

Sunday 22 March

Lent 4/Mothering Sunday

Dear Friends

These are difficult and unsettling days as the rhythm of our lives is turned upside down. The changes we are facing – very temporary we pray – are truly biblical in their scope. Everything we have taken for granted for so long about our economy, church and community life has been disturbed by COVID-19.

As event after event has been cancelled, I have become acutely aware of the strength of our church and community life. I wonder if we truly appreciate this in ordinary times? Perhaps when things begin to return to normal, we can take the opportunity to celebrate and express our deep thankfulness for all those groups and interests that enrich our lives.

These may be difficult days, but as Christians we are well equipped to cope, and well equipped to help others cope too. We have a rich spiritual tradition to call upon – especially the psalms: have a read of Ps. 23, 46, 123, 126, 139 just for starters. Here is the assurance of a God who loves and knows us; a God who walks alongside us; a God who will never fail us, however challenging our ways prove to be.

This week we have begun to put into place a range of initiatives that will help support you and help you support one another.

Our very first priority is pastoral care. Both churches now have a telephone cascade or tree through which everyone is linked to someone else. There will be someone responsible for telephoning you and you may have someone to be responsible for calling too. We will use the telephone tree to communicate specific messages, identify specific needs and simply to have a chat. Please let me know if there is someone you think should be part of this wonderful network.

The first two tasks through our telephone trees is for us to collect two pieces of information. First, an email address so that we can send you this newsletter electronically. Secondly, if you live alone, we would like to know please your next of kin or a family contact. All this data will be held securely by the clergy and churchwardens. Don't worry if you don't have an email address; this newsletter will be distributed to your home each week including any other information we think might be of interest – including our reading sheets.

The need to be mindful of one another's health does not mean that we cannot go outside. We have plans therefore to open our churches on specific days and times to encourage people to spend time in prayer and quiet reflection within our sacred spaces. We hope this can happen most days, including Sundays. This will be for private prayer only; there will be no public services. I will, however, say a said eucharist at the high altar on my own and without amplification in order to ensure that the cycle of eucharistic celebration continues. This will be at 10am at St Godwald's and 11am at All Saints. We will also be adding worship resources to the web site: <https://bromsgroveparish.org.uk/> and through this newsletter we will also be drawing your attention to appropriate worship resources on radio and television.

Finally, our church finances are already suffering. Many hall hirers have cancelled, not to mention baptisms and weddings. Please help your church by making sure that you set aside your regular collection every week. Envelopes can be provided for this purpose. If you can increase your giving at this time, that will be especially appreciated.

This Sunday has been declared a National Day of Prayer and action for COVID-19. At 7pm everyone is being invited to place a lit candle in their window. If you can do this safely, please do. In any case, at 7pm on Sunday evening, please set a few minutes aside to pray knowing that you are joined by millions of others. You might find this prayer helpful:

Gracious Lord:

During these difficult weeks,

When everything we depend upon in life feels fragile and uncertain:

Remind us of your steadfast love of each one of us,

That you know our needs and share in our distress and confusion.

Through the challenges of today,

Draw us closer to one another, even though at times we may feel more apart;

Help our faith to deepen and grow,

That by trusting in your enduring wisdom,

We may discover hope and joy for tomorrow,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

If there is anything you need help with, please let me or another member of the church congregation know. We are here for one another. Go gently, and remember that you are loved and that God walks alongside you every day.

With continuing love and prayers,