

CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS : www.holycrossedinburgh.org

Congregational e-news for Sunday 22 March (Lent 4/Mothering Sunday)

From the Rector, Revd Dr Stephen Holmes:

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I. KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER

Dear friends at Holy Cross,

As one of the congregation pointed out with a smile (at least I presumed there was a smile as we were on the phone), 'you said on your first Sunday you weren't going to change much at first but now you have abolished all services!' The current Covid-19/Coronavirus pandemic has put us all into a new and unprecedented situation as a country and a congregation and I am glad I started collecting your email addresses on the last Sunday we gathered for worship as this regular email will be the main way we keep in touch during this time of national shut-down.

You are receiving this because your email address was given to me as someone who would like to receive this news and prayer bulletin. I am keeping your details just so Holy Cross can keep in touch with you and if you don't want to receive this email just let me know. I only have 23 addresses so far so please forward this to anyone else who may want to receive it and ask them to send me their email address.

Beyond starting this e-news some of the things we are doing during this crisis are:

- We can't gather for worship in our Church but I will continue to celebrate the Eucharist at Holy Cross on my own, at the request of the Bishop. My intention is to do that at our usual times, 10.30 on Sunday and Wednesday so you have the opportunity to stop at that time and join in spiritually. I will also be saying Evening Prayer in the church when I can and have started ringing the bell at the start of worship to let those around know that the door may be closed but we are still in business praying for them and for the world. We can keep in touch by prayer.
- Some of you have joined groups offering your services to those who are self-isolating, for example to get shopping. It is probably best to join the groups that already exist but some of us at Holy Cross want to make ourselves available to members of the congregation and others who need help and would like a familiar face. Alan Kirkpatrick (07891 237940 or muttley.l@blueyonder.co.uk), Helen Smith (07917 695491 or Helgillard@yahoo.com) and I (07584 091870 or rector.hce@gmail.com) are ready to do this and if anyone else who is not in a vulnerable group and under 70 would like to offer their services, let me know. We'll post more on the weekly e-news and hope to link up with a similar group at Davidson's Mains Parish Church.
- What some churches are doing is live-streaming services so that others can virtually join the priest praying on his or her own, putting up videos of sermons or setting up groups and meetings on platforms such as Zoom and Skype. We are looking into these options but the Scottish Episcopal Church has committed to broadcast a service every Sunday at 11am which you can see on the SEC website: www.scotland.anglican.org. This Sunday it is from the Chapel of our Primus, Bishop Mark of Moray, Ross and Caithness and will use the 1982 liturgy which we all know.

- Not everyone has access to the internet and a congregational email cannot reach all of us. Guidance from the Bishops discourages pastoral visiting during the crisis but I am available by telephone so do give me a ring on one of the numbers given above.
- Margaret Deas is working hard to get the April magazine ready and even if there are problems distributing the printed copy it will be posted on our website so you can read it there.

Even in the short time I have been here I have seen how Holy Cross is a close-knit community where people look after each other and I am sure we will continue to do this in this strange new situation. May God bless you all and may we continue to grow as a Christian community even if we don't see each other. As I said at our last service, Jesus' teaching gives us a good principle to live by in this crisis: 'Love your neighbour and do not be afraid'.

With love in Christ,

Stephen

2. KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH GOD

Although we can't meet together, we can keep praying for each other and for the world and we can maintain our contact with God and his Word. Some Christians have always wanted to withdraw into solitude to live for God alone and perhaps one of the graces of this period of 'self-isolation' and 'social distancing' is that we can all do this and be monks and nuns for a while (though this may be difficult if we are working from home and are trying to home-school our children at the same time!)

One simple discipline is to read and meditate on the Gospel passage for the day. Every day the Scottish Episcopal Church gives us a series of Bible readings for the Eucharist and Morning and Evening Prayer. As a priest I read Morning and Evening Prayer every day and I find it is a real blessing which feeds my relationship with God. These readings are the same as the ones used by other churches throughout the world so we are never alone when we read them, we are united with Christians everywhere each day.

To take one of these readings each day and think about it could be a real help in getting through these challenging times. Below I have listed some of these readings for each day and some intentions we could all pray for each day so that we remain united in prayer. I'll end this section with a few thoughts on the gospel this Sunday, **John 9:1-41**, the story of **Jesus and the man blind from birth**.

Our Sunday readings are on a three year cycle. Each year in Lent the first Sunday Gospel is the story of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, a good start for our Lenten journey. This year, Year A, then gives us a series of powerful stories from the Gospel of John: Second Sunday in Lent – Nicodemus (John 3:1-17); Third Sunday in Lent – the Woman at the Well (John 4:5-42); Fifth Sunday in Lent – the Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45). In the early years of Christianity these Gospel stories were used in preparing adults for Baptism which was then usually celebrated at the Easter Vigil. You can see why they were used as they all speak of baptism or the breakthrough of new faith in Jesus: Nicodemus learns of being born again by water and the Spirit; the Samaritan woman receives the living waters of faith and Lazarus receives new life from the tomb.

This Sunday we have the story of the man born blind who again receives new life, regains his sight, from his meeting with Jesus. It is the blind beggar who sees who Jesus really is and to

whom Jesus reveals himself as God; the Pharisees not only don't get it, they actively oppose Jesus. It is the poor blind man who can see and those who trust in themselves who are spiritually blind. Again the values of society are turned upside down – it is the person on the edge whom Jesus is close to and who recognises who he really is, with a bit of help from Jesus. Jesus sees his beauty under his rags and his disability whereas the Pharisees just dismiss him as a sinner. Even the disciples at the start of the story see the blind man and talk about him in front of him “did he sin or did his parents to cause him to be blind?” Jesus however turns to the man, speaks to him and heals him, he recognises him as a person not thing to be argued about.

In this story Jesus teaches us how we should live and how we should treat others. Do we want our eyes to be opened to the truth? Read the story and ask the Spirit to show you what it says about Jesus and about you. When you read the story are you the blind beggar, one of his parents or one of the Pharisees? Try thinking of it from each of their perspectives. Are there any lessons from this Gospel story to help us behave well in the coronavirus crisis? Can we learn anything from it about how to make people with disabilities welcome in our community?

3. PRAYER & READINGS FOR THE WEEK AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Sunday 22 March - Fourth Sunday of Lent (Mothering Sunday)

Collect: Almighty God, grant that we, who are weighed down by our sins, may be relieved and encouraged by your grace; through Christ our Lord, Amen

Readings at the Eucharist: I Samuel 16.1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5.8-14; John 9.1-41

Prayer intentions: our Church Community (Nancy M; Jennie C); our mothers and all for who Mothering Sunday is a difficult time; those with Covid-19 & their families. *Edinburgh Diocese*

Prayer Cycle: Revd Joe Roulston & Rosslyn Chapel

Monday 23 March

Daily Prayer Readings: Genesis 49.1-28; I Corinthians 10.14–11.1; Mark 7.24-37

Prayer intentions: our Church Community (Helen A; Graham H), all affected by the school closures. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* Revd Andrew Bain, Emmaus House & the Ecumenical Community of St Benedict

Tuesday 24 March (Paul Couturier, Priest and Ecumenist, 1953)

Daily Prayer Readings: Genesis 49.29–50.14; I Corinthians 11.17-34; Mark 8.1-10

Prayer intentions: our Church Community (Andy; Eric T), those worried about their jobs, businesses & financial situation. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* Revd Stephen Holmes & Holy Cross, Davidson's Mains

Wednesday 25 March - The Annunciation of the Lord

Collect: Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord: that, as we have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel to the Blessed Virgin Mary; so by his cross and passion we may be brought to the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

Readings at the Eucharist: Isaiah 7.10-14; Psalm 40.5-10; Hebrews 10.4-10; Luke 1.26-38

Prayer intentions: our Church Community (Heather A; Mike H), St Margaret's RC Church. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* St Philip's and St James', Inverleith and Logie Green Road (in vacancy)

Thursday 26 March

Daily Prayer Readings: Exodus 1.6-22; 1 Corinthians 12.12-26; Mark 8.27-9.1

Prayer intentions: our Church Community (Lucy; Peter S), groups that use our hall, medical staff and emergency services. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* our Area Council, Edinburgh Forth

Friday 27 March

Daily Prayer Readings: Exodus 2.1-22; 1 Corinthians 12.27-13.3; Mark 9.2-13

Prayer intentions: our Church Community and those who live around us (Dan R; Andrew), especially those self-isolating. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* Revd Andrew Bain & St David's, Pilton

Saturday 28 March (The Aberdeen Doctors, Theologians, 17th century) The Aberdeen Doctors were Episcopalian theologians, much loved by our former Rector Douglas, who defended the Catholic faith of our Church and opposed the narrow and fanatical understanding of Christianity held by the Covenanters.

Daily Prayer Readings: Exodus 3.1-22; 1 Corinthians 13.1-13; Mark 9.14-29

Prayer intentions: our Church community (Molly; Carol), those suffering from Covid-19 and their families in Italy & China. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* Revd Steve Butler & St James, Leith

Sunday 29 March Fifth Sunday of Lent (Passion Sunday)

Collect: Merciful God, look upon your family as we travel to the foot of the cross: and, by your great goodness, guide us in body; that, by your protection, we may also be preserved in heart and mind; through Christ our Lord, Amen

Readings at the Eucharist: Ezekiel 37.1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.6-11; John 11:1-45

Prayer intentions: our Church community (Douglas; Isobel W-I), Rev Dan and Davidson's Mains Parish Church. *Edinburgh Diocese Prayer Cycle:* Bishop John and the Diocesan Staff

4. AFTERWORD : 'The Horses' by Edwin Muir

We get insight from music and literature, not just from sacred texts. Now we have a bit more time on our own it might be time to read some poetry. I have always loved this poem by an Orcadian poet who taught at Newbattle College near Edinburgh. Muir imagines a global disaster, it is a war and he lived with the threat of nuclear war but a pandemic like the current one sparks similar apocalyptic thoughts. As today the shutdown of modern society is already bringing dolphins into clean canals in Venice and purifying the atmosphere, in the poem nature reasserts itself and purifies the community. Love and do not be afraid.

Barely a twelvemonth after

The seven days war that put the world to sleep,

Late in the evening the strange horses came.

By then we had made our covenant with silence,

But in the first few days it was so still

We listened to our breathing and were afraid.
On the second day
The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.
On the third day a warship passed us, heading north,
Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day
A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter
Nothing. The radios dumb;
And still they stand in corners of our kitchens,
And stand, perhaps, turned on, in a million rooms
All over the world. But now if they should speak,
If on a sudden they should speak again,
If on the stroke of noon a voice should speak,
We would not listen, we would not let it bring
That old bad world that swallowed its children quick
At one great gulp. We would not have it again.
Sometimes we think of the nations lying asleep,
Curled blindly in impenetrable sorrow,
And then the thought confounds us with its strangeness.
The tractors lie about our fields; at evening
They look like dank sea-monsters couched and waiting.
We leave them where they are and let them rust:
'They'll moulder away and be like other loam.'
We make our oxen drag our rusty ploughs,
Long laid aside. We have gone back
Far past our fathers' land.
And then, that evening
Late in the summer the strange horses came.
We heard a distant tapping on the road,
A deepening drumming; it stopped, went on again
And at the corner changed to hollow thunder.
We saw the heads
Like a wild wave charging and were afraid.
We had sold our horses in our fathers' time
To buy new tractors. Now they were strange to us
As fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield.
Or illustrations in a book of knights.
We did not dare go near them. Yet they waited,
Stubborn and shy, as if they had been sent
By an old command to find our whereabouts
And that long-lost archaic companionship.
In the first moment we had never a thought
That they were creatures to be owned and used.
Among them were some half a dozen colts
Dropped in some wilderness of the broken world,
Yet new as if they had come from their own Eden.
Since then they have pulled our ploughs and borne our loads
But that free servitude still can pierce our hearts.
Our life is changed; their coming our beginning.