**THE CRISIS, THE CHURCH AND JESUS**

For those of you looking for the latest magazine from Newburn Parish I’m afraid that we won’t be publishing it until this crisis is over. We don’t have the people to deliver it as we are all trying to socially isolate or are self-isolating in line with government advice.

Last week I went from my diary bursting at the seams to meeting after meeting or event after event being cancelled. One person wrote on twitter that it was a bit disconcerting to see their whole life being categorised as non-essential contact!! I could definitely relate to that. So how can we as a Christian community respond and be church when we can’t be in physical contact with one another?

I’m sure you will have heard that our churches are closed for worship and I realise that many people will be struggling with this. In response many churches and ministers of all religions and denominations have decided to ‘do church differently’, putting services and other materials online. In fact, some vicars seem to be quite enjoying their increased social media presence! However, this would not be appropriate in Newburn Parish, where a limited number of people are on email, never mind being able to live stream or download a pre-recorded service.

So I’ve taken an alternative approach and adapted a service that people are familiar with for us all to do in our homes. I’ve asked if people will go through this service on Saturday mornings at 10am, either on their own or with those they live with, so that we can remain a worshipping community in a different format. For other days of the week, I have circulated Bible readings with a prayer booklet to use as you wish. A number of us delivered those resource over the weekend; it was very encouraging to receive calls today to say that people really appreciated them and that they would be joining us in their own homes on Saturday morning.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said in his online service that “We can focus on fear, on ourselves and what we cannot do. Or we can turn to God and let God lead us into praying for the world, and let prayer flow into us, taking creative and loving action. That’s what we want to do today, to remind ourselves that life carries on and that there is much to celebrate in our communities.”

“To listen to the voice of God’s caring love for us, and his encouragement to turn ourselves towards others, and how we can care for those around us, in person or virtually.”

He concluded: “Today we are separated in space but we are still worshipping together before God.”

I have sad so many times in my sermons that the church is the people not the buildings. Wherever we are God is with us. Please pray and worship; if you want specific prayer, please just let me know. I’m staying in touch with lots of people by phone.

So if you want a service booklet and/or daily Bible readings please get in touch with me and I’ll get one delivered. This is a strange and difficult time but let’s not forget that….. we must keep ourselves safe and when we do that we will be protecting others.

Sometimes at times like this we take stock of our life and ask ourselves the question “what’s it all about?” I hit a really low point 30 years ago; I took stock and thought that there must be more to life than I was experiencing. So with the help of a very good vicar I was encouraged to think about a man called Jesus who loved me. After some time I decided that he was what I wanted, so I asked Jesus into my life.

Having Jesus in our life brings us comfort and healing. If you’ve never asked Jesus into your life here’s a simple prayer that you can say.

*“Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience).  Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.*

*Thank you that you died on the cross for me, so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit.*

*I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever.  Thank you Lord Jesus, Amen.”*

Touching is a dangerous act at this time because of Coronavirus – and we know that there are some that will not be healed physically from the virus. But a touch from Jesus can and does heal needs that are even greater than the physical needs that we see around us; it can and does heal the need to be loved unconditionally

 *“And wherever He went–villages and towns and countryside–they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him to let them just touch the fringe of His cloak. And all who touched Him were healed.” Mark 6:56*

Rev Allison Harding