

Why, my soul are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. Psalm 43:5

Dear members of St Marys

Many of us have been downcast this week - as we heard the news of the sudden death of Kirsty Edwards in Luton and Dunstable Hospital on the afternoon of Palm Sunday. Suddenly this ghastly virus has reached into the midst of us and swept away a dearly loved member of our church family. It's so hard to bear. As our hearts go out to Kirsty's family, and our thanks and sympathy to church members who've been supporting her closely over a challenging few months. And as we hear bad or worrying news from other families as well as on the news every day.

There is of course, comfort in our memories of Kirsty's warm and happy faith in Jesus. For all the hurdles she faced, Kirsty shared the firm faith of the psalmist: 'I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God'. When we are able to gather in numbers at a future service of thanksgiving, we will rejoice together in her trust in Jesus, love for his people and hope of heaven. As we take courage from the heart-warming news of help being offered and encouragements shared across church, families and communities.

But just now, our hearts are taking a battering. What does it mean to come to Easter like this?

Over and over again in the Bible we see believers cast-down by hard times, saying honestly 'this is heart-breaking, this is miserable'. And then finding the strength to endure. Not with stiff upper lip stoicism. But with the assurance that we do not face hard times alone. Paul writes: 'we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.' As we recall and celebrate at Easter, Christians belong to one who was struck down. And, far from being destroyed, rose up. Never to be struck down again.

So there will be tears in our eyes as we sing hymns and songs this Easter this year. But there will also be joy in our hearts. That Jesus has overcome death. That he has his people in his grip. And that there is solid hope for the world to know.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Peter

Services this week on the church YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZvCU7xTRXeo4l4L5U10cxQ>

Good Friday 10th April

Two ways to observe Good Friday as individuals and families.

First, a short service for all ages.

Alternatively, there will be a selection of readings and prayers on a Good Friday 'playlist' - including hymns from our own musicians, a reading from John19, the final Holy Week Thought for the Day, and Good Friday prayers.

Easter Day 12th April

Easter Service Do tune in from 8am on Sunday morning. Can I invite you to read beforehand the account of the resurrection in John's gospel: John 20:1-18. I will be preaching from vv11-18.

For those who do not have internet access, you can hear the sermon over the phone. Just dial 01234 866195: after the short message beginning 'you have a trial account . . .', press any key on your phone and after two rings you'll be connected to the sermon track. At the end, just hang up. (Please pass this information on the people who may need it.)

Zoom Coffee! At 11.30am on Sunday morning, for those able to access Zoom from the following link, there will be a Zoom Coffee time - where we can meet up with other church members for up to forty-five minutes. Bring your own coffee! <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/125923967?pwd=NFp1UTZ1VDJXbGNta3lyZE1XUkhJUT09>

Meeting ID: 125 923 967

Password: 010520

Easter Day Prayer Gathering - 12th April 7.15pm

Do join us for 40 minutes of prayer on Zoom on Sunday evening

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/125923967?pwd=NFp1UTZ1VDJXbGNta3lyZE1XUkhJUT09>

Meeting ID: 125 923 967

Password: 010520

Prayer o'clock - 8pm(ish) daily Every evening at the vicarage we are now reading a portion of a psalm using Tim & Kathy Keller's daily devotional, My Rock My Refuge. And then turning what we read to prayer as we pray for one another and issues on our hearts. I'd love to hear how other people are finding this daily time to remember each other.

Prayer Diary & Programme Card Attached is the daily prayer diary for the fortnight beginning April 19. A revised - online - programme card is in preparation and I hope will be available shortly after Easter.

Christianity Explored We will be offering an online version of this introduction to the Christian faith after Easter. Contact Phillip Young for more details - saintmaryscurate@gmail.com, 01234 401462.

Training For many people, the lockdown and school closure means our days are full. On the other hand, if you are finding yourself with time on your hands and would like to use it to engage in some online training (eg Dynamics of Biblical Change with Biblical Counselling UK), please let me know.

Annual Meeting & PCC This has now been postponed until Monday 28th September. By order of the diocesan bishop, churchwardens and members of PCC and Deanery Synod remain in office until the autumn. Just before the lockdown began, PCC approved its Report and Accounts for 2019; this will be available on the church website shortly. An online PCC meeting is being held on Monday 20th April.

Hardship Fund We are all aware that for some, the coronavirus crisis brings financial difficulty. PCC will be asked to approve a hardship fund for donations to support church members in emergency financial need. If you would like to give in this way, please contact the Treasurer, Phil Wainwright (01234 391740). And if you or someone you know is in need of help, please contact me or a churchwarden in confidence.

Bedford Foodbank Hazel Sanders tells me she is receiving a steady and significant stream of goods for the Foodbank at 52A Church Road. These are quickly delivered to the Bedford Base, which is in continual need of supplies. Thank you.

Mission Partners Please remember our mission partners in prayer at this challenging time for all Christian ministries (details on the church website). Many of us will know that since 2007 the Lunch Club has been supporting the education of children living in a slum district in Kampala Uganda - the FOCUS Mulago Child Project. Today I received an email from the project director. Let me close this Easter letter with their words:

Dear Peter,

Trusting this finds you well. The children and parents here at the FOCUS Mulago Child Project are very concerned about you. They call in to ask how you are and they are praying for you.

In moments like this, it is clear that our only help is found in Christ alone. Let us keep fixing our eyes on Jesus. Helen Howarth Lemmel in 1918 wrote a song 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus'.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace

Oh, souls are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There is light for a look at the savior
and life more abundant and free.

His words shall not fail you, He promised
Believe Him and all will be well
Then go to a world that is dying
His perfect salvation tell

Hebrews 12:2 " Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Praying for you

With love to all of you in Christ Jesus

Peter