

Sunday 19 July 2020

Rest in the Lord

Dear All

In these times when our normal routines and patterns have been disrupted, I find myself sometimes losing track of time. As a mum and former teacher, I was always very mindful of school term and holiday dates but this year, it passed me by. The school term ended last week, and I hope teachers and staff are enjoying a well-deserved break after the long run since lockdown began. I expect there's a few relieved parents too, enjoying the end to home-schooling! Let's pray for all our children, those who care for them, and all involved in education that they find rest and relaxation this summertime.

Last week I wrote about journeying into the unknown, and on Sunday we heard our 'vision passage' from Exodus 13 – the story of the Israelites entering the unknown as they escaped from Egypt. The passage tells of God's presence as a pillar of cloud and fire that was to be their guide. When the pillar stayed still, so the Israelites remained in camp, only moving on when it was time to follow. That image came into my head this week as a reminder that being called to follow doesn't mean always being on the move, sometimes the pillar of cloud and fire stays still! That was something I needed to hear and is perhaps a message for us now. So, over these summer months, I would like to encourage us all to 'stay still' – enjoy some rest and the opportunity to 'waste time with God' as Liz Rawlings spoke about. Such time is never really wasted, it strengthens our faith and gives room for God so that we are better ready to follow when the time comes to move on. On my ordination retreat, David Monteith recommended a children's book ['Jesus' Day Off'](#) as a reminder not to take ourselves too seriously and to take time off with God – you might enjoy it too.

Sunday's Services: YouTube ...

This week we continue our series on the Church. Last week we thought about being the people of God, called to follow. This week we focus on the first of four connections or relationships that are part of being church, this week thinking about 'up' – our connection with God and the biblical image of being the Bride of Christ. My sermon illustration is a bar of Toblerone – I'll leave you guessing! An email with the link to the YouTube playlist will be sent as usual on Friday. As ever, please do get in touch if you have difficulty accessing the service and we will do all we can to help.

... and Zoom Evening Worship at 6pm

Last week's Evening Worship got off to a good start with 15 or so people. There was a lovely sense of gathering and the opportunity to interact with one another in a way that we can't through the YouTube service. I was particularly struck by the richness of prayer. This is a simple half-hour service of prayer and Bible reading with the opportunity to stay on and chat at the end if you would like to. Everyone is welcome, please bring a Bible if you can. Again, details will be sent in a separate email on Friday.

Opening for Private Prayer

The Church building and woodland will again be open 3-4pm this Sunday. As we are still awaiting guidance from the Church of England regarding face coverings, I think it would be wise to bring a mask to wear if you are coming inside the building.

Worship Survey

The response to our online services has been overwhelmingly positive – many thanks for your encouragement and the ideas you have shared. Here is a summary of the feedback:

The vast majority of people are watching the YouTube service every week and finding it helpful and inspiring, both in terms of worship and in a sense of connectedness as the family of St Mary's.

Seeing different people contributing, and the Peace video, were much appreciated and is something I hope we can continue to build over coming weeks. There were positive comments about the sermon series, variety of speakers and the richness of intercessions. People also welcomed the familiarity of the service, being not unlike 'normal' St Mary's.

In terms of suggestions to change, music had the widest range of personal preference, with those who like traditional and others contemporary. This is not unusual and hopefully indicates we're getting the balance about right. Unfortunately, we can't do anything about the YouTube adverts, you just have to be ready to click 'skip'! A couple of people expressed overall disappointment with the services and wanted to see more relevance to the current situation. Please, if you have ideas for this, do get in touch with me.

There was a very marginal preference for monthly communion (51%) so we propose celebrating every few weeks, not necessarily monthly, to fit in with service themes and festivals.

Several people are also accessing other services through radio, TV and internet and finding them helpful.

Thank you to you all for this feedback, please do continue to communicate ideas.

Treasurer's Update – a Message from Ian

Hello again,

As we continue to navigate the strange waters that we are going through, I wanted to give you another update on how St Mary's finances are going.

Firstly, thanks to all who continue to support us with your generous giving, and a special thanks to those who have recently started to give online or by bank standing order. This makes it so much easier for our hard-working administrators. If you normally give cash via envelope or plate, would you please prayerfully consider changing to use one of these means.

As I have said before, we continue to experience a reduced income, from plate collections, envelopes, Chapter House lettings and wedding income. A survey from the diocese shows that we are not alone in this. We are fortunate in having sufficient reserves to fill the gap for this year.

Assuming that these unusual conditions will continue for some time, we will need to consider how we balance the books going forward.

Let us all pray that God will supply all our needs, as He has promised to do.

Ian

Ann's Resignation

Finally, I end with the sad news that last week Ann gave notice that she will be resigning as Parish Administrator by the end of December, or earlier if someone is in post. This is for personal reasons as Ann and Andy look to enter into a 'new chapter' of life and I am very grateful that Ann has given us such a long period of notice and has committed to helping us make a smooth transition. I want to say a big thank you to Ann for all that she does and for the wonderful welcome and support she has offered me in my starting my new role. Please pray for Ann and Andy and for the new opportunities that lie ahead, and for wise decisions for us at St Mary's as we begin to consider options for the future. I would be very interested to hear from anyone with relevant experience in HR or similar, or who simply has an interest and would like to join the committee overseeing the recruitment process.

*"O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him, and he will give you your heart's desire."
from Psalm 37*

With love in Christ

Adele