



# Holy Trinity Church

Oswestry

18th March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Attached to this letter you will find information about how we will continue to live together as God's people in these very unusual days. We must continue to hear God's voice, say our prayers, encourage one another and care practically for the needy. Before those details it is worth stepping back briefly to think biblically about what is happening. This pandemic is a reminder, a warning and a call.

### **A reminder**

Everybody is uncomfortable with what is happening. It messes about with normal patterns of life; it leaves us without the face to face company we enjoy; we can't buy what we want; and we don't know what is going to happen in the coming weeks. But there is something more that we don't often speak about: the pandemic is reminding us every day that we are weak and mortal. We are not in control and we, and others we love, might die. This is the real discomfort that we are experiencing. We don't like being reminded about it.

### **A warning**

The striking thing is that plagues and widespread illness in the Bible are always seen as warnings from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a prayer at the end of this letter which understands this. It was the normal understanding of previous generations of Christians. It is wonderful to have the knowledge of the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientist flanking the Prime Minister at the daily news conference, but for a full response we need the Archbishop of Canterbury to have a lecturn too. Because it is the job of the Christian church to bear witness that the Almighty God of heaven, in his mercy, is warning us. He is puncturing the pride of the nations, he is bringing down the mighty, he is humbling the self-sufficient, he is exposing the gods of our age (sport, finance, health, travel) and this time he is doing it globally. Yes, it is a judgment, but any judgment that falls before the final judgment is a warning, it is not the final reckoning. And so it is also a call.

### **A call**

It is a call to every nation, tribe, language and tongue to turn back to the God of heaven while there is still time. To recognise his control and our mortality. To recognise that we have become so contented that we have forgotten him. And so to heed his warning that he will not put up with the arrogance of humanity forever. As Paul said to the leading Athenians,

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

*Acts 17v30-31*

C.S.Lewis famously said that suffering was God's megaphone to a deaf world. On a Sunday evening with the young people we have been studying two contrasting examples of how to respond to warnings from God. Both had time to repent: one did and one didn't. You can read about Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in Daniel 4 & 5.

In the discomfort of his reminder, when we properly heed his warning, then we will respond to his call. And only then do we find hope.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you....

...And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

*1 Peter 5v6-7,10-11*

With this certain hope comes the responsibility to live as hopeful people.

"We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people - the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven"

*Colossians 1v4-5*

Of all the people in this current crisis, we are the ones who are not tethered by the worries of the world but are set free to serve others. We are not only equipped by the gospel to survive, but to thrive in love and good deeds because of our hope. This will be seen in some of us by a cheerful submission to government advice; and in others by a cheerful service of those in need.

So, brothers and sisters, let us pray:

*O ALMIGHTY God, who in thy wrath didst send a plague upon thine own people in the wilderness, for their obstinate rebellion against Moses and Aaron; and also, in the time of king David, didst slay with the plague of pestilence threescore and ten thousand, and yet remembering thy mercy didst save the rest: Have pity upon us miserable sinners, who now are visited with great sickness and mortality; that like as thou didst then accept of an atonement, and didst command the destroying Angel to cease from punishing, so it may now please thee to withdraw from us this plague and grievous sickness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

*Book of Common Prayer, in the time of any common Plague or Sickness*

*Merciful Lord, receive the prayers of your people who call upon you and grant that we may know those things we ought to do and also have the grace and power faithfully to perform them, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

*Collect for 1st Sunday after Epiphany*

With thanks to God for all of you and in the sure fellowship of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Darlington". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Darlington  
Vicar