**Address for Sunday 19th April 2020 2nd Sunday of Easter**

**Readings Acts 2: 14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1: 3-9; John 20: 19-end**

Greetings to you all from no. 7 Pippin Road!

Thank you Anthony for a chance to reach out to everyone, and thank you too, for all the services you did for us during Holy Week and Easter. This morning’s service of Morning Prayer, or new Morning Prayer, will be available on line for most of us, at some point during the day. Or we can just read the service for ourselves from the service booklet that Anthony delivered for us at the beginning of the shut down.

Usually we just read the psalm, and the old and new testament readings, not the Gospel passage, but do have a read of all of them if you get the chance.

All through this last week the readings have been telling us about the Resurrection appearances of Our Lord to His disciples – and others. They are the most thrilling accounts, but also very honest. The disciples were as blind - unbelieving – frightened – amazed – as we all would have been, faced with the Risen Lord, only hours – days - after watching him die. Who can blame them? Thomas demands proof – Peter needs forgiveness. They all need to be reassured that what they see with their own eyes, and experience with their bodies, hearts and minds, is not just an illusion.

But the readings from Acts and 1 Peter show a man who has changed. Peter the humble fisherman, after the experience of Pentecost, found a new confidence which enabled him to speak out boldly to the people, and later to write his two letters, which are full of wise teaching, and encouraging words.

I was particularly thrilled that this reading from Peter’s first letter is set for us today.

Many years ago when my own Peter was ill, we were visited by the Rev. Tony Cox (our Methodist Minister at the time) who read this passage to us. Something about the tremendous sense of confidence that St. Peter conveys in these few words, lifted and awakened us to a new yearning to know more and more about the power behind the Resurrection of Our Lord and the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of the Apostles, and also into the lives of ordinary Christian people – those who quietly loved the Lord and tried to follow his teaching. But there is more than this. There are words of hope and joy – that deep inner conviction that whatever happens, whatever we suffer, God is with us. It was a life changing moment for us both.

Peter talks about how our faith is tested, saying, “...even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold, that though perishable, is tested by fire........” Did you know that your faith is more precious than gold?!!

This couldn’t be more relevant to us today as we all share with millions across our world the strange experience of being confined to our homes. For many the horrifying reality of this modern day plague is threatening and often succeeding in bringing about premature death. Images of suffering and struggle, heartbreaking stories of battles with the disease fought and lost, bereavement, loss and sorrow fill our TV screens every day. I would be lovely to hear how many people are recovering as well.

In the face of all this suffering, it’s difficult not to feel guilty that most of us are safely hidden away, and enjoying the Spring weather. We are so lucky – we have gardens and countryside all around us. We have a kind and generous community which reaches out at times like this to help it’s people. Sad and difficult as this all is, I have been amazed and overjoyed by the way people all over our country and the world are responding. So many wonderful acts of kindness and generosity – so many willing sacrifices – so many lovely ideas to bring laughter and fun and family entertainment into our homes.

I have been forced myself by this to embrace the technology which keeps us all in touch with family and friends. It’s been a ‘steep learning curve’ as they say, but I am now so grateful for it.

I’m also grateful for this pause – this enforced halt – to our usual frenetic everyday life. It has given us all an opportunity to stop – look – listen – and be more aware of our way of life, and the world and people around us.

We now are much more aware that the great work that all who serve and care for us in the NHS, and in every possible area in life, which we have always taken for granted, and never given a thought to – is the huge blessing that it is. I hope we shall never forget, or take them for granted again.

This pause is helping us at last to see with clarity, never experienced before, that everyone, whatever they do or don’t do, is valuable, and that we all need each other, not just through crises like this – but always. Perhaps when we stand outside our homes and clap in thanks, we should include thanks to each other for all the wonderful acts of kindness and generosity we have received. And with our eyes opened to a new reality, perhaps greater understanding, it should‘nt difficult to see God’s hands at work in all this.

Psalm 16 has a verse ( in my version) which says, “O Lord, you are my portion and my cup; it is you who uphold my lot. My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; indeed I have a goodly heritage;” which couldn’t be more apt.

But this morning my Bible notes reminded me of another psalm which is equally apt. Psalm 46. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.” And of course those wonderful words, “Be still and know that I am God.” These are words to be etched into our hearts today.

As we share this lock down experience, I pray that our prayers for each other, our families, friends and neighbours, our country, our world, all who are ill or dying – for all who are working to help and save us from this virus, will be heard by our loving Heavenly Father.

Many lovely prayers have been generated by Covid-19. Here’s another one from our Dean Philip Hesketh at Rochester Cathedral.

**Ever present God, be with us in our isolation; be close to us in our distancing; be healing in our sickness; be joy in our sadness; be light in our darkness, be wisdom in our confusion. Be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar, that when the doors re-open we may with the zeal of Pentecost inhabit our communities and speak of your goodness to an emerging world. For Jesus sake. Amen.**

God is Christ will bless us all. I know he watches over us. I know he loves us.

Take care of yourselves, with love and prayers. Sue