

MARCH 18th 2020

Yesterday's email from 121 came as a shock, though hardly a surprise.

The Prime Minister announcement on Monday evening set out stringent restrictions on public gatherings, in order to clamp down further on the spread of Coronavirus. In the face of such restrictions, we could not envisage church gatherings being an exception. As from today, Worship Services, Church meetings, cafes, etc must cease until further notice.

And yet, Sunday Worship is at the heart of any Church's life, and for those who attend regularly, it is with great sadness that we comply immediately with the new Regulations. These affect all denominations (and no doubt all religions) so many, many people will now feel the loss of being unable to meet to worship God and to pray.

Fortunately for us all, God is not dependent on structures, whether material or virtual, and His love for the world is now shown through the love and kindness that we show to one another every day. The end of our Lenten journey will be a strange one this year, but it will end in the same way as ever - thanks to what Jesus did on the Cross - with Good overcoming Evil. Perhaps it was a sense of *deja vue* that made me repeat three weeks ago Pope Francis' 2017 suggestions for fasting:

- Fast this Lent from Hurting Words and use Kind Words instead.
- Fast from Anger, and be filled with Patience
- Fast with Pessimism, and be filled with Hope

It will take us all a while to adjust to whatever now becomes our new way of life. While we pray for the safety of all those who must serve the public in their work life, we also think of those facing physical separation from loved ones, the many now isolating themselves from friends and wider family - and all those who find the reality of staying at home and washing their hands to be a really grim prospect!

I commend to you the prayer written by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland specially for this health emergency....
First, a Hymn, whose well-known tune (The Bard of Armagh) makes it very hum-able, while its words are so very pertinent to the position we find ourselves in today...

The Church is wherever God's people are praising,
knowing they're wanted and loved by their Lord
The Church is wherever Christ's followers are trying
to live and to share out the good news of God.

The Church is wherever God's people are loving
where all are forgiven and start once again,
where all are accepted, whatever their background,
whatever their past and whatever their pain.

The Church is wherever God's people are seeking
to reach out and touch folk wherever they are –
conveying the Gospel, its joy and its comfort,
to challenge, refresh, and excite and inspire.

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[c Carol Rose Ikeler b. 1920]

God bless and take care

Liz

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