

Friday 17 April 2020

Dear Friends,

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

Hebrews 3:12-14

As I write this the government has informed the people of the UK that we will have to practice the current social distancing disciplines for at least another three weeks. This is hard news for many. I know that families are struggling with children at home while parents have been furloughed or made redundant. Boredom can set in very quickly. Tempers fray. Some go 'stir crazy'. Many of us long for positive interaction with others. The Thursday evening celebration of the NHS affords us the opportunity to interact with neighbours in doing something that feels good in a time of trouble. And above all, we long for things to return to 'normal'.

Those who follow Christ are a people of hope and a people of longing. We have been given hope as we rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. He has conquered sin and death at the cross. His resurrection is the evidence that transformed the disciples' vision and lives. Because He lives, they could live. That is the normal Christian life. So often, we lose sight of that magnificent vision of Jesus. In times of crisis, it affords us the opportunity to reconsider what matters, how we are living and what our vision is like for our walk with Jesus.

This is nothing new. It's why Paul could write in Hebrews as he does. "*....encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," ...*". We could look back at what has been, to what was 'normal' and make that our focus and our desire. We can fixate on the past, hoping it will be our future again. That creates a lot of anxiety! I wonder however if what we are called to is to live in the now, the today. Remember when Jesus said, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*" (Matthew 6:33-34)

None of us knows what the future holds. It seems clear that the next few years may well be very difficult as nations battle this virus and its attendant economic burdens. There will be difficult choices for governments and individuals to make. Many will face hardships. Christians will not be immune from any of this. Some will face serious illness. All of us will experience the economic costs. What are we to do? Let me gently offer a few suggestions.

1. Turn to the Lord

As many people are turning to much more exercise, maybe we will be a fitter nation! Today perhaps the Church can perhaps become spiritually fitter too. Longing for more of the Lord, to read and pray and to meet with one another. One danger is that we grow cold towards the Lord. Trust me in this - it will be of no help to you if you make that your choice.

2. Encourage one another today

This is not the same as keeping an eye out for another and offering help (vital and good as that is). It's more about holding one another to account and helping one another keep our focus on the Lord. One of our members sent me an encouraging email of concern for my welfare a few weeks ago. It was mainly about me not burning out spiritually, and it was such a help to keep my desires and focus right. So, ask how one another is doing not only emotionally but in our walk with the Lord.

3. Share Christ

It can be tough holding on to faith in a time of crisis. I sometimes say that a pastor's calling involves keeping the faith for those who are struggling to do so and reminding everyone of Christ's love. Pray that I will do that faithfully. But I pray that you will do that too! We are in this together and my prayer is that the Lord will strengthen His Church in and through all that is happening.

Let me close with an encouragement. I am in regular contact with Bishop Andy Lines who sends his love and who is praying for us. To my amazement, on Easter Saturday evening, I got a call from Bishop Charlie Masters of the Anglican Network in Canada. Then yesterday, Gary Nelson, bishop of North West Australia called. Both of these men are busy, yet they took time to send greetings to us and to remind us that we are not alone in our struggles. They were encouraging us for today and I am very grateful to have such friends in Christ.

Online Worship, Gathering and Communication

Ali and I had a few quiet days this week (we should have been away in a MacDonald's Hotel in the Lake District, thank you very much St T's!). This meant a break from offering online prayer. That has now restarted and we encourage everyone to participate.

We continue to use Facebook Live for much of our online presence. A reminder that you do not need a Facebook account to participate in our live worship times. You simply need to go to <https://www.facebook.com/stthomasedin> and look for a red symbol which says 'Live'.

Online worship is also available live on our YouTube Channel (please subscribe!) at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1r0Eq3PqBmxioDssYXCbGQ>

Some serious work has been going on to enhance our website. This is ongoing but please do visit <https://www.saintthomas.org.uk>.

Our Twitter account has also been reactivated. Search for @StThomasEdin.

If you are interested in taking part in Online Worship on Sundays either with reading or praying, please let us know. You'll have to be able to make an audio recording of your reading or intercessions in advance and then send the file to me electronically.

We are also using an application called 'Zoom' to pray and meet together. If you need advice about this or anything about our online presence, we can help. Simply contact me.

Please do join the closed St Thomas' Facebook Group, where you are encouraged to share scripture, prayer concerns and encouragements. Contact me for details and we will add you.

We are very grateful for all the support and work the musicians and technical people are putting in to make videos of the sung worship for Sunday. It has been wonderful to receive the end product of so much labour. Please keep those involved in prayer.

The Vestry and Trustees meet in a 'Zoom' meeting on Monday 27 April. Following that meeting we will send you an update of where we are and possible new appointments to serve us on vestry.

If you have prayer concerns or needs, please let me have them by email, text or message. You are very much in my thoughts and prayers.

All love In Christ,



St Thomas' Church Online Week Beginning 19 April 2020

Online Worship & Gathering

All worship events are available online at:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasedin>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1r0Eq3PqBmxioDssYXCbGQ>

Sunday 19 April

@10.30am – 'Faithful Thomas'

Monday 20 April

@9.30pm – Night Prayer

Tuesday 21 April

@12pm Midday Prayer

Wednesday 22 April

@2-3.30pm Rooted Bible Study

@9.30pm Night Prayer

Thursday 23 April

@ 10am - 'Zoom' Coffee Online

@ 12pm Midday Prayer

Friday 24 April

@9pm Night Prayer