



Vicar's Letter May 2020

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter there is no clear indication of when and how the lock down will lift, but what is clear is that it will be a long time before life returns to any sort of normality, and we are going to have to live with restrictions for some time to come.

During the last few weeks there have been two Bible passages that have been on my mind. The first is Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (*Psalm 137:1-4*)

This Psalm was composed during the time when the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Judah were held in captivity in Babylon, following the fall of Jerusalem in 597BC. Exiled from their homeland, it speaks of their longing to return to their homes.

Although our situation is very different to that of the people of Judah, it feels to me as though we are going through a period of exile. We find ourselves in an unfamiliar foreign landscape, where things we once took for granted have been taken away from us, and where many people are longing for life to return to how it was before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

Lament is an important tradition within scripture, especially the psalms, and psalm 137 reminds us that it is okay not to be okay, and it is important to allow ourselves space to grieve over what is happening and what has been lost.

The second passage that has been on my mind is Joshua chapter 1, as the Israelite's prepare to enter the Promised Land.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them..." "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it

to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (*Joshua 1:1-2, 7-9*)

Although many people want life to return to normal as quickly as possible, it is clear that the world will be a very different place once the present crisis is over, and the question I have been asking myself is do we really want to go back to the way things were, or is God leading us into something new? It feels to me as though we are like the Israelite's, preparing to enter into a new land, what might that look like, and where is God leading us as a church?

As the Israelite's prepared to cross the Jordan River, they knew that there were big challenges facing them, just as we undoubtedly face challenges, but God's encouragement to them was not to be afraid or discouraged, but to put their trust in him and remain faithful, I pray that we do the same, and obediently follow where God leads.

Worship From St James

Although our church buildings our closed, our worship together continues. We are streaming a new weekly service every Sunday from 10.30am onwards via our YouTube channel and Facebook page (these services are available to view 24 hours a day).

For those without internet access, you can listen to services via a mobile phone or telephone by dialling **585724** (calls charged at local rate). Like our online services, you can dial this number and listen to these services 24 hours a day. The phone service is a shortened version of what goes out on the internet, and includes a couple of songs, a bible reading, talk and prayers.

For those with access to the internet, I invite you to join me for Morning Prayer via Zoom (see the e-bulletin for more details). This prayer meeting starts at 8.30am and usually lasts 35 minutes, and includes a couple of Bible readings and time of informal prayer. I am also doing Night Prayer at various times during the week, which can be viewed via our Facebook page (details in the e-bulletin).

Daily Hope

The Church of England has launched a new free telephone service called 'Daily Hope', which offers music, prayers and reflections. This service is available to access 24 hours a day by dialling **0800 804 8044**.

Church Finance Update

I want to thank everyone for their continued financial support of the church during these difficult

times. I appreciate that the present crisis has affected some in our church financially, and I am so grateful for the support people are continuing to give to St James.

I thought it would be helpful to update you on how this present crisis is impacting church finances. First of all the good news, we have received a government business grant of £35,000 to help support the Op Shop and Cornerstone during this present crisis. In addition the church received a very generous anonymous donation, and I would like to say thank you for this gift.

The church continues to pay 100% of our staff salaries, but because the PCC took the difficult decision to furlough Kate, Andy and Ruth, we are able to reclaim 80% of the cost of their salaries from the government.

However, we are still facing significant financial challenges through the loss of lettings income, and the fees we receive through weddings and funerals. Another big financial impact is the loss of income that is generated by the Op Shop and Cornerstone, which have been closed since March 20th. Although the government grant helps us a great deal, it looks likely that it will be quite some time before we will be able to reopen Cornerstone and the Op Shop, and when they do reopen, there may be restrictions imposed on our operations as social distancing measures are likely to be in force for a considerable time to come.

As a church we continue to have bills to pay, as well as honouring our financial support for our mission partners and continuing to pay our parish offer, which contributes to the ministry that we receive at St James.

Your ongoing financial support of the church therefore remains crucially important. Although our buildings are closed, our calling to love Jesus by serving the community and growing disciples remains as important as ever, and your financial support of the church is a key part of this.

The best way to give to St James is via a monthly Standing Order - enclosed with this letter is details about how to go about setting up a standing order mandate. If you are a tax payer and are not gift aiding your donations, please do so, as it enables us to reclaim an additional 25p for every £1 donated.

If you give by the envelope scheme, or by putting cash on the plate, and do not wish to give by standing order, can I encourage you every week to set aside the money you would normally give to St James. If it is safe for you to do so, please consider dropping off these donations in a sealed enveloped at the Parish Centre between Monday to Friday from 9am to 12noon when Toby is in the office (or you may wish to make a donation for the value of your usual weekly giving over the course of 12 weeks).

There may be some who would like to make an additional one off donation to support St James through this time (if paying by cheque please make it payable to 'St James Church PCC'). Any gift you make, however large or small, will be greatly appreciated.

Once again, thank you so much for your faithful support to St James during this time.

Raising Money Via Easyfundraising And Amazon Smile

With lots of shops closed, many of us will be turning to online shopping, when you do, please consider using easyfundraising. Easyfundraising is the UK's biggest charity fundraising site, it's simple to use, and it's free. Simply register to use easyfundraising, and choose 'St James Church PCC (Cornerstone) - Carlisle' as the charity you wish to support, then every time you shop online go to your favourite retailers via the easyfundraising website and shop as normal. Once you've made a purchase the retailer will then make a small donation to St James to say "thank you". Through easyfundraising we have so far helped raise £286.30 for St James.

Amazon is one of the few online shops that does not use Easyfundraising, but you can still raise money for St James by using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.co.uk) and choosing 'The Parochial Church Council Of The Ecclesiastical Parish Of St James Carlisle' as the charity you wish to support. Amazon Smile will then donate 0.50% of the cost of your purchase to St James.

Online Alpha Course

We will be starting a new Alpha Course, which will be streamed live via our Facebook page every Tuesday evening at 7.30pm. This is wonderful opportunity for people who might not normally consider joining an Alpha Course, to connect online, and discover more about Jesus and the Christian faith. Please encourage the people you know to consider joining us for this special course.

Curacy Update

Due to the current situation, the diocese have postponed Nina's ordination from June 27th to September 26th. Please pray for Nina and her family as they make arrangements to move to Carlisle later in the year.

Food Bank

A reminder that if you know anyone requiring an emergency food parcel, they can contact the Parish Office on 810616, Monday to Friday between 9am and 12noon. We can deliver food parcels to those who are self isolating in Denton Holme, Longsowerby or Cummersdale. All donations of food are gratefully received.

Finally, if there is any way I can be of practical support, or if you just want to have a conversation please contact me on 319830.

God bless Simon