Dear friends in Christ

For all of us, young and old, the Year 2020 will stand out in our memories as the year the world was called upon to stand still. We will remember Monday 23rd March, the day we were informed we were going into Lockdown for years to come. Our lives with the myriad of choices that we have on a daily basis were changed. In the life of the church both locally and across the diocese plans for weddings, baptisms, annual meetings, ordinations, licensing services and other such services were put on hold and special occasions postponed. Families and friends have been separated, and many in our communities have been shielding to protect them from the impact of COVID-19.During lockdown funeral services were changed too and opportunities for families and friends to gather to thank God for a loved one who had died became very different. For those with access to the internet, services went ‘on-line’ and plans were put in place by many churches to keep in touch with members at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety.

As I draft this article, we are beginning tentatively to come out of lockdown. We are giving thought to how best to open our churches for private prayer whilst ensuring the well-being of all in our community. I am not aware of the date on which we will be allowed to gather together in church for public worship. We are advised that we have suppressed the virus and that we must do all that we can in our churches to ensure that we do not contribute to an increase of the ‘R’ rate that could lead to a further spike in infection levels locally and across the region.

All of this means that we must approach the easing of lockdown as it applies to our common life together with caution. We will meet together in our churches but we don’t know when. We know that when we do we will be working out the implications of the COVID-19 on our pattern of mission and ministry as a diocese given the impact of the pandemic on church finances.

When we do meet again we will be able to get to know Jonathan and Asnath following Jonathan’s appointment as Interim Team Vicar in the team. Jonathan was licensed by Bishop David via Zoom in April and they were able to move to live amongst us in June. In the autumn, Deb will be Ordained Deacon and Shane will be licensed as Reader in the team. We look forward to the day when we can gather with them all and formally welcome them to their new ministry.

Between now and then we must remain patient and prayerful. We were unable to gather together to reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus. We remain what we always were, namely a people shaped by the Jesus event in history that has brought us salvation and the promise of eternal life in God’s nearer presence.

So let us continue to live our lives confident in God and resting on his promises. A verse from John 14, which we read during Holy Week, is very apt for us at this time. Jesus and his disciples are in the Upper Room. Jesus has just washed their feet and broken bread with them all. The events of Good Friday are about to unfold for them along with the emptiness of Holy Saturday before the joy of Easter Day. As we journey out of lockdown the days ahead might feel to us like Holy Saturday. I encourage you to meditate upon on this verse as we anticipate the Easter Day to come. Jesus said, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me’ (John 14.1)

Revd Martin Cox. Team Rector