

# The Parish of Christchurch



*The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch  
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell*

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Friends,

First we had a flurry of activity following the government's announcement of restrictions on movement and the Archbishops' direction about the closure of our churches. Then we had another flurry of activity as we prepared for Holy Week and Easter. And now? Now, with those initial slightly frantic weeks behind us, we are trying to find a rhythm and a pattern that we can sustain, and which will sustain us, for the foreseeable future. After a period of rapid change, we are trying to work out what the new normal looks like.

I think this is true not only in our shared life together as a church community, as we plan acts of worship, times of prayer and the ongoing administration of the Parish, but in our own individual and family lives as well. I know that my routines and practices have been disrupted and pretty well knocked sideways, and I suspect this is true for many of us: we are gradually figuring out the new normal. Of course, there will be some among us who are well-used to staying at home for the bulk of their time and relying on others for help with the daily chores and necessities of life: maybe the rest of us, who are not used to living with such restrictions, could usefully listen to their stories and learn something from them about life during 'lockdown'.

Speaking personally, I am having to learn to be patient, to re-assess what I can get done in a day, to reconcile myself to some things having to be postponed or given up altogether. And if I find that I am becoming a bit tetchy and irritable as a result, I must remind myself that others will also be feeling a bit unsettled and on edge as they too are under new strains and stresses. So I try to remember to be gentle with others as I need them to be gentle with me.

Do you find yourself dreaming about how things might be 'when this is all over'? Do you plan for a special celebration or treat or indulgence? Do you wonder how our economic life will recover and worry what the lasting impact will be? This enforced down-time is an excellent opportunity for some reflection about the future, not only in our personal lives, but also in our life together as the Church and in our wider society. We have an opportunity to rethink how we live, as individuals, as Church and as society. 'When this is all over', we do not necessarily have to return to the way things were; indeed, perhaps we should not aim to return to the way things were, but should aim to allow these difficult days to change us for the better.

One really good thing that has begun since we became unable to meet together in person is that we have begun to pray together more frequently and in greater numbers. During Lent, we began a series of sermons about prayer and also small study groups focused on prayer. Charles wanted us to think together about how we pray, why we pray and, above all, I think he wanted us to develop a practice (or habit) of prayer. At first, it seemed that this plan was going to fall victim to the virus, as the sermon series stopped and the small groups had to be cancelled. But what has happened? We are praying together, and I dare say also alone, more than before. This is happening most noticeably at Morning Prayer at 8.30 am each day (except Sundays) when we pray together online: we now

regularly have more people meeting to pray together midweek than ever before, and more each day than for most of our Sunday services. If you have not yet joined this time of prayer, why not give it a try this week? Details are on the parish website ([www.christchurchpriory.org](http://www.christchurchpriory.org)) and if you email [conference@christchurchpriory.org](mailto:conference@christchurchpriory.org) we will send instructions about how to join in. If you do not have a computer or do not use the internet, that is not a problem – you can join in by telephone (any phone – it does not have to be a smartphone). If you phone the temporary parish office contact number (01202 800888), we can take your details and give you a call to explain how this can work. I would encourage you to give this a go – the sense of mutual support and ‘togetherness’ that is generated through shared prayer is a rare and precious thing and now is the perfect time to benefit from it.

Of course, it is not all rosiness and optimism. I suspect that for many of us the effects of the virus have come closer in the past week – perhaps people we know, perhaps even family members, have contracted the virus and are gravely ill. Or perhaps the risk of doing so is causing anxiety that is becoming damaging. We must acknowledge the reality and the severity of the pain and distress that is now palpable. But we know this: that the darkness and fear of death will not defeat the light and the love and the hope that flows unceasingly from the risen Christ and which is freely offered to all of us. He conquered death that we might have life. We need not fear death, for it is not the end. Now is the time for our faith to reveal that truth. ‘Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning’ (Psalm 30, v. 5).

May God bless you and keep you close during this coming week, and may you know the joy of Easter every day.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Evans', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rev'd Jonathan Evans