weeks ago we wouldn't have thought it would come to this.

But there are good things and even some funny moments. In times past a visitor might bring flowers or chocolate...our middle daughter returned home and brought toilet rolls. My neighbours continue to keep spirits up with texts and funny clips.

I had assumed that the tighter restrictions would still allow me to go to church and pray and celebrate Eucharist ... But the archbishops have made it clear that cannot happen. Of course you can pray anywhere....but I do like to pray for the church and community in the church.

Last Sunday....being in church was both comforting and worshipful...hearing Rob play the organ and Katherine the piano – familiar worship tunes and hymns. But it was also very difficult to conduct a Communion one my own. In fact I couldn't and I was quite overwhelmed. I invited Revd Terry to come and say the responses so that I had that sense of community.

It turned my mind turned once again to Carol Gay's painting and to a favourite picture of my own.



This photograph is the top of Scandale Pass and I'll tell you about that another time. It's the dry stone wall I'm thinking of. The craftsman uses every stone and

every stone can be useful and play a part. There's no point walking a distance to try and get a "better" stone when with a little ingenuity and skill they are all fitted in.

I showed this picture at my interview at Holy Trinity because I had been asked to talk about collaboration.

St Peter – 1 Peter 2:5 - ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^{to} to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

It was the same passage that inspired Carol Gay to paint her picture.



Carol is married to Stuart who served his curacy at HT 2001 to 2004 I've placed the original large version in the Chapel at church and have a smaller copy in my study.

On my interview day, Jane Ward Hall brought her copy and hung it in the lounge at the vicarage where the formal interview took place. Clearly God was at work in our hearts and minds...that same passage, seen in different ways and yet at the heart of what it means to be church.

This is the reality of church. Everyone matters, everyone can belong.

Whether you are comfortable at the side or you like to be in the thick of it. Whether you are seen more or you like to be a background person. Whether you feel connected to everyone or you only know one or two people, we all make up the living church. Our gifts and skills our personalities and likes and dislikes...all part of the mix of living church

Our most visible expression of being church is a Sunday morning gathering. We come together – in different groups which is all part of it – to express worship and to do so with others. Being part of a church community is a non-negotiable of the faith. We are called into community as God is community within himself...which we really ought to know as we are Holy Trinity, worshiping Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It cuts deep when we are isolated from each other...but it's for the sake of others just as the church itself is there for the sake of others.

St Peter goes on. 2:9&10 ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Although we cannot gather together and visibly be community, nevertheless we are community keeping in touch, emailing, texting, calling each other. Each of us are in touch with a whole different wider community of neighbours and family and friends. We realize what it means to belong to each other when we can't actually meet.

So I would like to offer prayers, thanking God for the church community – dispersed like those first Christians who scattered far and wide from Jerusalem.

(What followed was extemporaneous prayer for the church, our leaders and the world community.)