

**Wednesday 8th July 2020**

*“Out of the eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet”*

Dear Friends

Some will recognise the riddle above as coming from the story of the young Samson in which he kills a lion and then, a little later, eats honey from the comb that has formed in the animal’s carcase. A graphic, if not slightly distasteful, reminder that good can arise from disaster.

We are now in the most challenging period of the pandemic – how to extract ourselves from our lockdown environments and return to something resembling the life we enjoyed at the turn of the year. We must try to continue to trust that good things will emerge from all the tragedy – for our communities, families and our churches.

We now have permission to resume worship in church – but how we do that and when requires a great deal of thought and prayer. It is not straightforward.

This week our worship committees have met to begin to reflect on this and the PCC meets tonight to look at the issue from a parish-wide perspective. Next week our two District Church Councils will meet to take plans a few steps further forwards.

All this requires careful planning so that when we do return into church the worshipping experience is both spiritually uplifting and physically safe.

It also requires us to be patient and prepared to adapt to changes. We may not be able to sit in ‘our’ usual seats. We cannot sit next to our friends unless they are part of our household or ‘bubble’. There will be no singing. We must sanitise our hands as we enter and leave. We will not be using our familiar hymn books and service booklets but following words on a screen or ‘use once’ service sheets. Fellowship will be real – but distanced.

This is going to be tough for some, if not for all of us. Testing, not only in the sense of managing difference, but also in our understanding of what it is to worship.

Is our drive to worship God sufficiently strong and deeply rooted in us that we can see beyond the minor inconveniences of this age and come before God with all our frustrations and disappointments and still say ‘You are my God and I love you’?

Worship is not our liturgy or our music or our rituals – worship is whatever is worthy of God. This means simply turning up to worship – whether physically or online – is more than enough to satisfy our Lord’s yearning for us to be attentive to the Spirit. It also means that everything else we do during the week is also worship, if it is worthy of God.

Decisions have not yet been made as to whether the restrictions on space in our churches means that we need to give priority to some people over others. If our church cannot accommodate everyone who wishes to come, then our desire to be inclusive and fair means that those who cannot access worship online might be given priority over those who can. This may call for extra patience on your part, if you are not shielding, yearn to worship back in church but have zoom access.

Bishop John Inge has urged all clergy to take two days off a week during July and August. As a result, I will be taking Thursday as well as Friday as my days off most weeks, beginning this week, until the 31st August. I am grateful to +John for this advice although I know squeezing everything into five days will be a challenge!

I have almost finished completing my analysis of the questionnaires that were completed by 51 households. Thank you! It’s been encouraging to read of the various initiatives that have been appreciated – these letters included – and also the many imaginative thoughts about the future evolution of our churches. The results will go before our DCCs next week. For the present, these letters will continue, but the frequency may drop to fortnightly, depending on workload.

As this week progresses, may you know God’s love and appreciate God’s many blessings in your lives: with my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

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