Pastoral Letter from your Rector, Saturday 28th March

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change ... (Psalm 46:1-2)

Dear Friends,

As we come to the end of our first “lock-down” week, I wonder how you are doing? We know we are going to be facing the severe restrictions on our movement for several weeks, and if you are in a “vulnerable group” or were already self-isolating, this will be even more difficult.

Not many of us remember anything like it, although a few who were alive during the Second World War will no doubt be able to make some comparisons. Initially, the new way of living takes some getting used to, but already there are many signs that people have found sources of strength through phone calls with other people, joining in online exercise classes, or the radio and TV. I know some people have relished the opportunity to catch up with jobs at home or in the garden. For those looking after children, the enforced confinement to the family home will have had both blessings and challenges! There’s always a silvery lining to every cloud!

The Bible is full of wisdom for every situation. Perhaps for some the following from Paul’s letter to the Colossians may be timely:

12 As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.
(Colossians 3:12-15 NRSV)

The source of the kindness, patience etc that we need is God, so making time every day (perhaps frequently) to let our minds and hearts be filled with his peace and giving thanks for our blessings could make all the difference both to our sanity and to our relationships.

Practical information

Help: Steph Martin (01252 873316) is linking volunteers to those who need help with shopping, collecting medication or who would just like to have a chat with someone. Do phone her.

www.healthwatchbracknellforest.co.uk/ are another organization which is co-ordinating help within the Borough. Their phone number is 01344 266 911.

The Silver Line is a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people open 24 hours a day every day, tel. 0800 4 70 80.
**Crowthorne Foodbank** (operated by Wokingham Vineyard) needs donations and volunteers. Rather than buying food yourself, you can also donate money online at https://wokinghamvineyard.churchsuite.co.uk/donate/fund/3.

**St Michael’s Church and Pastoral Centre** are now closed until further notice, following instructions from the Government and the Church of England. The **Churchyard** is still open as a place of tranquility, if that is where you’d like to go for your daily bit of exercise. The regular maintenance, however, has been put on hold for the duration of the current lock-down.

**Sunday Worship**

I will be posting orders of service to use at home this evening on the website, with a post on our Facebook pages. Like last week, there will be one for adults and one for families with younger children.

I am hoping to live-stream a service from the Rectory using Facebook at 9.30 am tomorrow, 29th March. If you don’t use Facebook, you will still be able to watch it later through the website (I hope – I’m on a steep technological curve here!). The Live stream will hopefully be going ahead at www.facebook.com/StMichaelsSandhurst. Please bear in mind that the clocks go forward by 1 hour tonight!

In addition, the following worship is available on the TV or online.

- **BBC1** is going to be showing **Sunday Worship at 10.45 am** (note time) this Sunday morning.
- **Oxford Diocese** will be streaming a service at 10 am at oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/#toggle-id-5-closed

**And finally**

Let’s remember that God is always with us by his Holy Spirit, and that we are united in fellowship even if we can’t physically meet. Please take initiatives to pray for others, for health workers, for our Government and for leaders throughout the world and for people struggling not only with this virus but with war, poverty and natural disasters. Phone friends, neighbours, family members. Amidst all the uncertainty and anxiety, give thanks for everything you can. To continue Paul’s advice to the Colossians:

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

With every blessing,

John

Rev John Castle