

Tuesday March 24th

Dear Friends,

We are living in times that none of us has ever experienced before. It is frightening and confusing when our whole way of life is turned upside down, and the Prime Minister's announcement introducing very strong restrictions on our daily lives has brought home to us all just what a crisis faces our nation, as it does the world.

But these measures are essential if we are to bring the spread of coronavirus under control. They are essential if we are to stop people dying unnecessarily. They are essential if we are to avoid overwhelming our health service and the wonderful nurses and doctors who are putting their lives on the line to care for others. Please follow the government warnings. To do so is to love your neighbour as yourself.

This is the first of what will be many weekly newsletters at this time of isolation from others.

NOURISHING YOUR FAITH AT THIS TIME

PRAY

No matter what we face in life, God is always there and has promised to hear us when we pray. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." God doesn't mind about the words you use, just that you turn to him and trust.

Here are some prayers that you may want to use:

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need

as if we were caring for you.
In this time of anxiety, give us strength
to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,
and to assure the isolated
of our love, and your love,
for your name's sake.

Amen.

For those who are ill

Merciful God,
we entrust to your tender care
those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold them safe.
Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For hospital staff and medical researchers

Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

From one who is ill or isolated

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing can separate me
from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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Light a candle at 7pm

Something many of us are doing at this time when we can't be together is this. Every night, at 7pm, we pause, light a candle if we can do that safely, and pray for the world, for our NHS and for all who are ill. Then finish with the Lord's Prayer.

When many of us do this at home wherever we are, we are united in God's love.

READ THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's word to us, where we read the story of God's relationship with the human race. It's where we read the story of how God stooped down to earth so we could be lifted up to heaven. I encourage you to read the Bible at this time and ask the Holy Spirit to help your understanding of it.

The readings for Sunday March 29th – Passion Sunday, are:

Ezekiel 37 v 1 -14

Romans 8 v 6 – 11

John 11 v 1 - 45

We are fast becoming an online church and started live streaming our service last Sunday. Here is the sermon Revd Liz preached last Sunday March 22nd, the first Sunday we weren't able to have public worship in the Church of England.

On this Mothering Sunday like no other, what a poignant gospel reading we have. Imagine the scene. You're probably helped by the paintings you may have seen of Mary's agony at the foot of the cross. Her worst fears realised. A mother watching on as her son dies a cruel death. Unable to stop it. Powerless to take his pain away.

When we love, one thing is always true. We run the risk of being hurt. Hurt by rejection. Hurt by loss. Hurt because one we love is hurting and out of love we stand in their shoes. This Mothering Sunday we celebrate our mothers. We'll thank God for their love and care. But we're hurting too, just like Mary. Because people who would have been together are apart. Those who would have been in company are isolated. Those who might have been at ease are full of fear. Those who may be clear about the past and where they've come from are uncertain about the future and where they're heading.

In a few short months, Coronavirus has changed our world out of all recognition. In a few short weeks it's taken our country in its grip. In a few short days it's turned our way of life upside down and done what we would never have thought possible. And we don't know when it will end.

*But let's turn to our gospel reading again. **When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.'** Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. Even nailed to a cross he thinks not of himself but of others. He dwells not on what's lost but what can grow in its place. He leads people away from despair and into hope. Through his words and actions a bereaved mother will have a son she can turn to. A grieving friend will have a mother to comfort him. Not blood relatives. But a new sort of family. How amazing is Jesus?*

Amazing yes. But surprising, no. Because isn't that the way of God? Isn't God always able to bring light out of darkness? Isn't God always able to whisper into our hearts those words that hold us up at even the most overwhelming moments of life? All will be well. We're living through frightening and strange times. But out of the fear and the unreality, God is bringing to birth amazing things. Kindness. Goodness. Sacrifice. Love. All around us. Within our churches and outside them. Creative and inventive ways of being united when we can't be together. Communities of care and concern. We're learning that we're all in this together. We're learning again a truth that we forget too easily. That we are one human family.

Out of the pain of the cross, Jesus taught those who love him how to create a new family. Out of the pain of coronavirus, may we learn how to be family to all those who need us. So we can ease the fear. Share the distress. Help one another grow in hope. And in time, bring healing to a world that's battered and afraid.

*We are not people of fear: we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed: we are people of generosity.
We are your people God, giving and loving,
wherever we are, whatever it costs
For as long as it takes, wherever you call us.
Amen*

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Despite the fear and distress around us, God always brings good things out of painful situations. It is really good to notice the good, lovely and beautiful things all around us. They give us hope that all will be well. So at the end of the day, or whenever it helps you to do so, set aside some time to count your blessings and give thanks to God.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR GENERAL WELLBEING

Here are some tips about taking care of your physical and mental health at this time. God has created us mind, body and spirit and we need to take care of that gift because we're precious in God's sight.

1. Plan practical things, like hospital appointments, ensuring you have food and medication. If you are isolating at home struggling to get what you need, please ring Revd Liz on 0792587263 and she will link you up with practical support.
2. Connect with others – use your phone and remember we are all in this together so reaching out to others will help them too. TV and radio is enormously helpful and a real lifeline when we are spending lots of time alone.
3. Talk about your worries. You can do that when you pray, but God is very good at using people to do his work. Again please ring Revd Liz on 0792587263 if you need a listening ear and want someone to keep in touch with you regularly. We're not made to be alone, so please connect.
4. Look after your body by eating healthily, drinking plenty of water and doing exercise. If you're staying in, there are exercises you can do at home.
5. Don't stay glued to the news. Choose times to watch it and stick to them. And do other things in between.
6. Carry on doing things you enjoy, like hobbies: puzzles, drawing, painting, reading, sorting out those things you never got round to, colouring, singing, knitting, woodwork, cooking etc.
7. Establish a new daily routine and stick to it as much as possible.
8. Look after your sleep – make sure you get enough and try to stick to a pattern of bedtime and getting up.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCH AND WIDER COMMUNITY

SOME VERY SAD NEWS FROM REVD LIZ

I am so sorry to have to let you know that our treasured friend **John Chipperfield** died in hospital at 1.00am on Monday 23rd March. He had been in Queen Elizabeth Hospital since Friday 20th, suffering from pneumonia, but his condition deteriorated overnight on Saturday and his daughters were informed that he wasn't expected to recover. At this point we don't know what the cause of pneumonia was.

I know this news will be upsetting for very many people, because John was well known and much loved in both our congregations. He recently became a volunteer with the Syrian family project at St Thomas', co-ordinated the listening ministry at St Luke's and had served as Churchwarden since April 2019. He had been a member of the congregation at St Luke's for most of his life: always respected, dignified and kind, with that lovely sense of humour.

In case anyone is worried about the possibility that John had coronavirus, at this time we haven't received any such confirmation. However, should it be confirmed that he had

contracted the virus, as the last time he was in the church building was Sunday March 8th at St Thomas' and Wednesday March 12th at St Luke's, anyone who had contact with him then would have needed to go into isolation for 7 days, a period which has now past.

Please pray for John's family, especially his daughters Lisa and Sarah at this time of mourning. As a church community we share their pain and our church will do whatever we can to support them in the days and weeks ahead.

This is such a difficult time for our whole world, and here in Charlton this devastating news only adds to the weight we all bear at this time. We have been working hard over the past week to set up channels through which we can support one another, and there are several people who are happy for their phone numbers to be shared. They are people who you can call if you would welcome someone to talk to. Their names and numbers are below.

John received the last rites on Sunday morning and I went in to see him during the evening and prayed with him and his daughters.

Please remember this: John had a strong faith in Christ, who loves him far too much to let him slip through his hands. So let's be assured that John is beyond the suffering of this world and in the presence of his creator and redeemer.

*Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.*

PEOPLE YOU CAN CALL IF YOU NEED TO TALK

PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOU ARE ALL IN OUR PRAYERS
AS WE GO THROUGH THIS PERIOD TOGETHER.

WE WILL GET THROUGH,
BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD AND ALL WILL BE WELL.