

Dear Friends,

This comes with warmest greetings and prayers for safekeeping and hope...

It was five years ago on 14th March that I was inducted to become the Vicar of Wrecclesham, St Peter's Church – and I said back then, as I say now, alongside my Confirmation at Guildford Cathedral some fifteen years' earlier and Ordination as deacon in 2014 and then priest a year later, this was one of the most joyful and memorable occasions for me - and five years' on I still believe that I have been called to this place to work for the Lord right now – with all of you. What a blessing this place and you people have been for me – thanks be to God....

But my, what a difference five years makes. Who would have thought back then that we would be have a couple of years where we were livestreaming services from a locked church, having much of our church and community life on zoom, enduring restrictions on meeting family and friends, and even now, being mindful and cautious about the risk of infection Covid-19 that we now concede will not be going away.

I wonder if the disciples, looking back, would have said 'who would have thought as they were called by Jesus to follow him and to help to change hearts and minds to build a more loving and peaceable place on earth in a new and grace-fulled way that would challenge the oppression and injustice of the day. I wonder if they would have said 'who would have thought' when they journeyed through the last days of Jesus' life - living out the tenderness of the Last Supper, the pain of the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane – the denial of Peter and the cowardly fleeing of the others – the horrific Good Friday Crucifixion – the sorrowful Sabbath Day and the glorious Easter morn when the world stood still and was given a glimpse of the eternal new-life promise of God through the Resurrection of Jesus – new life, new hope, new beginnings....

As the fog lifts over the trauma of the pandemic days and when we say 'who would have thought...' it seems bewildering to think that the fear and paralysis of those days actually brought the whole world to its knees and changed life patterns and worldviews forever.

But the point is that just because those times were bewildering and unbelievable – that didn't make them untrue – they happened and we are part of the history that was shaped and will be recorded in days to come – we are first-hand witnesses, and as we tell our own stories and accounts to the next generation they too might say to us 'Really? Did that honestly happen – it seems really hard to believe – and I am not sure that I even do!'

And that is how it might have been for the disciples who witnessed something as bizarre as the resurrection as they tried to tell future generations – people looking at them in almost disbelief and bemusement.

But just as we tell our own bewildering story of lockdown – the disciples told their own most bewildering and unbelievable story – but, just as it is with us, being bewildering and bizarre didn't make the story any less true - in fact, for the disciples to have to admit that their leader was put to death in the most humiliating way – and his empty tomb first discovered by women whose word was (unbelievably!) not always credible in those days – seems to say to us that actually, because the circumstances being described were so humiliating and so bizarre, and so rather embarrassing to admit, that they are more likely to be true, just as our accounts – embarrassing and bizarre as they seem – are true...

As we live in the 'new norm' post post-lockdown – bringing both its blessings such as new work/life patterns and appreciation of experiential rather than material assets – and its challenges such as difficult economic and emotional times – I do hope that like the disciples, we find a new spiritual road through that will underpin and help along our material and emotion lives with a

foundation and strength that helps us to journey on in a deeper way of self-discovery of ourselves personally and ourselves communally in our family life and community lives.

Being part of a church-family in one way or another can help with that because when that community gathers – on a Sunday morning or another time - we gather to bring all our everyday living into a collective spiritual living out of an everyday faith that takes everything about our lives and wraps it in a blanket of hope and welcome and love and sends it back out to spread that goodwill into the hearts and minds of those outside the church doors – a church without walls indeed!

This time of Lent can help with that journey – just as it helped the disciples through their own Lenten time in between the death of their beloved friend and leader and the realisation that he was alive in some new way – leading them back then – and us here today out into the sunlight of Easter Sunday in all its forgiveness and new-life sunshine-hope as the amazing appearances of Jesus sought to assure them that he was still with them and would always be with them, no matter what it looked like on the ground – that a loving and holy spirit never dies...

One of my very favourite of songs when I was a trouble and soul-searching teenager was a Stevie Wonder song called 'Place in the Sun' – and I have actually played it at the end of one of our services ☺ The chorus:

'There's a place in the sun where there's hope for everyone
where my poor restless heart has got to run...
There's a place in the sun and before my life is done
I've got to find me a place in the sun....'

What is your 'sunny place' – the place that would make you smile and hope? Even if you are not in it right now, perhaps you could visualise it and pray for it and hope for it....

Let's encourage each other to turn to the 'sunny side of the street' and hope in trust for the better days to come and that no matter what darkness we are walking through there is a caring and sharing and faithful community of friends – called church - waiting to help each other along the way as we walk the road of life together here in our place, our community.....

I leave you with the message I wrote to everyone in March 2018

'My hope is that Wrecclesham's church and community will grow ever-more closer together. My prayer is that those yet to visit St Peter's will do so and discover a space of peace and tranquillity amidst their busy lives, and I trust that all who come will experience that warm welcome and sense of belonging promised in Christ's name and find for themselves the joy that comes in belonging to a loving community that lives life through faith, fellowship and friendship.'

Blessings and prayers for safekeeping
Love, Jacqueline

The Church of my dreams: John Milton Moore

This is the Church of my dreams
The Church of the warm heart,
Of the open mind, of the adventurous spirit.
The Church that cares, that heals hurt lives,
That comforts old people, and that challenges youth,
That knows no divisions of culture or class;
no frontiers, geographical or social.

The Church that enquires as well as asserts,
That looks forward as well as backward,
The Church of the Master, the Church of the people;
High as the ideals of Jesus, low as the humblest human.
A working Church, a worshipping Church,
An enchanting, winsome, charming, captivating Church.
A Church that inspires courage for this life,
and hope for the life to come;
A Church of courage, a Church of all good men and women,
This Church of my dreams is the Church of the Living God. Amen

Written in March

The cock is crowing,
The stream is flowing,
The small birds twitter,
The lake doth glitter,
The green field sleeps in the sun...

There's joy in the mountains,
There's life in the fountains,
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing,
The rain is over and gone.
From a poem by William Wordsworth

