



The Parish of Christchurch

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

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for 8th November 2020

Dear Friends,

So here we go again: another national lockdown, as we try to protect ourselves from the danger of the Coronavirus. We hope it will not last longer than the initial 4-week period, but we fear that the virus is unlikely to have disappeared altogether by early December. We hope that the infection rate will fall, but we fear that many will die. For some people, nothing has changed – many residents of care homes and nursing homes have been in constant isolation since March; they never came out of lockdown. Similarly, many of the most vulnerable have been shielding since March, and the permanently housebound may have seen little or no change in their daily lives in this last year. Yet for others, much has changed. Many can no longer go to work or visit the people they love and rely on for emotional support. Many already have or soon will lose their jobs as businesses collapse.

What then are we to do as the people whose commission is to proclaim 'Good News'? We might profitably try to make good use of the lockdown period, however it affects us, to do two things: deepen our relationship with God and reach out more to others.

Plants need to develop a good root system before they can send out shoots, branches, leaves and ultimately flowers and fruit. Our faith also needs good roots and we need to take time to develop them if we are to avoid being like the seed that fell on stony ground in the parable told by Jesus, which springs up quickly but becomes only a spindly plant that cannot withstand the strong winds that blow (Luke 8: 4-15). Throughout our lives we need consciously to nurture and feed our faith, spending time with God in prayer, spending time reading the Bible and other books or works of art or craft that help us to deepen and strengthen our relationship with God. Remember: all we need to do is draw close and open ourselves to the presence and love of God; God then meets with us and draws us on. It is not that we have to struggle and study and work out who and where God is; we simply have to allow ourselves to be met with. This is what is meant by 'waiting on God', and 'those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40: 31). Now is a good time to be doing this.

And, as our roots develop and we gain in spiritual strength, we shall have the resource to reach out to others to share the love of God. This we can do now. The reaching out will of course take different forms

– a shared meal or a chat over a cup of tea or coffee in a café or at home will not be possible for a while. But we can speak by phone, we can write cards or letters, we can use video calls if we are able. I know I have an address book full of friends to whom I hardly ever speak and with whom I am at risk of losing contact altogether. Now is a good time to resume contact, to catch up, to show that we care and have not forgotten or given up on people. Letting people know that you are thinking of them, and that you value them, can really help our sense of wellbeing – just remember how good you feel when you receive a kindly meant letter or card from someone. This is a way of maintaining a sense of togetherness and combatting the dangers of isolation and loneliness. Now is a good time to be doing this too.

These two activities of deepening our faith by spending time with God and reaching out to others to share the love we encounter in God are aspects of what the mystical writer Evelyn Underhill describes as our ‘thirst and longing’ for God. We thirst and long for God and as we encounter God, so a desire grows within us to speak to others of the love we discover, and to take practical steps to show and share that love with others: ‘We, hard and loveless, already stand in heaven. We open the stiff door of our hearts and direct our fluctuating wills to a completely present love and will, directing, moulding and creating us. One aspect of redemption and one meaning of the incarnate life of Christ is to show men how to love this present God; who comes to us in this thing and that thing, yet who induces in us a thirst and a longing that cannot be satisfied by any other thing than himself alone’ (Evelyn Underhill).

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SUNDAY EUCHARIST – we plan to record a simple and short Eucharist this week and make it available online via the parish website, from 9.30am on Sunday 8th November.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY SERVICE – a number of people have worked hard to put together a pre-recorded service of Remembrance and we are very grateful to them all. We plan to make this service available online via the parish website from 10.50 am on Sunday 8th November.

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With my love and prayers for the week ahead,

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

Reverend Jonathan Evans