

Dear Friends,

I've heard from several people in the last week who say they are finding this lockdown the hardest one of all. It's hard to put into words but there's less energy, more anxiety, more weariness, less hope, and the kind of lethargy and greyness we often experience in January, but amplified several times. For those on the frontline, in hospitals, care homes, shops and schools, the sense of threat is higher, combined with the physical and mental toll.

Its not supposed to be like this is it? Not for Christians? Don't we follow the risen Jesus, don't we have a peace that passes all understanding and the joy of the Lord? Well, sometimes, but its just as true, as 2 Corinthians 4 says /"we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body./" The early Christians lived under peril of death, suffered physical, mental and emotional stress, saw their loved ones carried off by disease or by persecution, and understood that they were following a crucified and risen Lord. 'There is no crown without a cross' as the song goes. Suffering is woven into the life of Jesus, and the call to follow him. Being a Christian can make life harder - we make a new and real enemy in the devil, we have to start listening to our conscience, we become aware of all sorts of wrongs within us and the world which didn't used to bother us. It's tough. It's always been tough. But we are carriers of an all surpassing power, the risen Jesus. You will get through this, and God will carry you if need be. He may even be carrying you now, without you realising it.

\*News, links etc.....\*

It's great to hear of church members getting their first (and sometimes second!) dose of the \*vaccine\*, praise God for the miracle of new vaccines and treatments. 6 months ago scientists weren't even sure if any vaccines would be effective. There is a long way to go but there is a route out. In the meantime, we are being as careful as possible at church, it would be a tragedy if we caused new cases of covid just as the vaccines come on stream. Several church members from both St James and St Peters have been helping with stewarding at the Gateway vaccination centre. If you want to volunteer as a vaccinator, you can offer through St Johns Ambulance <https://vaccinationvolunteers.sja.org.uk/roles/volunteer-vaccinator.html>

\*Sundays service \*is still available here <https://youtu.be/t-cDbw30ti0>, especially if you were thrown on Sunday by seeing the service for January 3rd going live! Apologies for the dodgy dating! This coming Sundays service will be an All-Age service, so if you have children or grandchildren in your household then please do tune in with them. With new sound equipment going in to St Peters, we hope to do one of the 10.30am Sunday morning services from there in February.

For church \*families with children\*, we are looking at whether we can continue 'St James at 3' in some virtual format. In the meantime, if you find anything that's really helping you to pray, worship and explore the bible with your children/grandchildren, please do let us know so we can share resources around the church.

Also on the Youtube Channel, to go with our series on The Very Good Book, is the \*Lent Course session from 2020 on 'Is the Bible Reliable?\*' It's been broken up into several parts, to make it more digestible - you'll find the videos here <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-CzmdrTOnvjodE25tqZ1TkTYCpKdbymi>

If you've a \*story about a Bible verse which has really blessed you,\* or how the Bible has changed your life, please do let us know - either by email, or if you're willing it would be great to have some short videos we could show in a Sunday service.

We've started to get one or two \*referrals for shopping, delivery of food parcels \*etc. If that's something you could \*help \*with, and its safe for you to do so, please could you let me know. We may also be on the lookout for \*volunteers \*for other things: St Peters Community Centre is setting up a 'fresh food bank', which will need volunteers to collect unsold food from local outlets, to sort and store it at the Centre, and to distribute it. We may also be asked to help with the Census in March 2021 - it's going online, and the government is looking for public venues where people can get IT help in completing the questions.

\*Finally, a challenge! \*For lockdown we'd like to create a set of pre-recorded songs we can use in worship. So we're looking for someone with a bit of time and tech savvy who can find a way to capture these from our Youtube services, so that we can be led in worship by (recordings of) our own musicians! If you would like to have a go at that, please let me know!

Lets keep going, or in Ruths words 'stay chipper'. Please keep in your prayers those who are struggling - we can't tell you who they all are but at least 3 church members have had new and serious health issues just in the last few days. Lets pray for God's protection on ourselves, and one another. Ephesians 6 on the 'armour of God' is written in the plural, it's written to a group of Christians, readying themselves as a group of Roman soldiers would - getting equipped together so they could stand together. May God protect you from discouragement and doubt, and enable you to stand in His strength, held together by His truth, and confident of His saving love for you.

yours in Christ

David and Ruth

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St James and St Peters on

Youtube [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS\\_rhjBAJTIXz3kIXLMN\\_Xw/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS_rhjBAJTIXz3kIXLMN_Xw/)

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