

# The Parish of Christchurch

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



for Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2020 – Easter 5

Dear Friends,

Back in early February I attended a meeting about the Christchurch celebrations for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day, the end of the war in Europe. Although the conflict in the Far East was to continue for another three months, VE Day 1945 was a time of celebration and thanksgiving, just as VE Day 2020 was intended to be a day for commemoration and national unity. We had planned to hold a special service at 10.00am on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>, and to transfer the Sung Eucharist to 6.30pm.

All those public gatherings are cancelled, or at least on hold, thanks to coronavirus. This Sunday's online service will still reflect the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary; later in the day, the promised announcement from the Prime Minister may reveal whether it may be possible to focus all the planned public celebrations to mark the end of World War 2 in all its theatres of conflict on VJ Day, on August 14. That would be fitting. Certainly, a combined commemoration could, finally, do justice to those of our armed forces veterans, and those of other nations, for whom VE Day was not the end, and who have felt forgotten for so long.

What seems undeniable is that the coronavirus pandemic is the most serious crisis to confront our nation since World War 2. The expression of thanks to the NHS and all its staff that now takes place at 8.00pm every Thursday evening has for some weeks been the most perceptible sign of a heightened sense of community. That phenomenon led Peter Hennessy, Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary College, London and a crossbench peer, to write in *The Tablet* on April 22:

'I am not alone in hearing in that glorious cacophony the sound of a people and a nation rediscovering their better selves. The question is: can it – will it – be sustained post-corona and be turned into something durable? Long ago we did exactly this in the decisive war and post-war years of the 1940s, which also shaped the Queen and to which she returned in her short but moving address from Windsor Castle last week ... The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves once more. We can do it. It is entirely up to us. The road to 2050 can be the remaking of us; a high road, not a low road for the country and our people to travel.'

So will this 'rediscovery of our better selves' be sustained? It's a fair question. If this is to happen, it will be because of choices made by people like us: it's far too important to be left to politicians.

But it prompts another question: as those who follow Jesus Christ, what might 'the very best of ourselves' look like? Some principles from Scripture come to mind:

Love one another as I have loved you. (John 13,34)

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12.30-31)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12.1-2)

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2.3-5)

Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. (James 1.22)

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1.27)

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Do not repay anyone evil for evil ... If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12.13, 17a, 18, 21)

That will do for starters (though clearly there is much more where that came from). Picking up from something Jonathan wrote three weeks ago, '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.' Just so.

We have an opportunity, indeed an obligation, to review all we do in the light of what God is showing us in these days. Sustained, prayerful reflection on Bible passages like those quoted above, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may lead us to revise our priorities so that we may be completely aligned with what God is doing in Christchurch, and beyond.

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Christian Aid Week begins today. Normally, there would be house-to-house collections and other ways of raising funds to support Christian Aid's work across the world. This year, it will be up to people giving online. I encourage us all to visit Christian Aid's website and consider making a donation.

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As many of you will know, the impact of Covid-19 on the Church has been severe. For example, most parishes, all dioceses and the national Church are experiencing a significant and sudden drop in income. We are going through this in Christchurch: because there are no Sunday collections, giving is down; income from visitors is non-existent; the shop and café are closed. This position is replicated across the diocese.

One consequence is that the Wardens and I have taken the step of asking some of our staff to go on furlough, in line with the government's Job Retention Scheme (JRS). This allows employers to reclaim 80% of the salaries of furloughed staff. The staff in question are: Geoffrey Morgan, Richard Newell, and Maureen Whiles; also Sarah Alcock and Susan Emms, of the CPL staff; all of them are unable to carry out their normal duties because of the lockdown and have agreed to be furloughed. Furthermore, at her request, we have also agreed to furlough Heidi Haagensen on account of her childcare commitments, again in line with the JRS. During this period, they may not work for the parish. All six continue to receive their full salary.

The diocese centrally is having to make substantial cost savings. This has already included putting a number of lay staff in the Diocesan Office on furlough. Others have been reduced to part-time work.

I have to inform you that earlier this week the diocese decided to put all stipendiary curates on furlough, with immediate effect, until the end of June. This includes the Revd Jonathan Evans, who was officially informed of the diocesan plan by email on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> and required to respond by Thursday lunchtime. He has agreed, with very great regret. He knows he has my full and unconditional support in the painful decision he has made; I trust he has yours also.

During the weeks of lockdown Jonathan has been hard at work, in ways many of you will be aware of, while others are unseen by almost all. We had envisaged that his multifaceted and much-valued ministry would continue through the lockdown. Sadly, this is no longer possible.

Of this, Jonathan writes:

'This has all happened very fast indeed, and I very much regret that I have not been able to tell you about this most unwelcome development in person, or at least by phone. It is hard for me, and also for Alice, to be asked to withdraw from parish life at this most difficult of times. I will badly miss sharing in our common life together, and will be grateful for your prayers for all our family.'

I am grateful to Jonathan for his gracious words at a difficult time. By the time you receive this mailing, he will already be on furlough. For the benefit of Jonathan and Alice, and of us all, we need to recognise a number of implications of this:

- As with our own staff, Jonathan is not permitted to carry out any ministry during these weeks, or any of the duties he would normally carry out.
- Please do not try to contact him, either by email or his work number. Both will be automatically forwarded until his furlough ends.
- Speaking from personal experience, please do not try to contact Jonathan via Alice, even just to ask how he is. Rest assured that Jonathan and Alice will be supported, cherished and cared for throughout these difficult weeks.
- The diocesan decision is bound to result in a re-distribution of the tasks Jonathan has been undertaking on behalf of us all, and a consequent increase in the workload of a number of staff and volunteers. I hope you will understand, therefore, if some of the things we have been doing since lockdown began may no longer be sustainable. We shall do our best.

I know this news will be received with sadness and shock. Please remember Jonathan, Alice and their family in your prayers. Please pray also for Heidi, Geoffrey, Maureen, Richard, Sarah and Susan, also on furlough. And please pray for the staff team, for the wardens and the PCC as we work together for the Kingdom of God in this place.

In the light of this news, I believe we all stand in need of God's blessing. So, to close, here is an Easter blessing for us all:

God the Father,  
by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,  
strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and always. Amen.

*Charles Stewart*