

Wednesday 29th July 2020

Mary, Martha and Lazarus

Dear Friends

As a youngster I lived – between the ages of 9-18 – not far from Keston College in Kent, the centre founded by Michael Bourdeaux and others dedicated to the study and pursuit of religious freedom and expression in communist and post-communist countries. As a result, I was aware from quite an early age that some people had to make real efforts to worship God. I could wander along to church if I wanted to, more or less at any time on any day of the week, and seek out the peace, quiet and serenity of sacred space.

In the light of the real hardships suffered by others in the pursuit of religious expression, the inconveniences we face today – hand sanitising, social distancing, the wearing of face coverings – are small indeed. As we approach the recommencing of worship in church – starting this Sunday at All Saints at 10.30am – I hope we can remember those who have and who continue to truly suffer for their faith, and approach our current small challenges with grace and thankfulness. I'm going to try to do this; though I know I approach leading worship in a mask or visor with a great deal of trepidation. It's like something tangible is getting in the way between me and you. We need to remember that the Holy Spirit is a great deal more resilient, creative and imaginative, than three layers of cotton!

The service on Sunday – which I hope you will attend, whether online, by telephone or in person – will be a celebration of friendship. It will be shorter than normal, mainly due to the absence of hymns, though I am delighted that Julian will be in church to play for us at the beginning and end of the service.

By coincidence, today is also a celebration of friendship – that of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, those three great and very dear friends of Jesus. Theirs is an honest friendship – remember Jesus speaking frankly to Martha when Mary sat at Jesus' feet rather than helping with the housework. It is also a friendship of considerable loyalty as Mary and Martha showed at and after the crucifixion. But above all of this, it is perhaps a friendship rooted in very considerable love – not least expressed when Jesus brought Lazarus back to life after four days in the tomb.

Honesty, loyalty, love – three qualities of friendship celebrated by the church today and which we will echo in our worship on Sunday too.

All Saints DCC will meet on Monday next week to review Sunday's worship experience and then we will prepare for St Godwald's first service back in church on August 16th. Their DCC will hold a similar review after that.

We then plan for September and beyond; mindful that before we've blinked twice we will be heading towards harvest, All Souls, Remembrance, Advent and even Christmas: all of which will look and feel different this year.

In October we are planning to hold our annual parochial church meeting. We haven't set a date yet as we are still awaiting further guidance from the national church. I know that legally we cannot hold this meeting remotely at present. Under the revised rules it must be held in person and by October 31st.

My other main concern at the moment is our halls and, more generally, our finances. I am studying hard as to how we can re-open our halls in a way that is useful to hirers and economically feasible. This is a challenge but progress is being made.

With regards to finances more generally, your support is both deeply appreciated and more needed than ever. Thank you to everyone who has continued their giving through standing orders or BACS. If you have been amassing piles of envelopes at home, please let me know so that we can arrange collection. Similarly, if you usually give through cash in the collection plate, I hope you have been able to set funds aside for the church. Again, these can be collected safely.

Unfortunately, a closed church is not a free church and although some savings are made because we haven't had the lights or heating on as frequently, many costs continue and some – not least printing – have risen.

I know you are all aware of these issues and do what you can – for which, sincere thanks.

This letter comes, as always, with my love and prayers:

David Ford, Rector

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