



St Mark's Church, Reigate

May 2020

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

Continuing in Lock-down

For my letter this month, I have included again some recent emails I have sent out, and a reflection from Bishop Jonathan. I hope these are helpful in the current situation, and hopefully we will join together again soon.

Don't forget there is a service every Sunday on our website, and on 10 May and 31 May we will also have a live Zoom broadcast at 10am which can be accessed by computer and telephone. The details will be sent out in advance, or please contact the office.

With every blessing.

11 April 2020

This Holy Week and Easter have been so different to any previous experience that any of us have lived through. In the last few days I have been reflecting on this experience. Christians have very different ways of reacting to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Some lay such agonized emphasis on his sufferings that they seem almost to get stuck there. A gloomy faith, fixated on suffering, can lead to a repressive and judgemental outlook on life that allows no room for the extraordinary miracle of Jesus' resurrection and the transformation of the whole of creation that is its fruit. At the same time, a faith that is only Easter Sunday and alleluias can fail to take seriously the very real struggles that even dedicated followers of Jesus may encounter, and can appear glibly optimistic and superficial in its engagement with the crucifixion of Christ that continues in his desperately suffering people and God's desecrated creation.

Jesus' sufferings can act as a litmus test for our self-understanding and our ability to cope with the mystery of human weakness. Human suffering and evil, like the situation we are faced with every day at this time, are the stumbling block on which many people's faith founders. Praying through the Passion of Jesus may draw us close

to some kind of acceptance and dim understanding of God's response to our suffering. But it may also challenge our capacity to keep on believing and hoping. Thoughts and feelings that we have repressed as unworthy of a person of faith may surface, but, painful though they are, this can be a sign of grace beginning to emerge. This kind of prayer, where we confront our bewilderment and pain at what we experience as the remoteness of God, is far more real than easy protestations of love and loyalty that cover up what we find unbearable.

This is the prayer of Peter and the disciples when their sincerely meant but empty promises of fidelity crashed down on them in their fear and faithlessness, as the reality of what redemption meant for Jesus confronted them. They deserted Jesus at the cross, and locked themselves away, yet the resurrected Jesus came to them. He comes to us still today as we self-isolate. And so we can perhaps understand how to rejoice in the resurrection in an era of fear and suffering and rejoice in his resurrection as we understand better his Passion and suffering.

My best wishes for a joyous Easter.

Martin

25 April 2020

For several weeks we have been concerned about how to safely support the work of the St Matthew's Food Bank, especially as demand is high but getting donations is difficult.

There will be a donation collection box outside the Vicarage where you can leave donations of food and cleaning products. In particular they have asked for:

- Tinned veg, meat, fish, soup, baked beans;
- Rice, pasta, pasta sauce, breakfast cereal;
- UHT Milk, Long-life fruit juice;
- Biscuits, jam, tea, coffee, dried ready meals;
- Tooth paste, shower gel, etc.

These will be taken to St Matthew's Food Bank.

If you want to give, but would find it difficult to put anything in the box, please email help@stmarksreigate.co.uk or telephone 07979 788601 and we can arrange for someone to collect from your doorstep at an arranged time.

This weekend is also the time of our Annual Gift Day, which is more important this year than ever. Hopefully you will have received a letter from our Treasurer about this, but if not, there is a copy on the next page.

With my best wishes

Martin

GIFT DAY 25 APRIL 2020

We - the Church and its members - are in survival mode during lockdown.

The primary concern is the future extent of the Covid -19 pandemic.

The Church and the Hall are closed so there is no income from collections, activities and Hall hire. The car park is not being used by the staff of the construction company tenant and thus the rent is at risk. These four sources of income total £85,000 per year.

Our annual Gift Day is also an important source of income - more so than ever before.

I am asking you to contribute as much as you can afford to ensure that St Mark's continues as your parish church to be your place of worship and a community centre for local activities.

Please make your donation –

- (1) By bank transfer to HSBC Crawley (please contact the office for details)
- (2) Via our Golden Giving facility on our website
- (3) By cheque posted to me at 46 Alma Road, Reigate, RH2 0DN

St Mark's is relying on your generosity and support.

Thank you in anticipation.



Brian Rowbotham
PCC Treasurer

Letter from Bishop Jonathan

Holy Saturday, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters

From where I sit at home, I can usually hear the trains rumbling in and out of East Croydon station. I hear the cars attempting to drive too quickly round Croydon's dual carriageways and watch aeroplanes climbing and descending overhead. Now – well, it's not exactly silent, but it is quiet. The hyperactive bustle has been replaced with the sounds of essential travel. The birds are no longer having to shout as they sing their territories.



This reflection comes on the quietest day of the Christian year, Holy Saturday. This is the day on which the eucharist is not celebrated, the day when all creation holds its breath, while Jesus sleeps in the tomb. That's the spiritual and liturgical truth every year – but most years, in most churches, it's actually full of people cleaning, preparing Easter liturgies, arranging flowers, printing off orders of service, finishing sermons, rehearsing music – etc., etc. For a day when nothing is supposed to happen, it's terribly busy.

In this very strange Holy Week, as we prepare for an equally unusual Easter, I would like to invite you to join with me in the silence of Holy Saturday as a way into the mystery of God's love which we celebrate at this season.

Holy Saturday is not a continuation of Good Friday, nor is it a prefiguring of Easter Day. It is in-between time, the time of uncertainty and waiting, the time of not knowing what will happen next, bad or good. Jesus has given himself into his Father's hands as he dies on the cross. The ambiguity of 'It is finished' is as yet unresolved – we do not yet know whether it is a cry of failure or of triumph. We do not even have the security of knowing that the worst has happened, still less the certainty of resurrection.

Or at least, that is how it is in the drama of Holy Week. But we read it also from the perspective of Easter. We know that this day of waiting is the prelude to unimaginable joy, to the breaking from the tomb and the beginning of the restoration of all things which is the final consummation of God's purpose, in the new heaven and the new earth.

It is that knowledge, I believe, which enables us – perhaps strangely – still to live with the stillness and not knowing of Holy Saturday. Our resurrection faith gives us the strength to bring hope into the emptiness of this day, without denying its power. Holy Saturday has its place in our spirituality, because it is still part of our human reality. The light of resurrection is the sure hope of a new dawn, but in this world the experience of emptiness and darkness is still real. Those of us given the task of ministry are called to accompany people there and be with them, to walk with them

as Jesus brought the good news to the dead (1 Pet 3:19).

Holy Saturday is the process of the transformation of the tragedy of human existence: it is the experience of God descending into the depths of that which is lost and hopeless, opening up a way for us through the very powers that would otherwise destroy us.
Dermot Power, 'The Holy Saturday Experience',
The Way 38/1 (1998), 32-39

It has felt to me that the whole of this Holy Week has had something of Holy Saturday about it, and that that will continue into Easter. So how do we celebrate Easter this year? Maybe not as noisily as we sometimes do, and certainly not by gathering together. I hope instead that in our own homes we will be able to experience the sheer wonder of the resurrection in a new way. The gospels vary in the exact number who were the first witnesses to the resurrection, but it was not many. Whether on our own (like Mary Magdalene in John's gospel), in twos or threes or family groups, this Easter may be an opportunity to experience again the overturning of all expectation that the resurrection brought. Having gone to a tomb, they found new life. Going in darkness, they were overwhelmed by light.

In that light, then, we bring the good news of resurrection into the current crisis. For those who go to work, saving lives and keeping our essential services going, anxious for themselves or their families, as well as those who stay at home. For those who are sick, and those who pray and wait for them. For those who are sitting in the darkness of bereavement, and especially those who have not been able to say farewell to those who have died.

For our society as a whole, at a time when the superficial comforts of consumerism have been in part stripped away, the resurrection brings the good news that death is defeated, that God's forgiving love is offered to all. The deepest realities of our human existence have forced themselves into the public realm, and require an equally profound answer.

Thanks be to God!

+ Jonathan Coadon