

Letter for May Newsletter from Revd Sheila Swarbrick

Dear friends,

As I write this at the end of April, with the continuing uncertainty around the spread of the virus and how any restrictions to the current lockdown will be lifted, we expect to be maintaining our pattern of providing material for worship, prayer and reflection via email and post until June. This time of change can lead us to reflect on what are the most important aspects of our lives as Christians and what does it mean for us to be 'church' at this time.

During the Easter season the lectionary gives a reading from Acts each Sunday and for the 3 May this is Acts 2:42-47. Luke's first summary description of the life of the first believers following the dramatic events of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In May 1996, for a bible study module on Acts, I wrote an essay looking at Acts 2:42 as signs for a healthy church. The verse is 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'. I looked at how these 4 aspects of the first believers' life together were replicated through the book of Acts and in a new church congregation that I had been part of during my second curacy in Chesterfield.

Now I wonder how this verse can encourage and challenge us today and in the coming months. We can continue to spend time in prayer and in reading/reflecting/listening/writing/drawing or whatever ways you find to develop your understanding of the Christian faith. But this is all very individualistic and life as a Christian has always been outward-looking, serving others, caring for the poor and vulnerable, offering hospitality. Some of us can get involved in our local neighbourhoods with community support or with the foodbank but many of us are confined to our homes. Some of us will be able to give money and will have our favourite charities while others are not in that position. For many years Christian Aid has had its annual week for street collecting and fund-raising events in May but obviously this cannot happen though the need for funds to support other countries is critical. The local Christian Aid representative has put together a leaflet showing the different ways we can donate, and I will include it with this letter.

In the midst of the suffering that many in our country and across the world are experiencing we can continue to use the prayers I shared in the April letter. This month I will conclude with a prayer of encouragement as we move from the Easter season to Ascensiontide and onto Pentecost.

Lord, help us not to dwell too much on the past,
holding you to the Galilean hills and the streets of Jerusalem,
but to know you more and more as present Lord and Saviour,
risen, ascended, and always present with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

With love and prayers for you all

Sheila R Swarbrick