

Letter from Rev'd Gill Nobes, 24th April, 2020

Dear Friends

'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.' (Psalm 46.1, NIV)

Although the mist has returned today, we have enjoyed some beautiful sunshine this week and we have enjoyed watching more spring buds burst into bloom in our garden. We had the added joy earlier this week of watching a duck leading her baby ducklings as they took their first outing on our pond!

We engaged in some new ventures this week, too, as we launched 'Elevenses' on Tuesday and started our new Bible study group last evening. We are gradually adapting to our changed circumstances and finding new ways of being church together. We are continuing with our Sunday morning Zoom service. Last Sunday we ironed out some of the problems and this week, hopefully, I will iron out some of the problems with music distortion. I have chatted to the Town Church who have become very proficient at Zoom over the last few weeks and have some tips from them. They told me that it's important to have Zoom vergers/stewards who take over some of the responsibility for the smooth running of the service – eg – one person takes over the technology and admits the participants to the service and 'spotlights' the video ensuring that the screen remains focused on the main speaker, another person checks that the readers and intercessor are all on the call and a third plays the music. If you would like to be a verger and carry out one of these roles, then please do let me know. It would mean I could focus on the worship rather than trying to be 'Gill of all trades'!

By coincidence, there is a feature on Zoom Vergers in this week's Church Times which came out today. It resonated with our experiences and I have taken the liberty of including part of it here:

#### "How to be a Zoom verger

Church services on videoconferencing software need not be chaotic, and can provide a valuable connection for locked-down communities, says *Jonathan Gebbie*

"WE ARE gathered together. . ." CRASH! "Owww. . . Mum, he hit me. . ." " . . in the presence of God. . ." "Just trying to turn it up. . ." "Brian, are the potatoes on? . . ." "PLEASE! CAN YOU ALL MUTE YOURSELVES!"

This type of exchange will be all too familiar to those of who have tried, in these locked-down times, to hold a church service on Zoom, the video-conferencing software. It is very useful for corporate meetings and conversations between small groups of friends, but it can induce anarchy when we try to use it for worship.

Why use Zoom? There are other options which churches have tried: streaming on Facebook Live, or recording videos and posting the them on YouTube. The difference with Zoom (other videoconferencing software is available, though not so widely used) is that it provides a real meeting: all the attendees are present in real time, and, if you're late, you'll miss it.

With Zoom, you cannot put the Vicar on pause while you go and make a cup of coffee. You are a participant: either intentionally: reading the lesson; or unintentionally: accidentally un-muting yourself during the sermon, so that everyone hears your children squabbling, instead of the preacher.

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Most importantly, Zoom provides a virtual space in which a community can gather, see, and hear each other, and interact. At St Mary's, Stoke Newington, in London, it is that sense of gathered community that we value, even if the price is a bit of disorder (after all, even in normal times, there is still the potential for unexpected occurrences in services).

It is important to remember what Zoom was designed for: slick corporate meetings and conferences, in which everyone is well-behaved and reasonably IT literate, and in which only one person speaks at a time. So, Zoom does not cope well with more than one person talking, and it certainly cannot handle congregational singing. The sound quality is very variable: OK for speech, but not good for music.

OUR first attempt at a Zoom service, on Passion Sunday, was chaotic. The number of people who managed to connect was impressive, but many had rudimentary computer skills and clearly could not find the "mute" button.

Our Rector, trying to lead the service from her laptop in her sitting room, made several pleas for everyone to mute themselves, with limited success. So, there were frequent interruptions, most notably during the Gospel, when Maureen (names have been changed to protect the innocent) could be heard asking her husband to start putting the vegetables on for lunch.

A hymn started well: Michael, our director of music, has a flat with a beautiful sea view (yes, Stoke Newington is not on the coast, but one of the advantages of online worship is that people can attend wherever they are quarantined). We were captivated by him playing the piano and singing, until one of the less musically talented members of the congregation got loud enough to take over the sound channel, in a not-quite-so-melodious way.

One of the key lessons that we learned from that experience was this: the person who leads the service should *not* be the Zoom "Meeting Host". In fact, "Meeting Host" is a bit of a misnomer, which confuses things: a better term would be "Meeting Controller". But, for our services, I prefer the title "Zoom Verger".

The Zoom Verger is effectively running the sound desk, lighting, and projector all at the same time, and occasionally acting as sidesperson. Therefore, they should not be doing anything else.

ONE of the Zoom Verger's prime responsibilities is to control the sound. You have the power to mute everyone, and we do that at the beginning of the service. Subsequently, we un-mute only the people who are contributing to the service, except at specific times, when we unleash the joyful bedlam of everyone talking at the same time: at the Peace and at the end of the service. When you un-mute everyone, watch out for households where there are two connected devices in the same room, which can cause a loud feedback squeal until one or both are muted.

As Zoom Verger, you should bring up the list of meeting participants; this is one of your most important tools. This list behaves in an odd way: it usually lists everyone alphabetically, but then promotes the current speaker, and others who are not muted, to the top of the list. You can use this list to un-mute and mute speakers, so that only they are heard.

If you have a lot of people at your service, the list may be long; you can use the search box at the top of the list to find the person you need to un-mute next. This may be tricky: Brian Chivers, due to lead the prayers, might be using his wife's device, so he may appear on the

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list of participants as “Maureen Pemberton”, or even “Mum’s iPad”. The alert Zoom Verger will have checked the order of service and noted contributors’ Zoom names as they arrive. Advanced Zoom Vergers might also use the Spotlight Video feature to focus everyone’s video feed on the current speaker. Don’t forget to cancel the Spotlight, or they will find themselves, awkwardly, the centre of attention long after their contribution is complete.

We are getting better at Zoom services, but there are still hiccups: awkward pauses, the wrong person un-muted, contributions missed because speakers are still on mute. A sense of humour is vital.

When it goes well, it can feel as if we are discovering a shared quarantine spirituality. Clare, a member of the congregation, commented: “Seeing the Rector lead the service from her living room, with her family, is really powerful. It reinforces the spirit of us all being a community in lockdown together. If it were led and filmed from the church building, much as I value our buildings, a lot of the spirituality would be lost.”

We have come to value seeing each other more, and realise how important our community is to us. Our faith community will be strengthened by coming through this experience together.

As with so many other aspects of life at present, we can only speculate where this will leave us when things return to normal. In the meantime, Zoom is enabling us to hold on to our sense of being a gathered community that regularly meets for worship — however haphazardly.”

If you want to give it a go, let me know!

## **Worship**

Our weekly worship is now being held via Zoom every Sunday at 10.30am. If you would like to help out by reading a lesson or offering intercessions, please email me and I will include you when I can.

This week’s order of service is attached. As you will see, it is very similar to last week’s (except the Collect and hymns are updated). I am also attaching the Collect and hymns as a separate doc for those who just want the updated parts.

Please click on the following link to access and join this Sunday’s service:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/91348069778?pwd=M1JzblZLWkVWdEJRUIbUpKbINxZz09>

Meeting ID: 913 4806 9778

Password: 014503

Worshipping in this way won’t be everyone’s cup of tea and so I highlight below, the religious broadcasts on the BBC this coming week.

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## Television

**Sunday 10.45am** (BBC1) **Sunday Worship** A service from Hereford Cathedral, filmed before the closure of church buildings.

**1.15pm** (BBC1) **Songs of Praise** Sean Fletcher looks back on journeys to ancient and sacred places of pilgrimage.

## Radio

**Sunday 8.10am** (R4) **Sunday Worship** Professor Jennifer Strawbridge, of Mansfield College, Oxford, and the Revd Dr Steve Nolan, a hospice chaplain, reflect on where to find hope in times of despair.

**3pm** (R3) **Choral Evensong** A repeat of last week's archive recording from Royal Holloway, University of London, first broadcast on 7 April 2010.

**11.30pm** (R3) **Slow Radio: The cathedral** The sounds of Durham Cathedral recorded in a single day (repeat).

**Tuesday 9am** (R4) **The Life Scientific** Jim Al-Khalili and the physicist Brian Greene discuss the composition of the universe, and the end of time (1/8).

**Wednesday 3.30pm** (R3) **Choral Evensong** An archive recording from St John's College, Cambridge, first broadcast on 2 May 2018.

The following free resources, complimenting this Sunday's lectionary themes are available from Roots on the web:

- Resources for adults: [www.rootsontheweb.com/adultsathome26apr](http://www.rootsontheweb.com/adultsathome26apr)
- Resources for families: [www.rootsontheweb.com/familiesathome26apr](http://www.rootsontheweb.com/familiesathome26apr)

## WhatsApp Prayer Group

Please do think about joining a small prayer group – you can meet for free using WhatsApp or Zoom. We have created two groups please do think about whether you might find it helpful to join with others for prayer.

The groups are an ideal way to meet together informally to share prayer together and offer encouragement and support to each other.

If you would like to be a part of a group, please email me and we will set up some more groups.

Remember the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:11 *“Therefore **encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**”*

## Bible Study Group

On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> Peter started our on-line evening Bible study group (via Zoom) using the Bible Society's 'Bible Course'.

If you would prefer to join a daytime group, please let me know and I will set one up.

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### **Pastoral Support**

We are now holding **'Elevenses on Tuesday'** – a coffee morning by Zoom. Make your coffee, bring your cake and get comfy on the sofa. Dial in to Zoom by clicking on the following link:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92258823763?pwd=UkkrT2ZLZXRIU1Y2RIIReGtibHBiUT09>

Meeting ID: 922 5882 3763

Password: 013511

We are continuing to try to ensure that congregation members receive a phone call every few days from one of our church leadership teams. Should you wish for specific spiritual support then please do be in touch with either me (my details are below) or John Le Page on 257436.

### **An Easter Reflection on the Lord's Prayer**

I received the following meditation on the Lord's Prayer earlier this week which really spoke to me. I hope you find it helpful too:

**"Why is there so much pain and suffering? Why has so much sorrow been released by a single virus? We must ask the question. We will never know the full answer. This line takes us back to a deeper, stronger understanding of time. The world is not yet as God wills it to be. There will be no disease or death when God's kingdom comes in all its fullness. For now, we celebrate all that remains good in the world and offer our talents to promote this. We groan with all creation in suffering and we look forward to the day when all things will be well. When all will know your love, your peace and your joy enduring through the hardest of days.**

### **Luke 11.1–4**

11 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' <sup>2</sup> He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

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The third line of the Lord's Prayer helps us understand the times in which we live. The world is full of suffering and pain. That suffering is brought to our attention every waking hour. How does a Christian live in an imperfect world with 24/7 news and social media?

Only by understanding the times and the Christian concept of time.

God made the world good. But the creation is flawed and broken. So God entered his world in Jesus to make it new and right and good again.

By his ministry and death and resurrection, Jesus proclaimed the beginning of a new age: the kingdom of God. That age has begun but is not yet complete. We live in the imperfect in-between times.

So every day when we pray, 'Your kingdom come', we remember the times in which we live. We lift the suffering of the world to God and we long, with God, for the world to be set right.

The world feels very strange at the moment. Covid-19 means schools are closed. Some people are worried about their jobs. Lots of people are separated from their loved ones. When we pray "*Your Kingdom come*" we are praying for change, for a time when God's love will change everything. Draw a picture of what you think God's Kingdom might look like. Write "*Your Kingdom come*" on it. Put it somewhere everyone can see it, as a reminder that things will not always be as they are now."

And finally in those moments when you might be feeling anxious or worried, listen to this:

## *Music To Inspire Your Prayer*



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And remember these words from the Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila:

*“Let nothing disturb you.  
Let nothing upset you.  
Everything changes.  
God alone is unchanging.  
With patience all things are possible.  
Whoever has God lacks nothing.  
God alone is enough.”*

Don't forget, 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.' (Psalm 46.1, NIV)"

God bless

Gill

Revd Gill Nobes  
Rector of St. Sampson

24<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Tel: 07781 140985