

The Parish of Christchurch

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



For February 28th, 2021

Dear Friends,

Another week on, and the landscape begins to look a little different. On Monday, the Prime Minister outlined the government's "Roadmap out of lockdown", with four steps or stages between now and June 21st, when most of the current restrictions may be lifted, if all has gone according to plan. Amid all the caveats and cautionary words, and factoring in the steady increase in vaccinations, this feels like a moment for hope.

Notice the word "may": there is no guarantee that the government's timetable will hold. All it will take is for the infection rates – and consequently numbers of hospitalisations and Covid-related fatalities – to rise again, and the schedule may be pushed back. Sadly, experience over the past year has shown us all that such a rise in infection rates and of the R number is possible.

In light of the 'roadmap', therefore, some words from Pope Francis's recent book 'Let us Dream' came to mind (the book that is the focus for our Lent Course this year). One of the quotations we considered this week speaks to our present circumstances:

"What is the greatest fruit of a personal Covid? I'd say patience, sprinkled with a healthy sense of humour, which allows us to endure and make space for change to happen." (p.36)

"Patience, sprinkled with a healthy sense of humour" sounds just what we all need, now and in the coming weeks. Patience, for several reasons: first, because the kind of graduated programme outlined by the government means that not everything is going to open up at once; which means that some of the things we have been longing to do again will have to wait for a while longer. We are longing to see loved ones in person, to be able to give and receive a hug, to enjoy again a familiar treat, a meal out, a trip to the coast, to the cinema, to a much-loved beauty spot. All of these things will, we trust, become possible – but not yet.

Second, because the pandemic constraints are taking an increasingly heavy toll on people's well-being. Many of you have spoken about how this lockdown is harder to sustain than its predecessors. And, third, because we are hearing – and it is a different message from what was being trumpeted last Spring – that Covid will almost certainly not be "beaten", nor eliminated. Coronavirus, like flu, will always be with us, though with its worst effects minimised through the vaccination programme. Patience is certainly needed.

Another thing that many of us are longing to do is to be able to come back to church to worship. I sympathise fully with that aspiration, though, again, the answer to any questions of timing is "not yet". In the coming days, the PCC will be considering how best we might re-open for public worship. If ever there was a need for the PCC to be granted the wisdom of Solomon, this is it! There are so many factors to bear in mind, chief among which is doing all we can to keep everyone safe and healthy. In this regard, I was grateful for some wise words from our Area Dean, Canon Gary Philbrick, in an email earlier this week. Gary wrote:

"Although most of our older folk will have had at least the first vaccine, many of us, and many others, won't have – after all we've been through, we want to keep people safe on the last lap, and we don't want our churches to become centres of infection ..."

That seems about right. It is precisely this approach that has led us to be so persistent in taking care with all the social distancing measures in the Priory and St George's, which I know many of you have valued and trusted. None of us, I am sure, wants to jeopardise that.

As for the healthy sense of humour, I suspect we would agree with Pope Francis that this is vital. It's not that he is expecting us to turn into stand-up comedians – thank goodness – but more in line with Proverbs 17.22: "A cheerful heart is a good medicine". In other words, to be able to choose consciously to be good-

humoured, to remember to smile, to express appreciation rather than criticism, to take ourselves not too seriously, to remember that not everything matters, to remember what makes us laugh out loud and then laugh at it – all these can only help get us through the weeks to come with a greater equilibrium.

The key thing in what Francis writes is that he sees these as “the greatest fruit of a personal Covid”. It’s of the essence of fruit that it doesn’t appear overnight. It takes time for fruit to ripen. So perhaps Francis is encouraging us not to avoid the crisis we’re all going through, not to shrink from its implications. But by being with God as we go through the crisis, ask Him day by day for this “greatest fruit” – for the gifts of patience and a healthy sense of humour. And to choose to approach each day’s challenges and obstacles with patience and good-humour is precisely that, a choice, a decision we can all make.

As so often, St Paul has a verse that speaks to our present circumstances: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12.12). The balance in those words and qualities makes this a good verse to turn into a prayer as we rise in the morning: “Lord, help me today to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer.” And then ask Him to help us make the choices through the day that lead us to become at least part of the answer to our prayer.

May God bless us all as we continue to journey through this Lent.

Charles Stewart

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Lent Groups

The first session in this year’s Lent Course took place this week. If you would like to join the Lent Course (this is your last opportunity), please send an email to conference@christchurchpriory.org or use the email contact form on the website, indicating which of the days/times you prefer. The sessions are on Mondays at 2.30pm, Wednesdays at 2.30pm, and Wednesday at 7.30pm.

Midweek Reflection

Starting this week, a Midweek Reflection will be posted on our website. In the main, these will be recorded readings from one of the two books used at Morning Prayer to provide our ‘third reading’; normally these are extracts from books, writings or sermons of some from the spiritual giants – many of them scarcely known to us – of our Christian heritage. I hope you find the recordings helpful.

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Heidi Hågensen writes:

I just wanted to thank you all for the generous gift I know many must have donated towards. I truly appreciate the gift and also the many cards I have received. We have decided to purchase a tent with the gift, as we discovered in half term that our previous 2nd hand tent was no longer waterproof!! So we look forward to later this year, when hopefully we may be able to go camping as a family in our new tent. I have also purchased a couple of puppets to use in ministry work wherever I am! Thank you all for your generosity, your support and your prayers. *Heidi*

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Electoral Roll *Robert Phillipson, Parish of Christchurch Electoral Roll Officer, writes*

Notice is hereby given that the Ecclesiastical Parish of Christchurch Electoral Roll is being REVISED.

Any person whose name is NOT ALREADY on the Electoral Roll needs to fill out a form,

- or if you have changed your address since this time last year,
- or if you know of anybody whose name is on the Roll but who has either died,
- or have moved during the year.

When filled out, please return the form to me either by email electoralroll@christchurchpriory.org, via the Priory Vestry, or directly by the 4th April 2021 at the latest. Failure to have your name on our Electoral Roll will mean you will be unable to vote at the Parish AGM, stand for a member of the PCC, Deanery Synod or Churchwarden.

In line with the Diocese, you are being asked to provide telephone numbers and an email address (if you have one). This extra information will make it much easier for the clergy to make contact should the need arise, as they use the Electoral Roll as a means of identifying and communicating with members of their congregation. It is, therefore, essential that the Roll is kept up to date.