



Holy Trinity, Hartshill

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St Peter's Galley Common.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ

These are unprecedented times in which I know many in our community (local and global) are feeling scared, confused and unsure about what the future holds. Please be assured of our love, thoughts and prayers as we still seek to be 'church' albeit in a different and even new way.

We, as Church of England ministers, are being updated regularly by the advice given both by the national church as well as local Bishops and leaders. As I am sure many of you will have picked up from the news / internet the headline news is:

Church services are to be suspended until further notice

as Public worship services are NOT allowed to take place

(This includes the Lent course, prayer meetings, all groups, meetings and social events)

However, God can be prayed to and worshipped at any time in any place – and so at the end of this letter there will be a series of resources that can be used for personal prayer. Sharon and I will continue to do our rhythm of prayer which will have a special focus of praying for you all by name as well as praying for our community and world. And so to have a sense of community we have decided to do that at the same time (individually...but symbolically together) and so we will be doing morning and evening prayer each day at 9.30 am / 6.30 pm. If you want to feel part of that by doing the same at home – then join us informally with your own prayers or use the website/app to do the set liturgy and readings for that day.

For those on email we also plan to offer you a virtual service each week for 10am on a Sunday which we will email out to you by Saturday night each week – including readings, prayers and a reflection. If we don't have your email address – send it to me and I'll add you to the list. For those who don't do email – we have included with this letter a prayer booklet covering readings and prayers that you can use at any time.

Being isolated doesn't mean being alone...DO keep praying, phoning, remotely supporting one another wherever possible. The church is the people of God - being the Kingdom of God wherever you are.... Love God.... Love one another....be kind... these rules can still be lived out in new and creative ways as we seek to 'be' church rather than meet as church.

All of this is under review as we get new advice almost daily... and as and when things change we will let you know where possible.... Or for those on line do look at the C of E website for updates.

Also, please be aware that as distressing as this is for us - it is also impacting our wider church community (home communion recipients, baptism families, wedding couples and funeral families) as well as for those for whom community groups are a life-line (community café, coffee morning, over 50's, tots etc...) Please remember these people, groups and their leaders in your prayers too.

Please pray for your leaders too as we are having to make difficult decisions with limited resources and having to battle between our hearts and heads with many of the day to day things we are facing. We are having to hold on to God so closely at this time – and so thank God that He is our strength and our song ... and is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Lastly, for now, this Sunday – the Archbishops of Canterbury & York have said this.... *“We have called, along with our fellow church leaders, for a day of prayer and action this coming Sunday - Mothering Sunday (22nd March). Mothering Sunday has always been both a day of celebration for many and a sensitive and emotional day for some. Wherever you are this Sunday please do join in this day of prayer and action and remember especially those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service. As one action, we are calling on everyone to place a lighted candle in their window at 7.00 p.m. as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished.”* They have also said *“This is a defining moment for the Church of England. Are we truly a church for all, or just the church for ourselves? We urge you sisters and brothers to become a different sort of church in these coming months: hopeful and rooted in the offering of prayer and praise and overflowing in service to the world. Please, therefore, join us in this great challenge; and pray for our Government and nation, for each other, and especially for those who work in our health and emergency services.”*

I end with a prayer for all those affected by Coronavirus:

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

With our thoughts and prayers

Heather & *Sharon*

Suggested prayer and other resources:

Daily Prayer – that Sharon & I will be following....

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

C of E's website – prayer resources for this time

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

ABC's note on COVID-19:

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/articles/message-archbishop-justin-welby-responding-coronavirus>

Radio 4 is continuing Ruth Valerios reflections on Lent on Sunday at 8:10am

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qnds>

BBC1's Songs of Praise for Mothering Sunday is at 1.15pm

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006ttc5>