

Dear Friends,

17 March 2020

In these difficult times we need to both trust in the Lord and obey the instructions issued by the government and by the archbishops of the Church of England. All of us are heading into uncharted waters and we do not know exactly what the future holds for us.

We have now been advised that although the building will remain open, all public acts of worship are to be suspended until further notice.

Although this news is not unexpected, it is still a shock. We have been used to gathering together for worship even through some very difficult times as a nation and perhaps we have taken that blessing of face-to-face corporate worship for granted. We now need to change how we do church- we do not go to the church; we are the church!

We now have opportunities to live out our Christian faith in a very different way:

PRAYING

We continue to pray to our Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. I will send round some helpful online prayer resources soon, so that we can continue to be people of prayer, though we cannot physically meet together. Although we are being discouraged from meeting in groups, you may still want to pray with friends and family at this difficult time.

The archbishops are calling for a National Day of Prayer this Sunday, this is an extract from their letter:

"We have called, along with our fellow church leaders, for a day of prayer and action this coming Sunday - Mothering Sunday (22nd March). Mothering Sunday has always been both a day of celebration for many and a sensitive and emotional day for some. Wherever you are this Sunday please do join in this day of prayer and action and remember especially those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service. As one action, we are calling on everyone to place a lighted candle in their window at 7.00pm as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished."

Further details here: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/latest-news/coronavirus-archbishops-call-national-day-prayer-and-action>.

Some other prayer resources from the central church: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

SERVING

We are all aware of just how important it is to be salt and light in our community at this time. The elderly, the vulnerable and the self-isolating will need particular care and attention.

I am working closely with the Town Council in Lechlade as they co-ordinate various local agencies and voluntary groups in making sure people get the practical help they need, whether it be groceries, collecting prescriptions or simply a friendly phone call.

More details of how you can help others will be available very soon. St. Lawrence Church will make every effort to provide practical help to those around us.

For those of you with internet access keep an eye on our website, for those on Facebook please see the Facebook page for current information. We will try and ensure both these are kept up to date with news.

GROWING

The situation is changing every day and we need to pray that God will help us to be wise and make good decisions about the future. We will have new challenges and opportunities, perhaps even new ways to share our Christian faith in unexpected ways. Let us make the most of these opportunities. We have recently been looking at 1 Peter, which says, *'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect'* (1 Pet 3: 15). This may even be a time we grow in our faith- committing ourselves to going deeper in prayer, to reading the Word of God, perhaps reading a Christian book we have always wanted to tackle!

Yesterday was St. Patrick's Day, reminding us of a godly man, who was steeped in Holy Scripture and burned with a passion to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with his fellow countrymen and women. So it seems appropriate to leave you with part of the famous prayer of Patrick, who wanted God to surround him in everything he said and did:

I arise today through
God's strength to pilot me, God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to see before me,
God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me, God's host to secure me

Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit,
Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.



Yours in the name of Christ and in His service,

Revd Andrew Cinnamond

Vicar – St. Lawrence, Lechlade