

The Parish of Christchurch



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

for Sunday 26th April, 2020 – Easter 3

Dear Friends,

Christ is risen – He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We say it every Sunday in the Easter season and I've already promised that whenever we are allowed back into church we'll say it again. In our eagerness to proclaim Jesus' resurrection, however, I wonder if you have noticed the importance of the two shortest words in those phrases: 'He is'.

The Easter Proclamation is in the present tense. Jesus' resurrection took place nearly two thousand years ago, so there would perhaps have been justification for proclaiming that 'He was raised'. But no, every year we proclaim a continuously present tense: 'He is risen indeed.'

What brought this to mind is that this is the sixth Sunday since our churches were closed for public worship. And next Monday it will be five weeks since the Prime Minister announced the lockdown that we have been keeping ever since. I mention this not to engender a sense of despondency, but because I sense (and, of course, I might be mistaken) that we may be reaching a crucial stage of this extended period separation.

Up until now, many of us have been doing one of two things: looking back or looking forward. It's only human nature that we should look back to how things were before the lockdown, when we were able to meet together week by week for worship, and could enjoy post-service fellowship over a cup of coffee. It's unsurprising that we look back with gratitude and appreciation; these things are much missed: I know, because many of you have told me.

Looking forward is equally reasonable. Of course, we want to be back in church, alongside familiar faces and welcoming smiles, sharing in the liturgy, hearing the choral music, singing the hymns, exchanging the peace, and enjoying one another's company. For myself, I long for the day when our Sunday and midweek services, and the daily round of Morning and Evening Prayer can start up again.

Looking back; looking forward. Both entirely understandable, probably even inevitable; neither is wrong. And yet, there's a danger in both: because they can all too easily divert our attention away from the only place we can truly live and be with God, which is the present.

This goes all the way back to Moses. When he turned to look at the bush that was burning but was not consumed, he met God. When God gives Moses his mission to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses has a question about what he should answer the people when 'they ask me, "What is his name?, what answer shall I give them? God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM ... I AM has sent me to you."' (Exodus 3.13-15)

There's a profound truth in this, which the Jewish nation had to re-learn when they were taken into exile in Babylon. Not only were they away from their homes and homeland: they were far from the Temple, till then the heart of their faith and worship and faith. It turned out not to be the catastrophe they had initially feared. They learned they could still worship in their new, unwelcome circumstances. Though in exile, God was there and they were still his people. Life, faith, worship, fellowship and service all went on.

No-one knows how long this will continue, weeks or months; nor when we may be able to be together again in church. Who we are as the Body of Christ, and what he has entrusted to us of his mission and ministry, cannot be put on hold till then. We are Christ's people, Easter people, today, tomorrow and every day after that. Today is where we can look for him, encounter him, spend time with him, and serve him.

I want to close with a prayer, based on two prayers I found recently. I shall be using this prayer this week and invite you to join me:

Dear God, I spend so much time reliving yesterday
or anticipating tomorrow
that I lose sight of the only time that is really mine,
the present moment.

Help me to live in the present.

Allow me to be present to you,
as you are always present to me,
each moment of each day.

Allow me to be present
to the gift of each moment,
no matter how ordinary,
so that I can be present
to the joy
and wonder
of your loving presence
each moment of each day. Amen.

May the presence, love, joy and compassion of the risen Christ be with you today and always.



A reminder from our Planned Giving Officer

For some time now, the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) has been our recommended method of Planned Giving. In addition, it is strongly commended by the Church of England. Now that the government has extended the period of lockdown, and with the possibility that it may be extended yet further, I am writing to encourage those of you who normally make your gift at one of our services, either through the blue envelope scheme or the collection plate, to consider changing your method of giving to PGS, as the most effective and simple way by which you can continue to support the parish financially in these difficult days.

PGS has the benefits of being convenient (because it uses Direct Debit) and straightforward to manage. You can set the frequency of your donation to monthly, quarterly or yearly; the full amount of every donation is received by the parish. Where appropriate, PGS will even claim Gift Aid on our behalf. And when you want to change the amount of your gift, up or down, this too is easily done.

You can now register your interest in setting up a Direct Debit gift to Christchurch Priory Parish by completing an online form at <https://register.parishgiving.org.uk> and a member of the PGS team will contact you via telephone within 5 working days. You will require our PGS parish code: 41-6009101 at the point of signing-up to ensure your donation is directed to our parish. Thank you.

Next Sunday

Next Sunday evening, May 3rd, from 7.00 – 8.00pm, there will be a special Prayer Gathering here in Christchurch, under the aegis of Christchurch Fellowship of Christchurch. Members of all the churches of Christchurch are warmly welcome to join in. This Prayer Gathering will be via the increasingly familiar medium of Zoom; it will also be live streamed to YouTube.

This live gathering will include prayer for the town, our churches and sharing in Communion. For those participating via Zoom, there may be the possibility of using breakout areas to pray for different subjects.

Everyone participating is encouraged to have some bread and wine with them, much as we do on a Sunday morning in our online services. The form of Communion will probably be very simple, much as it was in the Upper Room when Jesus met with his disciples; it will give us a unique opportunity to break bread with our fellow Christians in Christchurch.

The Zoom link for the meeting was in the letter sent or emailed to all church members. If you need a reminder, please email the Vicar with your request.