

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

March 2021

Dear Friends,

Some of you will recall that in my pastoral letter for February I suggested that the Season of Lent might be viewed as a *season of the heart*; a period set aside intentionally for the interior work of prayer, reflection, and spiritual discipline. The other day I found myself reminded of this descriptor when we shared in our District Day of Prayer and Reflection. Over the course of a day, more than a hundred people participated in a whole variety of different opportunities to pray: from meditation to poetry, from morning prayer to compline, from joining with the deaf church to prayer and praise. In addition to the people who joined us online, there was an equal number who participated in their own homes through printed material and creative suggestions for different points in the day. All in all, it was a great success and it reminded me of the centrality of this means of grace in the Christian life of faith.

The word 'prayer' itself has its root in the Latin word '*precari*' (ask earnestly, beg, entreat) and it is not difficult to see the relationship to our English word *precarious* (to be dependent upon the entreaty or favour of another). To live life in a prayerful state of being is to live with a humble appreciation of the grace and goodness of God who reveals the nature of the divine through the coming of Christ. God who promises to be 'with' us and 'for' us in Christ crucified and risen; is the God we entreat with every breath of our body in the life of prayer. In this sense the whole of life is prayer – breathing in the presence of God in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, in tragedy and elation and finally in life and death! Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian soul, that carries it through the rich tapestry of our human experience.

There is little doubt that we are currently living in *precarious* times as we continue to struggle with the devastating consequences of a dreadful viral pandemic that has seriously disrupted - some might say irrevocably changed our whole way of life! It seems very likely that we will be living for decades with the economic, social, and political consequences of COVID-19. The Christian Church will not be immune from these aftershocks and a great deal of wisdom will be required to discern what it is we are called to be and do in a post-pandemic world. How will we navigate the competing demands of the digital Church and the Church gathered in presence? How will the Church best serve the needs of the poor and uphold the call for justice? How will we continue to resource the Church financially so that we are fit for purpose in the twenty first century? What importance will we attach to our buildings when we have spent so much time away from them over the last year? These are complex and searching questions that require wisdom, thought and prayer.

Over the next few weeks and months, it is likely that we will all begin to experience a greater degree of freedom as restrictions are relaxed and the vaccination programme continues to gather pace. As a Church we will need to make decisions about the wisdom of returning to our buildings and if we do so how we can ensure that we keep our congregations and our church officers safe. I hope and pray that during this time we will discover again the rich resource of prayer – both personal and corporate – that it will be the doorway to gratitude and praise and a deep silence in which we discern the still small voice of the living God.

With deep peace and blessing,

Julian

