

17th March – Plans for the coming days ...

Hi everyone,

I imagine we are all still taking in **yesterday's news** as we come to terms with the fact that normal life has now been put on hold. Finding my weekly schedule cancelled in one fell swoop, I awoke this morning feeling like I was starting a new job. What I am meant to be doing and where do I begin? I am sure many of you have experienced similar disorientation as the impact of yesterday's government directives start to impact our lives.

As I watched the news at lunchtime with it's reports of the economy grinding to a halt and the gradual shut down of normal life, a line from the 23rd Psalm came to mind, *'He makes me lie down in green pastures.'*

Makes.

The thought came to mind; might this be God's way of pressing an almighty 'pause' on our whole way of life with its excesses, hurry, distraction and the draining of our planet's resources? What if this is his way of making us 'lie down', giving us the time and space to reflect on the way we live our lives and what this does to both our world and our souls? What if, for many, this is a moment of re-connection with something lost; that at the end of it all *'many will see, many will fear and many will put their trust in the Lord?'* (Psalm 43).

What if??

This is in no way to make the coronavirus a good thing, but can good come from it?

Anyway, enough reflection for now (though perhaps more to come in subsequent emails); what does all this mean for our church family and our worship? A number of things to share with you:

- Following directives issued today from all our partner denominations, we will **no longer be holding meetings or gatherings, either for prayer or for Sunday services** until instructed otherwise. I know this will be difficult for many, but, as we know, this is in line with the strategy to minimise the possibility of transmitting the virus.
- All **midweek activities** (both church and community) have also now ceased. We do however, plan to keep the church open so that people can **come in to sit quietly or to pray**.
- **Home groups will no longer meet**, though we will encourage leaders to set up Whatsapp groups (or similar) so that you can keep in touch.
- Likewise, we hope to offer some form of **online worship**, whether live-streamed or with video recording and links to songs. We'll be working on this in the next few days and hope to have this ready for Sunday.

Whilst we will find it hard not to meet together, this is an exciting opportunity to discover what it means to be church in this new reality. We have already been trialing a

new shape of worship - now we get to experiment yet further! What will we discover about ourselves, our relationship with God, and the heart of worship as we step out in faith?

As we move ahead into these coming weeks, it seems to me that our **three priorities** should be to:

- a) ensure that **everyone in our church family is supported** and has all they need - especially those who are vulnerable and are self-isolating
- b) encourage us to **grow spiritually and to remain positive** as the days go by, using technology and links to helpful resources
- c) **join forces with others in the community** to ensure residents on the Heath are cared for and have all they need.

As we move ahead with these priorities I plan to send regular updates so that we keep in touch and stay connected.

When we crossed the river together a couple of months ago, I don't think any of us anticipated this sort of terrain awaiting us on the other side. But here we are, and I believe that God, as we remain faithful, will do amazing things among us. This morning I was with Roger and Christine. Before I left we prayed together this prayer by David Adam:

*Lord, you are in this place,
Fill us with your power,
Cover us with your peace,
Show us your presence.*

*Lord, help us to know,
We are in your hands,
We are under your protection,
We are covered by your love.*

*Lord, we ask you today,
To deliver us from evil,
To guide us in our travels,
To defend us from all harm.*

*Lord, give us now,
Eyes to see the invisible,
Ears to hear your call,
Hands to do your work.
And ears to respond to your love. Amen.*

Every blessing,

Patrick