

# The Parish of Christchurch



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

Associate Priest: The Reverend Richard Partridge, The Paddocks, Holly Lane, Walkford, Dorset, BH23 5QQ  
T 07903 252230 E richardpartridge310@btinternet.com

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Dear Friends

In this week's pastoral letter I want to ask you a question. Where has God been during the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic? Perhaps you have been asked this by those who know that you have a Christian faith, perhaps you have even asked yourself this very question, or at least allowed yourself time and space to explore and reflect upon the answer. Well I dare say that there will be many theologians who would argue that we should have a series of quite deep and lengthy study sessions to cover adequately such an open question, but just for now, read again these words entitled "**Footprints.**"

*One night a man had a dream. He dreamed that he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way, but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me." The Lord replied, "My child, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your time of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."*

The author of those words known so well by many of us is sadly unknown. This is a great shame as the words have brought both hope and comfort to so many people and I have often been asked to read them at a funeral Service for a departed loved one. They have also provided me with the answer to the question that I opened this letter with, where has God been during the pandemic? And that answer is simply this. **God has been working continuous overtime**, and has been doing so by walking alongside us all and by carrying us in his loving arms when we have struggled in body, mind or spirit. He has been a comfort to those exploring faith for the first time perhaps, those returning to the faith and with us all as we try to find the words in prayer that truly express our desire for His love and peace and presence to be the centre piece of our human lives, and in particular, as we seek to be the good and loving neighbour to those we find in most need at this most difficult and demanding of times.

Each one of us, as we seek to further our very individual relationship with God will suffer setbacks in our own lives. God knows this and God accepts this. There is rarely a day that goes by when I don't feel that I could have done more or that I could have done something better. God knows this as well and almost despite this, He still calls me, as he calls each one of us, to keep on going and to be strengthened by the relationship that He wants to deepen with us all. Perhaps those are the moments when looking back in the footprints in the sand, we can identify most clearly His loving presence at work within us. Perhaps too, these are the moments when we identify or recognise the visible wounds inflicted to the body of Jesus as he hung upon the cross, wounds that reveal the cost of love, the love that God still holds for each one of

us, and the love that reminds us that he is always with us on our life's journey, in the good times and in the less than good times. Well if that is true, so also is the fact that He calls us to love and support one another in a similar way.

The pastoral care that we can offer to each other is in my mind at least, the strongest sign of a good and healthy Church community. Every one of us has a part to play in the provision of such care, but as with other areas of Church life, some people are called by God to publicly exercise such a ministry in the name of the Church. Such callings have to be recognised by the local Church, training is then offered and the ministry is then recognised by the wider Church as they are commissioned during an act of Worship and then sent out to do Gods will. Well I am delighted to be able to share with you that we have six people in our parish who have been approved by the PCC to undertake training to become Lay Pastoral Visitors, and this will begin later this month.

As we reach the 6 month period since restrictions on so many aspects of our lives were first imposed, may our prayer be that each one of us may continue to feel our Lord's presence at our side as he walks with us. May we also feel renewed and refreshed as we seek to be the good neighbour to others, especially to those who are suffering in any way at this time.

### **The Rule is 6. Social Gatherings.**

Earlier in the week the Prime Minister announced that from Monday a maximum of 6 people will be allowed to meet in public places and within our homes for social gatherings. There are a few exemptions to this new law which the Church of England is examining at this time and further guidance will follow in a later letter. However it has been confirmed that this new law DOES NOT apply to acts of Worship. Consequently, Services within the parish will continue in their current format. On Sundays this will be the BCP Holy Communion Service at 8.00am in the Lady Chapel. 10.00am Sung Eucharist in the Nave. Said Evening Prayer at 5pm in the Great Quire. Today, Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>, Canon Charles will Preside at the 10.00am Eucharist and we welcome our good friend, The Reverend Tom Stuckey who will be preaching. A reminder also that the 9.30am Service on a Sunday morning will resume at St George's on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Dates for your Diary.**

**Harvest Festival** will be held at both The Priory and at St George's on **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October**. This year we will be supporting the work of the Christchurch Foodbank Plus. More details will be published at a later date on how we as a parish can support this most important charity within our own local community.

**The All Souls Requiem** will take place at 10.00am on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October in the Priory. Please do feel free to let other people you know, especially those who have lost someone close to them during the last year, of this special Service. A warm welcome will await them all.

With my love and Prayers.

Richard.

Reverend Richard Partridge