

The Parish of Christchurch

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



for Sunday 17th May, 2020 – Easter 6

Dear Friends,

It's been another challenging week. Nationally and internationally, Covid-19 still dominates everything: tragically, the death toll continues to rise, each death signifying a life ended, a family in mourning, and a circle of friends unable to be at the funeral; our concern for those at risk, whether our own loved ones, NHS and care home staff, other key workers, not least for the provision of good PPE; and now, though not yet with clarity or consistency, the first announcements of what a phased release from lockdown might look like.

I know, from phone conversations, that many of us are struggling to come to terms with all this. This is understandable: it shows that we are human. It is also a sign of our capacity for sympathy and compassion.

One of the shared experiences of living with the lockdown is that how we think, what we do and what we expect are all having to adapt to new circumstances. It's become a commonplace to speak of 'the new normal', even if there's little agreement as to what that might entail. In that context, some famous words from President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address in January 1960 challenged me again this week:

"Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

For sixty years, those words have inspired people everywhere, children and adults, to recognise the importance of serving others. I found myself paraphrasing President Kennedy's words in the context of our parish here in Christchurch:

Ask not what your church can do for you – ask what you can do for your church.

That reminded me of something I heard at a conference some years ago: the speaker said that in churches "complaints are generally about cruise-ship issues." When asked what she meant, she described the Church in terms of two competing images: the Church as cruise ship; or as battleship.

In practice, this means that if we (even subconsciously) evaluate our church in terms of a cruise ship, then the questions will go something like this: Is my cruise pleasant, relaxing and comfortable? Do I like the music they play in the ballroom? Is the service good? Do I like the captain and his crew? Are my wants met? Can I have a wonderful time without having to do anything?

In other words, a cruise-ship approach to church will focus on us, and what we get out of it. It will be about what we like and what we don't. And if we don't like it, we can always book with another company next time. We don't have to come back.

Whereas in a battleship, there are no passengers. Every crew member has a role to perform. Every member serves; and if crew members don't fulfil their role, the mission of the ship and all its personnel is at risk. For us as a parish, that affects not only those within our fellowship, but the wider community we seek to serve.

If the principle underlying 'Ask not what your church can do for you – ask what you can do for your church' – which is very close to 'Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others' (Philippians 2.2) – became part of our 'new normal', and something each one of us acted upon, it would utterly transform our mission and our capacity to carry out Jesus' ministry that Jesus together in this place. What do you think?

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This time last week I told you about the diocesan decision to put stipendiary curates on furlough, including the Revd Jonathan Evans. Since then I have received many phone calls, emails and letters expressing upset, shock and, in some cases, anger.

This week I am able to bring you better news. On Monday of this week, with the agreement of the Churchwardens, I began an extended conversation by phone and email with some in diocesan leadership to discuss an idea that had come to me in the wee small hours of Saturday morning.

The idea is simply put: rather than Jonathan being on furlough for two months, which would let the diocese reclaim 80% of his stipend from the government, might it be possible instead for us as a parish to contribute the 80% and so release Jonathan to return to ministry forthwith?

The benefits are obvious. At a time when we all want our ministry and outreach to be the best they can be, for the sake of our members and also for the wider community, during this period of lockdown and closed churches, this proposal would let us 'redeem' Jonathan Evans from furlough – to redeem, meaning 'to buy back' or 'to recover', is a familiar Biblical principle – and so ensure that we can carry out the ministry entrusted to us all with as full a staff and volunteer team as possible. If anything, lockdown and social distancing require us to do even more than what once we thought 'normal', to support and sustain those for whom we are responsible.

The answer I received was, 'Yes, we can.' This is very good news.

What I said to the Standing Committee on Wednesday morning, and which they agreed unanimously, was that we should ask you – members of our regular worshipping community – to contribute to make this happen. We need to raise £5,000 in total – the equivalent of what the diocese would otherwise have received for putting a curate on furlough for two months – or £2,500 per month. I know from a number of phone calls last weekend that some of you were already asking what you could do to help? This is how.

Any gift you can make, however small, will be very welcome. One way of looking at it that may be helpful, is that if 100 people each gave £25 in each of these two months, we would reach the target. And if people were able to apply Gift Aid, so much the better.

Two things: first, we are asking for two months' support only. Second, though the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement extended JRS until October, in the event of any proposed extension to the furlough scheme in this diocese, I would not agree to Jonathan (in effect) being asked to go back on furlough.

If you would like to make a contribution for this purpose, please do one of two things:

- a) If you are giving by bank transfer, please pay whatever you have decided to give to the PCC of Christchurch General Account: sort code 52-21-34, account number 52427900; and in the space for the reference, please type CURATE. If you are able to apply Gift Aid to your donation, please also send Ian Penny an email at prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org
- b) If you are giving by cheque, please send your donation to: the Administrator, Priory House, Quay Road, Christchurch, BH23 1BX, again indicating whether Gift Aid may be applied.

Whichever method you prefer, may I encourage you to make your donation without delay, preferably by Wednesday of this week? Thank you for supporting our ministry and mission in this way.

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Daily Hope, a free national phone line launched by the Archbishop, is still accessible by anyone with a phone. The free phone line, available 24 hours a day on 0800 804 8044, was set up particularly for anyone who is unable to join online church services during the lockdown. Callers will hear a special greeting from the Archbishop before being able to choose from a range of options, including hymns, prayers, reflections and advice on COVID-19.

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Thy Kingdom Come

This Thursday, 21st May, is Ascension Day, the moment when the Easter season changes direction and our focus turns towards Pentecost, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. In recent years Ascension Day has marked the beginning of Thy Kingdom Come (TKC), an ecumenical, international prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost. We are all encouraged to pray for five people to come to know the love of Christ.

This year's theme for Thy Kingdom Come 2020 is 'Prayer and Care'. Canon Chris Russell, of the Archbishop of Canterbury's staff writes:

'... however important prayer is we know the pray-er is called to action. So, this year we will be encouraging all not simply to pray that friends and family, colleagues and neighbours might encounter the love of God in Christ, but that they would experience that love in action. We are calling this 'Prayer and Care'. Of course, in churches up and down the country doing this is a daily reality, and this time of prayer gives itself to an even deeper engagement with the needs around us. There are a whole load of ways we are suggesting this could happen; by care, by contact, by service – but serving as Christ serves.'

You can find out more about Thy Kingdom Come and the resources that have been made available this year from their website, www.thykingdomcome.global

There will also be a link on the parish website to the TKC Prayer Diary and to this year's Novena (a nine-day pattern of prayer), both of which you can download.

Across our Deanery there are a number of online opportunities to participate in Thy Kingdom Come,; links to all these services will be on our parish website, www.christchurchpriory.org. The services include:

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| Thursday May 21 at 7.00pm | Deanery Ascension Day Communion Service. The order of service will be on www.christchurchpriory.org |
| Sunday May 24 at 6.00pm | A Taizé Service from this parish, available on our website |
| Sunday May 31 at 6.00pm | Deanery Pentecost Service from Ringwood |

In addition, you are most welcome to join our parish Morning Prayer on Zoom, at 8.30am every weekday morning. Please email conference@christchurchpriory.org or phone 01202 800888 for information on how you can share in Morning Prayer.

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Soon after the start of the lockdown the parish made a donation to Christchurch Foodbank+ of £5,000, from the Parish Benevolent Fund, to help them support the community during the Covid-19 lockdown. The Foodbank has seen a significant rise in demand at a time when donations of food have been tailing off. In your prayers, please remember Tracy Blick, who runs it, their volunteers, and those they support in the community.

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Wherever you are, and however you may wish to participate in Thy Kingdom Come, may I encourage us all to pray the Lord's Prayer every day. Sharing in prayer together will keep us more connected than anything else we can do. Every blessing,

Charles Stewart