

Easter Greetings

We are often reminded that the word 'Church' doesn't refer primarily to a building, but to the worldwide community of those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. When we cannot meet in our church buildings, however, we realise just how much we miss them and how important they are to our prayer, worship, fellowship and as a means of outreach to the wider community. During this most holy time in the Christian year, therefore, we are compelled to use our imagination as we picture the washing of feet in the Maundy Thursday Eucharist, the silence and starkness of our Good Friday services, and the exuberance, colour and joy of Easter Day.

The Peace Garden at All Saints' church is already resplendent with spring flowers, but sadly this year there will be no lighting of the Paschal candle from the Easter fire which is customarily lit there, and which so powerfully reminds us of Jesus bursting from the tomb in the garden on the first Easter morning. The setting for the Easter fire which in most years is lit before dawn in the churchyard at St Peter's, as the Vigil and first Eucharist of Easter begin, is very different. Apart from the small area of grass adjacent to the church, we are surrounded by empty buildings and empty streets, apart from, perhaps, the last of the previous night's revellers on their way home. The contrast between the cold, brutal lifelessness of stone and concrete and the fragile, flickering flame of the Paschal candle as it is brought into the dark church, is unforgettable. As the sun rises, gradually illuminating the church and its worshippers, we become aware of the effusion of colour and fragrance emanating from the Easter flowers, and we say together the glorious acclamation, 'Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!'

This year, both All Saints' and St Peter's churches are surrounded by streets which are almost deserted not just in the early hours, but throughout the night and for most of the day. The same is true for many of the buildings around our churches. Central Nottingham feels dead, its very lifeblood drained from it. It is hard to believe that this could ever happen, at least in the advanced, sophisticated world of today. Who would have thought that modern humanity could have been dealt such a devastating blow in a few short weeks, with consequences for societies, economies and the way we all live our lives which are only just becoming apparent?

As we celebrate Easter in our own homes, no doubt acutely missing the wonderful sense of togetherness which we enjoy as we worship together in our church buildings and share in the Eucharist, let us remember that even though the streets are empty, the risen Christ is still there, bringing new life and hope to our city and to our communities. Wherever we happen to be this year when we give our Easter thanks to God with the words 'Christ is risen!', he is also with us, in our hearts, giving us fresh strength and encouragement in times which, for many, are of course very difficult.

It has been wonderful to see in recent days how the breadth and depth of friendship, support and fellowship within our churches have continued in spite of all the constraints which keep us from meeting together. Some of our church members have demanding jobs in health care, and our thoughts and prayers are very much with them. There are those who have volunteered to help other congregation members in practical ways, and I know that this is greatly valued. Telephone conversations, emails, and text messages can also be a lifeline to those who are not able to leave their homes.

One splendid result of the present restrictions has been the provision of pre-recorded worship services online, via our parish website www.nottinghamchurches.org. If you have not yet discovered these, just click on the 'webcast services' button on the home page. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services are being made available, as well as a service for Easter Day and an Easter Family Service. You can listen to the services at any time; a new service is uploaded to the website at 10.00 am each Sunday. I would like to give enormous thanks to our Director of Music, Peter Siepmann, who has contributed very many hours of work of the highest professional standard in order to make this possible, and also to Adele Siepmann for all her splendid work in putting the texts of the services together and making them accessible online. It has also been wonderful to be part of a wider team of all who have contributed material to these services, each sharing gifts, insights and presentational skills from which we benefit greatly.

Although times are hard at present, I am also reminded that we have much in our church communities for which we should be profoundly thankful. Let us remain strong in prayer for one another and especially for all who are suffering as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, confident that the God who raised Jesus from the dead will also soon bring a new beginning to our churches, our society, and to our world.

Wishing you all God's blessing this Easter

Christopher Harrison, Rector