

ST MARY'S WEDMORE, CHRISTCHURCH THEALE, HOLY TRINITY BLACKFORD, ALLERTON CHURCH

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

What a joy it was to worship together in church after 4 months being separated. I wish that, as well as the recording that others were able to access and therefore join the service online, you had also been able to see things from the perspective of those of us leading the service. There were lots of smiley faces and a deal of relief that we could be together again. We didn't get everything right and know that as we continue to worship together how we do so will develop and some of the difficulties of managing social distancing and working out the hygiene guidelines can be ironed out. Yet it was such an important step. Worshipping together is part of what shapes us as God's people and being denied the opportunity to do so has been very painful.

We're in the middle of a round of PCC meetings at the minute and decisions will have to be ratified by the four councils but the wardens, treasurers and ministers hope we have drawn up a plan for the summer that will enable us to worship together every weekend and also reflect on how we can work towards a more comprehensive pattern in the autumn. So through July and August there will be one service on a Sunday morning at 9.00 a.m. each weekend, moving between the four churches on a rota basis. This will be recorded and then put up on YouTube so that those who can't be at church can join in with Sunday worship. I know that 9.00 a.m. is early for some, but this ensures that the service is ready to be accessed online by the end of Sunday morning. We are aiming for things to be ready on YouTube by 11.00 a.m., but the editing and uploading does take some time, so please do keep checking if nothing has appeared by 11.00 a.m.

For those of you who will continue to be part of our online congregation either because you aren't able to come into the church building yet or because you have joined our congregation online during lockdown and aren't ready yet to join us in person, please be assured that our online worship will continue to play an important part in the services we offer and that you are equally valued members to those who will be in the building for worship. For those who have joined us online during lockdown and are new to our congregations, we would love to be able to welcome you properly so please do get in touch.

For those who are hoping to come to one of our churches for the service, we have worked hard to keep everyone safe. So that you can have confidence, here are some of the measures we will be taking: -

- Those attending to sanitise hands on entrance and exit.
- A record is taken of the name of those attending.
- Congregation members to be directed to designated pews for households, families or individuals, keeping 2m distance.
- Handles and surfaces (where necessary) to be wiped down before services
- Face Coverings are recommended but are not compulsory.
- Projector and Screen to be used where possible for Order of Service, or Orders of Service and newsletters to be placed on designated pews. These then to be taken home at the end of the service.
- Potential pinch points to be considered and means taken to enable distancing to be kept there, with a possible one-way system in operation.
- A no touch thermometer to be used to scan for anyone with a raised temperature. Anyone showing a raised temperature to be asked not to come in.
- No congregational singing – a soloist will accompany any hymns that are played.

The Revd. Richard Neill

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This Sunday's service will be at Holy Trinity, a Morning Prayer similar to last Sunday's service led by Sam with me preaching. The intention is that the following Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July, which is the nearest Sunday to St Mary's patronal feast day, will be a communion service at St Mary's. Once again there are measures in place to ensure that you will be as safe as possible but also that all these extra measures don't get in the way of the service being joyful and holy.

This Sunday's gospel reading is the well-known Parable of the Sower and gives us all a good opportunity to reflect on some of what you may have experienced over the last few months. The table that accompanies this letter is for you to use during the sermon – hopefully with some useful guidance on the day!

As we build up towards a more comprehensive pattern of worship, we hope to be able to re-introduce our regular meditative service Start the Week, both in church and online, and also a form of midweek communion, again both in church and online. A few weeks ago I put forward some questions that will help us as we move forward and I offer these again as we continue to move forward during this time of change. If you haven't already done so, could you give some thought to these and send me the fruit of your reflection, it will help a lot as we plan a pattern of worship that will reflect and shape who we are as a church in this 'new normal'.

What will 'church' look like?

What have we learned about our church community during this time of 'exile'?

What practices that we have learned during this time of separation do we want to take with us into the future?

What practices will we be glad to leave behind?

How and Where and In Whom have you noticed God at work and how might we join in?

How can we balance using the building as a community spiritual asset with the importance of not being tied to church buildings?

How can we ensure adequate social distancing, particularly for big events and services like Remembrance, Harvest, Christmas?

How can we continue to help the local community maintain the spirit of neighbourliness and care?

Finally, here is another reminder of the Bank Details for our four parishes. Like many charities and organisations, these last few months have been very trying for our finances. All four of our churches are looking at significant annual shortfalls and will be calling heavily on their reserves. Thank you to everyone who has continued to support their church faithfully and regularly, especially when the many people are struggling and things seem so uncertain. Your generosity is much appreciated. If you haven't been able to offer any donations because you haven't been able to get to church or would like to offer a one off donation, we would be very grateful if you can give online. Please contact your church treasurer if you would like to set up a form of regular giving.

Thank you also to everyone who continues to support the Cheddar Valley Foodbank. Last weekend a further 28 kg were taken over to their centre, but the need is still there and please do continue to drop your donations off in the vicarage porch before 10.00 a.m. Saturday morning each week.

Thank you everyone for your patience. These continue to be uncertain and very difficult times. I know we won't get everything right as we begin to gather together again and thank you for your continuing forbearance.

With my love, prayers and best wishes to you all.

Your vicar

Richard