

Glastonbury Together in prayer

A news sheet for members of Glastonbury churches during the crisis caused by Covid 19



One step at a time

Following pressure from Church Leaders the first step to the reopening of our churches has been announced. The government is allowing churches to open for private prayer with restrictions in place. In Glastonbury it is planned to open St John's from 10:00 until noon on Tues, Thurs and Sat from 23rd June. St Mary's plans to open on Fri and Sat evenings from 18:30—19:30 and on Mon and Thurs mornings from 09:30-10:30 starting on 19th June. Both Churches will be open thanks to the help of volunteers who will control entry, to ensure hygiene requirements are met and numbers are such that distancing can be maintained. Number limits may require waiting outside until an earlier worshiper has left. Hand hygiene and the cleaning of surfaces that are touched are required. Touching devotional items should not take place and joint resources such as hymn and prayer books should be withdrawn. No joint worship is allowed and no music although guidelines allow organists to practice. There are no current plans for the other churches in the town to open for prayer. Some people are still advised to stay at home as much as possible and to take care with contact with persons outside their household; those concerned are persons over 70 years and those who are eligible for the flu vaccine.

The Body of Christ

The Thursday before Easter, Maundy Thursday, commemorates the institution of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, where Jesus breaks bread and gives it to his Disciples telling them *"take this and eat, this is My body"*. Jesus then says *"do this in memory of Me"* and this has been celebrated by Christians through out history as a focal point of Christian life. With the event being part of Holy Week there is a lot more going on, so in the 13th Century St Thomas Aquinas proposed that a feast be established to focus solely on the institution of the Eucharist. The feast of Corpus Christi, literally the Body of Christ, was established and settled at two months after Maundy Thursday which this year fell on 11th June. The feast is celebrated in a number of denominations whilst others suppressed it due to theological differences that arose around the time of the reformation. Some churches move the feast to the Sunday afterwards so that the commemoration can be fully celebrated. Many Roman Catholic parishes use this Sunday to introduce children to their first communion after a period of instruction—this year plans have had to change and celebrations postponed. Fully re-establishing Holy Communion in both bread and wine in churches may by its nature have to be one of the last things allowed as restrictions caused by the virus are relaxed.

Local risks

The numbers who have contracted the virus in Somerset are lower than in many parts of the country but the rate of reproduction (how many are infected by each person who contracts the virus) is higher than elsewhere. Whilst this may in part be due to the low numbers infected it does mean that we need to take care as there will be less resistance to the virus if it starts to spread more in this area.

Symptoms to watch for

In order to minimise the risk of transmitting the virus people who develop symptoms that may be those of the virus are asked to isolate themselves. The symptoms the government notes are: a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of or change to sense of smell or taste. If anyone comes down with these symptoms whilst at a place of worship those who have come in contact should wash their hands thoroughly but do not need to take further action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are asked to do so by the track and trace team.



Our Common Home

A message for our time

It is now ten years since Pope Francis issued his encyclical letter on the care for our common home, *Laudato Si*. In many ways this could be seen as being ahead of the time coming before much of the modern environmental campaigning led by people such as Greta Thunberg. It is also a message for the Corona virus crisis as some of the environmental aims are helped by the reduction in activity caused by the crisis. When the letter was issued Churches Together in Glastonbury staged a reading of the whole document at St Mary's and it was a moving event. When we are able to meet again it would be good to repeat the reading and/or to organise groups to study the document in an Ecumenical context. If you would like to read the document now it can be found online, search for *Laudato Si*, an English version can be found on the Vatican website. Since many of the changes to society that have taken place because of measures to control the spread of the virus have a beneficial effect on our natural environment we should consider carefully if we want to return to what was the previous "normal" when the crisis ends or should we aim to continue some of the life choices that reduce our impact on our environment. Pope Francis says that we need to develop new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. Perhaps the present crisis will help us to move towards a new lifestyle to help save our common home.

A look at Jeremiah 20

The three lectionaries include a reading from the prophet Jeremiah for the 21st June. The reading comes from the denunciation of his persecutors by Jeremiah. In chapter 19 the Jews had forsaken the Lord burning incense to gods that had not been known by their fathers. Jeremiah spoke out against this and, at the beginning of chapter 20, for his trouble was beaten and placed in the stocks by the leader of the temple. When he is released he denounces his persecutors and prophesies the exile into Babylon. The reading comes from Jeremiah's denunciation and ends at verse 13 in the middle of that section. In that verse Jeremiah praises the Lord who rescues the needy from the hands of the wicked. In this time of trial we should continue to praise the Lord and ask to be saved from the current situation.

The missing voices

Worshipping for many Christians includes the singing of hymns as an important part of services. Whilst we can sing in our own homes, perhaps joining with hymns sung in online streamed services many will be missing the opportunity to sing out as a group. It may be some time before we can again sing in our churches as singing may be seen as a greater risk of spreading the virus. In his hymn written in the 16th century William Kethe instructs "*All people that on Earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:*" something that it would be good to be able to do now. Kethe had a part in translating the psalms in the Geneva bible and his hymn is based on psalm 100, one of those he translated. In some hymn books there are only 4 verses to this hymn which matches the psalm but in many places a 5th verse has been added. This last verse is important at this time just after Pentecost where we think of the Trinity. There are a variety of words for the verse that have been published over the years but all have the theme of praising God in the three persons of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

This is a popular hymn appearing in well over 500 hymn books with large numbers including the hymn in the last half century.

Resources for remote worship

After several months with our churches closed it is perhaps appropriate to remind readers of worship resources that can be accessed on a computer or tablet. Prayers, hymns and the weekly readings can all be accessed via the internet. Many services are being live streamed and/or recorded for later viewing. Interactive services are also taking place in some areas by using meeting software such as Zoom. In Glastonbury the Anglican community have been using Zoom for a weekly Sunday service which one week reached the Zoom limit of 100 participants. Glastonbury Methodists are also using Zoom for evening reflective services. There are calls for these resources to continue when churches reopen and reports of people who do not normally attend churches using them. This makes the Internet a new and useful method for Evangelisation. Resources for each denomination are listed on the Churches together in Glastonbury website:

<https://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/glastonbury/features/homeworship/>

This page also contains a link to an international multilanguage version of *Amazing Grace* which can be found on YouTube, it is worth watching. If you come across any other resources that might be useful to others they can be added to the website on request.

