

## Where do we go from here?

Dear Friends,

The late Pope John Paul II once wrote: “We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!” These words seem apposite given our current circumstances. Some may say that after the year we have experienced there is no reason to sing “Alleluia”; there is only loss and grief. While this may feel true, the arc of the Christian story shows us that there is always hope. This week Christians across the world, and from every tradition, join together to retell the Easter story. This story is the pivot of history. And this story is in macrocosm, our own personal story. There is grief, there is pain, there is betrayal, isolation, rejection, and loss. Each of these emotions and experiences are real and valid: they may even be our own, but, this is not the whole story. The arc of the Easter story bends towards death, before miraculously bending towards victory and new life. And so it is with us: as we wait for the return of Jesus we live between the cross and the empty tomb, we live between agony and perfection, between grief and joy, between defeat and victory: that is the tension of the Christian life. None of these realities are false, yet none of them, without their opposite, captures the whole story. Though we feel all kinds of pain, and none of this pain is good in itself, we can still rise, despite our pain, to rejoice and bless the Lord: “We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!” As we meditate on the events of Holy Week and as we immerse ourselves in the Easter story, our own experience resonates with that of Jesus—more than that, as Christians we are united to Jesus—and so we go down ‘in him’ to death but ‘in him’ we also rise to new life. Whatever our circumstances, we have not only the permission, but also the ability to rejoice.

My hope, as we emerge from lockdown, is that we will be the people God has called us to be. That we will be an Easter people. That we will, whatever our circumstances, be able to rejoice and cry “Alleluia.” And as we rejoice at the ending of lockdown; at the arrival of Spring; at the incredible roll out the Covid vaccine; and most importantly, at the resurrection of Jesus, we will be able to testify to the goodness of God. And as we do this, we will demonstrate a hope and a confidence that those who do not know Jesus, do not, and without Him cannot, share. As a church, my hope is that we would not live according to the narrative that our media spins, but that we would instead live according to a better story: the Easter story. A story that neither sweeps suffering under the carpet, nor wallows in self-pity, but a story with both a cross and an empty tomb: a story that is able to name pain and acknowledge suffering but that simultaneously enables us to rejoice in the triumph of life over death.

As we emerge from lockdown I hope we can reflect the tension of this great story in our own life as a church family. Starting on June 10 we will begin a new Hub series, which is designed to help us reflect and recover from the past year. This programme is called Rejoice!—for we have much about which to rejoice, but at the same time our experiences will not be swept away. There will be time and space to reflect and to recover. There will be a healing service to consider loss and missed opportunities and a praise night to thank God for his provision. There will also be time and space to reconnect, to talk, to laugh and cry and hug.

After Easter, the 11am Holy Communion at St Michael’s will not restart. As I have spoken to the people who would be affected by this it appears that there is little appetite for such a service. There seems to be some desire for an evening service and it may be that from May we can start a 5pm Holy Communion at St Michael’s, very much in the style of the old 9am service.

Verity and I are expecting a baby on April 12 and I am due to have a small operation on my hand on April 26. As a result, I will be away for most of April, on annual leave and paternity leave, but I will be back to work on May 4. Please do keep us in your prayers. In the meantime, if you need to get hold of someone, depending on what it is, you can talk to Cecelia, Joanna, John, or one of the Church Wardens and they should be able to point you in the right direction.

I know this has been an isolating and difficult year for many, but as Christians let us not be defined by our circumstances, let us be defined by our saviour: the one who died, but the one who also rose again. “We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!”

With love in Jesus,

Chris