



ST JAMES

CARLISLE

Vicar's Letter September 2021

Dear Friends,

September traditionally feels to me more like the start of the new year than January. It is of course a time of new beginnings with the start of the school year, and a time when activities and events resume after the summer break. This year however feels a little different, whilst life does appear to be slowly returning to some form of normality there is still a lot of uncertainty about what the coming months will bring. This is reflected in church life, although some of the activities we suspended due to Covid are slowly resuming, I feel it is important that we continue to be cautious as we head into the autumn.

Having said this, it has been a real joy and delight to see people return in person to gathered worship. As I have mentioned in previous letters we are created for relationship, which is why meeting and worshipping together in person is so important. As Nicky Gumbel says, "We don't go to church, we ARE the church."

Online worship has been great, and we will continue to stream our services for those who cannot physically join us, but it can never replace meeting in person. Dan Ortlund, in an article entitled '15 Reasons Your Soul Needs Gathered Worship, Not Just a Livestream', has some helpful reflections on why in person worship is so important. Here are a few things he writes:

1. As Bonhoeffer said in *Life Together*, "The physical presence of other believers is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer." The mere presence of other Christians has a fortifying effect on our souls, beneath what we're even able to consciously recognize. That's one reason the Bible exhorts us to meet together. We are Christ's very body, organically connected to each other, the life and strength of Christ himself flowing into us *through* one another.
2. A virtual worship gathering is one-way participation, not two-way. You're receiving, but you can't give. You are seeing those leading worship, preaching, praying—but they can't see you. They don't see your eyes, your body, your solidarity.

3. Coming in for worship takes more effort... We're training our own souls to value corporate worship. The very effort to come in trains us in a healthy direction, reinforcing the irreplaceable value of gathering with other Christians.
4. Encouragement. We grossly underestimate the spiritual power of encouragement, both for the encourager and for the encouraged. One reason we gather is to en-courage, that is, to build courage into one another. I greet a friend; he asks how my week was; I mention a challenge I'm navigating; he says, "Hang in there; God is with you." A 30-second exchange, come and gone just like that—and my soul just got enlarged.

Can I encourage you, if you haven't yet returned to in person services (and you are able to do so), then please join us. The church (the people of Christ) needs you, and you need the church!

Changes to Services

From September onwards we are going to be making small changes to our services at St James. We will be continuing the pattern of two services on a Sunday morning, but changing the time of the second service to 11.30am. The 10am service is a much more informal service, with contemporary worship, whereas the 11.30am service is a bit more traditional. I hope at some point to resume the 6.30pm service, but no decision about when this will happen has been made, and will be dependent on having the resources (preachers, service leaders, musicians, etc) to run a third service.

Over the last few months the 10am service has met outside, but as we head into autumn this will soon change, and we plan to meet in the Parish Centre. We also intend to resume Sunday groups for our young people, which will meet during the 10am service. The plan is for the young people to go out during the talk for their own activities, but joining in with all other aspects of the service.

In addition, once a month we plan to hold a joint all age service at 10.30am, followed by a bring and share lunch in the Parish Centre (Covid permitting). The first joint service will be a harvest festival service on 10th October.

I hope in the next few of weeks to be able to make an announcement about when we will resume serving refreshments in church, and easing of other Covid restrictions.

When I needed a neighbour were you there?

Around 200AD, Tertullian a church theologian wrote the following quote as an expression of the astonishment the pagans of the day had when they witnessed the love and caring among Christians: “See how these Christians love each other”. Their love was tangible and practical, they took care of the sick, the widows, the orphans and strangers both materially and spiritually. Those who witnessed their love could not help but be moved by what they saw. Can the same be said of us?

In my report at the Annual Church Meeting earlier this year I spoke about my desire for us as a church to prioritise relationship with God, and one another. I know that during the last 18 months many people have been supporting one another within the church, but I also realise that that this won't be everyone's experience. There may be some reading this letter who feel that the church hasn't been there for them in the way they would have hoped and expected, and may even feel forgotten about. If this is the case for you I can only apologise.

Each one of us has an important role to play if we want St James to become a family where everyone is known, loved and supported. Good pastoral care depends on *all* of us supporting and caring for one another. There are lots of simple things we can do, for example, taking time to talk to one another before and after services, and not just our friends but those people who are new to church, or who we don't know well. Taking time to call someone who you may not have seen for a while to see if they are okay. Offering practical support when people are ill or struggling, for example offering to help with shopping, baking them a cake, meeting up for a coffee.

Jesus in Luke 6:31 says “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” This is often called the ‘Golden Rule’, if we could all do this it would transform the church, and our experience of what it means to be part of the family of God.

Events at Cornerstone

On Thursday evenings between 6pm and 8pm we are running Renew @ Cornerstone. This is a space for people to meet, free drinks are available, and there are a selection of activities on hand for people to participate in, or bring along their own hobbies. There is also the opportunity for people to participate in a short time of meditation and reflection.

On Tuesday 7th September, Andy will be running the CAP Money Course. Each session lasts approximately 2 hours, and runs over three sessions, and is a simple but effective course that helps people to manage their budgets.

From the 14th September a new Work Club is starting at Cornerstone. If anyone needs help with their digital job search, or updating their CV, or help in applying online for benefits, the work club is there to support them. Meeting every Tuesday, there will be two work club sessions: 9:15am to 10:15am and 11:45am to 12:45pm. Each session is restricted to 4 people and places must be booked in advance. Laptops are provided, but you are welcome to bring your own laptop with you. This is a FREE service with a free tea/coffee included.

For more information about any of these events, please contact Andy on 549796.

Vision Morning

The staff team and PCC will be participating in a vision morning on Saturday 25th September, to begin looking afresh at the vision for St James, and where we feel God wants to lead us as a church. Please pray for this meeting.

Love Denton Holme

On Wednesday 29th September at 7pm, the Love Denton Holme community group will be holding a meeting at Cornerstone to discuss a proposed Christmas festival for Denton Holme. This meeting is open to everyone within the local community, and who have a heart for Denton Holme. For more information please go to the Love Denton Holme Community Engagement Facebook page (facebook.com/groups/denton.holme).

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Simon', is positioned below the text 'Best wishes,'.

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