

Dear all

I am sure that, like me, you are finding it very strange living life under the new restrictions. Hopefully those with extra time on their hands are able to find things to fill it. Even if all you can do is pray, the value of this is immeasurable!

With the help of my children, I have started work on tidying the garden. Sadly, I don't think I'll be able as yet to get plants to fill it, but at least the ground will be prepared – hopefully for celebrations in the summer, including the Rose and Sweet Pea Show. I have also completed an online course, which is very informative, about Covid-19 and public health actions around it. Here is the link for any who would like to know more:

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/covid19-novel-coronavirus?utm_campaign=Share+Links&utm_medium=futurelearn-just_enrolled&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=IwAR3bStO3Gdx6PD3qoxxBwhNKzdNZaiudACqYYLUUap8AEvXWclX89sQH3ZI

Incidentally, Future learn do a range of useful practical courses at reasonable cost – e.g. Food Hygiene – for anyone seeking to fill their time.

As well as this, I have been keeping abreast of various missives and instructions from the Diocese and the Church of England. And, of course, keeping in touch by phone and email.

Today is the Feast of the Annunciation, when we remember the announcement to Mary that she was going to have a son. His name was to be Yeshua – Joshua or, as we know better, Jesus – the Saviour. We can take comfort at this time that God became flesh in Christ Jesus. He experienced the whole gamut of what it means to be human – the pain, the fear, the loss of loved ones, the loneliness and rejection... but also the joy and laughter, companionship and partying! He knows what we go through and promises to be with us, wherever our journey takes us.

The collect for today: We beseech you, O Lord, pour your grace into our hearts, that as we have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought to the glory of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

My old friend from Wellington, Nick Fawcett, has been blogging a series of prayers for those struggling to pray at the moment. Over the next few days, I will be including one in each of my messages:

Coronavirus: Are you struggling to pray? by Nick Fawcett

Are you struggling to pray at the moment? I am. You want to bring your fears before God. You want to commit yourself and your loved ones into his keeping. You want to pray for the innumerable people facing unimaginable difficulties and hardship at this time due to the health crisis that has descended so swiftly upon us. But prayer doesn't come easily. We feel almost numbed, almost lost for words, almost as though our own little concerns (however huge they may feel to us personally) are relatively trivial in relation to the scale of the crisis now facing the world. Yet we need to pray, now more than ever. Not that prayer will guarantee our safety or that of our loved ones, or that it will miraculously put everything right, but we need simply to seek help and strength to face whatever the months ahead may bring.

Over the coming weeks then, so long as I don't myself succumb to Covid 19 (which is an all too real possibility, as I'm in the very highest 'at risk' category), I'm going to post a short and simple prayer each day, alongside other posts, which I hope may help you to articulate some of your own thoughts and fears, and to remind you that in these dark days, however much it may feel like it, we are not alone.

Lord,
what can I pray for?
What should I say?
I'm frightened,
troubled,
confused,
everything in life having been turned inside out
and upside down.
And whatever words I use in prayer seem inadequate,
hollow,
even trite.
Help me,
hold me,
hear me,
and at this troubled time, encircle all –
myself,
my loved ones,
my friends and colleagues,
the wider world –
in the warm embrace of your love.
Amen.

Stay safe.

Blessings

Mark