

Dear all

It's going to be rather strange on Sunday, coming back together again. Some of us will feel apprehensive – not only at seeing so many people, but at starting to move out into the roadmap of easing lockdown restrictions. It would be tempting to grasp this opportunity with so much enthusiasm, forgetting that it is not over yet. As we return to church, we will continue to act sensibly – with masks, physical distancing, and no social gathering after the services.

Tuesday 23rd is a day that is designated as the National Day of Reflection, marking 1 year since the first lockdown started. The diocesan website notes...

On 23 March 2021, it'll be one year since the first UK lockdown. Since then, millions of people have been bereaved, both as a result of Covid-19 and other causes. The restrictions we've all been living under have meant that many people have had to grieve without the comfort of having friends and family around them.

Marie Curie, a charity which supports people around the event of a terminal diagnosis, has organised a National Day of Reflection to acknowledge grief and loss over the last year. The Church of England is one of several organisations supporting it. The Day of Reflection provides a first national opportunity to face our loss together. It may also be an occasion on which we might connect with those who have been bereaved and spend some time looking forward in hope. There is a minute's silence at midday, after which the Central Council of Bellingers is encouraging church bells to be rung where possible.

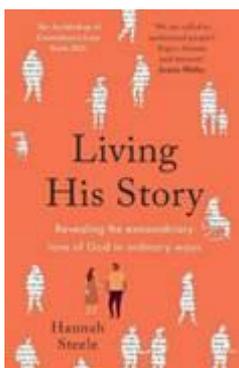
During the past year, as we know all too clearly, opportunities for mourning and grief have been severely restricted as church buildings have been closed and numbers limited at funerals. Research released today by the Church of England reveals that more than half (51%) of young adults, aged between 18 and 29 years old, have been directly affected by bereavement as a result of the pandemic. This figure should be set alongside the 31% of people aged 60 and over who have been affected. In other words, the pandemic has brought (what may be a first experience of) death close to a group of people who are in many ways unprepared to encounter it. An online survey showed that 3/4 of those surveyed were unable to attend a funeral in the past year due to the pandemic and more than 80% were not able to say 'goodbye' properly.

And yet it is our deeply felt vocation as a church to minister to and care for those who have been bereaved and those who are facing death.

At the Priory Church, we will be opening the church from 10.00am – 3.00pm for personal prayer and reflection. At 11.30 Sonia and I will lead a time of prayer and reflection, with some music. At 12.00 noon there will be a minute's silence, followed by the tolling of a bell.

I'd like to share a prayer from Nadia Bolz-Weber:

Dear God who made us all,
A year ago we did not know that we were about to learn:
what we could lose and somehow live anyway
where we would find comfort and where it would elude us
whose lives matter to whom
why we have kitchens in our homes.
In mid-March 2020 all I knew for sure is that
hoarding toilet paper doesn't make you safe - it just makes you selfish.
But God, it feels like the world is about to open back up.
And I'm both thrilled and kind of scared about that.
Because I'm not who I was a year ago.
I want so badly
to hug my friends again
and laugh like hell again
and have amazing conversations again
and yet I am not sure how long I could do any of this before crying or just getting really
quiet. My emotional protective gear has worn so thin, and grief just leaks out everywhere
now.
I am so afraid that I will never be who I once was. And I am also afraid that I will be.
(Not to mention, I'm not entirely clear what size jeans I wear as the me I am now)
And yet, when I quiet my anxious thoughts, I start to suspect that I am now closer to the me
you have always known and always loved. So help me trust that, Lord.
As things change, help us be gentle with ourselves and with each other. We are all wearing
newborn skin right now.
Amen.



Our fifth session of the **Lent Course** discussed Passing on the story of Jesus. The role of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel. There is a temptation to see Acts as a guidebook. Rather it is stories of how the Holy Spirit worked in early church. This was in a world that did not know Christ – like today!

Two stories were instructive. The account of Philip & Ethiopian shows that the Holy Spirit already at work.

The account of Peter and Cornelius shows us that the Holy Spirit is constantly looking for new places. The scope of Gospel bigger than they dared imagine! The question was posed who is Cornelius in our life? The person we struggle to imagine could ever become a Christian? Perhaps we, like Peter, need horizons expanded by HS.

The Holy Spirit is not about clever strategies, but about speaking of the love of God. The pandemic has given us an impetus to share the Gospel. There is much confusion,

apprehension, grief, loss... we need to speak of the overwhelming love of God with sensitivity, compassion and boldness.

6 principles of the early church in witnessing:

1. Risk-taking, not comfort-seeking. Even if we 'fail'.
2. Variety, not one-size-fits-all. e.g. Pentecost = public speaking, Philip = individual conversation.
3. Relational, not confrontational. The most common way to come to Christ is from personal relationships.
4. Seeking God, not taking God. 'Knowing all the answers' can be counter-productive. Power & arrogance can cause real harm. It focuses on us, not the Holy Spirit, who has often gone before.
5. Out there not in here. It is not just about getting people into church, but to meet with Jesus.
6. Together, not alone. In Acts, the disciples are rarely alone. Sense of partnership in Paul's letters.

It is a partnership with God – the Holy Spirit will show us what to say. We are never alone. The book of Acts doesn't 'end'... we continue the story. How about you?

A reminder that the Lent Course will take place on Zoom, Thursdays 2.30-3.30ish pm. The Zoom details are:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/8109399155?pwd=STVVVTU44RzJxTFFHbTY1MnI0bjJ2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 810 939 9155

Passcode: 1w2C9a

Service details for this coming Sunday, Passion Sunday (Lent 5).

Readings – Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 5: 5-10; Psalm 51: 1-13; John 12: 20-33

Today's musical offerings (apologies for adverts – it's how they are able to make content free!):

Firstly, the Psalm for this Sunday, Anglican chant.

[Psalm 51: Have mercy upon me, O God - YouTube](#)

And, for total contrast...

The Sons of Korah version.

[Sons of Korah Psalms 51 A Broken Spirit and Contrite Heart - YouTube](#)

Graham Kendrick

[Psalm 51 - Have mercy on me, O God \(by Graham Kendrick\) - Lyric Video - YouTube](#)

And in Hebrew

[Choneni Elohim, from Psalm 51 \(Be Gracious to me O G-d\) - YouTube](#)

The poet Malcolm Guite has provided a poem for each Psalm, reflecting on its meaning for him. Here is his reflection on Psalm 51.

[‘He Mends Your Broken Bones’ a Response to Psalm 51 | Malcolm Guite \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Anthems recommended for today include:

Verily, verily I say unto you by Thomas Tallis

[Verily, Verily I Say unto You - YouTube](#)

Christe adoramus te by Monteverdi

[VOCES8 - Adoramus Te, Christe - YouTube](#)

Christus factus est by Bruckner

[King's College Cambridge 2013 Easter #9 Christus Factus Est, Bruckner - YouTube](#)

My song is love unknown by L'Estrange

[My song is love unknown \(excerpt\) by Alexander L'Estrange - YouTube](#)



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark