

Longford Eight Benefice:
Boylestone, Church Broughton, Dalbury, Long Lane, Longford,
Radbourne, Sutton on the Hill & Trusley
Priest in Charge: Revd Jane Legh
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Dear Friends,

COVID-19 has affected our every thought and action in the past year: armchair analysts now tell us that we should have anticipated a pandemic as the greatest threat to the world, and to have prepared for it! It is true that our history books are full of past plagues and pestilence. I try to imagine what it must have been like to live through the Black Death of the fourteenth century and the Great Plague of 1665 without vaccines, drugs, PPE and any true scientific understanding of their cause. Unfortunately, our wonderful National Health Service, free at the point of delivery, and the development of drugs that can cure or at least ameliorate so many of today's disease have allowed us to think we are invincible, and the devastation caused by this pandemic unimaginable.

The medieval pandemic of bubonic plague, the Black Death, also began in central Asia and spread across the rest of Asia, North Africa and Europe, before reaching this country via the Dorset ports in 1348. Reliable statistics for the number of deaths do not exist but it is estimated that up to half the population died from the disease. The bacterial disease carried by fleas, associated with rats, returned at regular intervals until it finally died out after the Great Plague of London in 1665. The narrow, dirty streets of London enabled the disease to proliferate chiefly among the poor who were unable to leave the city as richer people did. Why does all this sound so familiar?

In the twenty-first century quarantining, by means of lockdown, is reducing the infection rate while we wait for vaccines to further limit the disease. Historians now believe it was the imposition of quarantine measures preventing the movement of traffic carrying rats and fleas, which accounted for the disappearance of plague after 1665. Undoubtedly Eyam's self-imposed quarantine eradicated the infection there. Perhaps we will all pay more attention to our social history in future.

When I last wrote about the courageous Derbyshire village of Eyam, last April, none of us expected that our lives would continue to be so seriously affected a year later. As we long to meet our friends and families in person we know that keeping our distance has been effective. With Easter in a few weeks' time we long to be able to mark the most important events of the Christian year in some way. I write this before we have heard the Prime Minister's announcement for our gradual steps out of this quarantine, so again, I hesitate to advertise any plans for Holy Week and Easter services. We do have some ideas, such as setting up a walk-through **Experience Easter** at St Chad's, Longford which we were prevented from doing for Longford School last year, and I pray that we may be able to have services in some of the churches. Please look out for local information on notice boards, emails and social media. The prospects for a more normal life this Summer begin to look more promising but having kept locked down (up?) for so long we must remain patient!

With very best wishes and blessings

Jane

Lent Reading: you may be interested to read the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2021: *Living His Story - Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways* by Hannah Steele. We are planning to get together on Zoom to talk about this book.

Zoom Prayers continue every Thursday morning at 9.30am and Bible Study (Mark's Gospel) on Tuesday 9th and 23rd March. Let me know if you would like to join any of these ZOOM gatherings: jane.legh@cubleylodge.com