

HARPSDEN PARISH NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2020



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MINISTRY IN LOCKDOWN

Church during Covid 19

What is happening at Church regarding the future and what are we doing about Covid 19 are questions that seem to be paramount in many peoples' minds at the moment.

Church Buildings

We are currently opening Dunsden Church for Private Prayer every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday between 2 pm and 4 pm so that people can drop in and enjoy the quiet, have time to pray and light a candle. We are finding that many people are making use of this - but not every session. We have had between 0 and 23 people in a session, plus various dogs!

Sadly we cannot currently allow a church building to be open without somebody on duty - who then sanitises anything that the visitor has touched (making sure that the visitor has gone). This is a great sadness as I know that many in our communities often drop into Harpsden and Shiplake as they know that these two churches are normally always open. I do not know when this will change, but as soon as it does rest assured our church buildings will be open again so that as many people as possible can enjoy these liminal places.

Services

Sarah and I immediately at the start of 'lock down' live streamed daily services, and we have now been joined with Pam who leads Morning Prayer on a Friday - we are envisioning that these services will continue for quite some time as we know that many people are finding comfort in the rhythm of the Daily Office and many of our congregation are still unable to leave their home as they have various medical conditions.

Sarah and I have held an on-line Communion service every Wednesday, Sunday and any Special High Days since the start of lock down, and again many people have expressed their deep thanks for the Liturgy and sense of belonging that these services have created.

We have had several joint 'Zoom' PCC meetings to look at how we reopen our churches and it was agreed that this would happen at the beginning of August - however Sarah and I received a missive from the senior staff at the Diocese saying that all clergy must take their set holidays - something that neither Sarah nor I have done since January. We therefore postponed reopening till 28th August to give us both time to take a break. At the same time to take the pressure off we have reduced the services during August and September to Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

Our first 'live' service was at Harpsden church on 26th August where once more we gathered together as a congregation in a church building - BUT this service was also live streamed to allow as many people as possible to join in from their homes (10 people have so far watched this service). We will continue for the foreseeable future to offer 'blended worship' (the new term for live and live streamed worship) to allow as many people as possible to join in with worship.

Before any of our churches were opened for any service a full Health and Safety Covid 19 audit was completed by Sarah and myself alongside the respective Church Wardens - these completed documents may be found displayed in the church building for your reference.

We are now looking at if we might be able to hold some services outdoors! We will let you know what happens.

Music

Music is an integral part of worship but sadly this has not yet been allowed to restart. New guidelines have just come into place to allow a small group of professional, or semi-professional singers to accompany the service, but congregational singing is not permitted. I have therefore met with Nigel Smith from Harpsden Church to start the conversation as to how we can start to once more have live music in a service - I am also talking to our organists Malcolm Harding and Adrian Fish to see how we progress in the benefice. The choir are having their first practice on 28th August - all socially distanced, and Nigel will feed back from that the thoughts of the choir.

Visiting people

Sadly we were immediately banned from visiting people face to face at the onset of the Pandemic to try and stop the spread of the virus. This is still the case and we look forward to the day when once more the clergy and pastoral team can visit people in their own homes.

However, in the first two weeks of the lock down I updated the benefice contact list and this list was split between the Pastoral Team, Clergy and Wardens to ensure that we kept in touch with all our amazing congregation. I also send out a Palm Cross and Easter Card to every person on our Electoral Roll and GDPR list to remind them of the real reason for Easter. Enormous thanks go to the Pastoral Team, Wardens and Clergy team for all the telephone conversations that they have had over the last few months - this will remain in place for as long as it is needed, and indeed might be the basis of a new way of undertaking Pastoral Care here in the Benefice.

The future

Regrettably I do not know what will happen in the future, but we will be constantly looking at new guidelines from the Diocese and the Government to ensure that we are keeping people safe during this difficult time. We do not know when 'normal service' will resume, if indeed it ever does, but together, and with Christ, we will move forward and our faith will be deepened by these experiences.

May God Bless you all at this difficult time.

Robert

A recent sermon from Robert

I read a book quite a while ago by Robert Fulhum entitled *Uh-Oh*. which is filled with witty essays. In the book he tells about being asked by a journalist if he believed in God.

“No,” replied Fulhum, “but I do believe in Howard.”

“Howard? You believe in Howard?” asked the reporter.

“It all has to do with my mother’s maiden name,” said Fulhum.

Fulhum then explained to the reporter that his mother’s maiden name was Howard and that the Howard name often came up in family conversations. So, when, as a small child, he learned to pray in Sunday School, “Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name,” of course he thought they were saying, “Our Father, which art in heaven, HOWARD be Thy name.” He knew his mother was a Howard, and, indirectly, that he was a Howard, and if God was a Howard too, he must belong to God’s family.

Since he was told that his grandfather had died and gone to heaven, Fulhum says, God and his grandfather got all mixed up in his childish mind as one and the same. And this gave him what he calls, “a pretty comfy notion about God.” He writes, “When I knelt beside my bed each night and prayed, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven, Howard be Thy name,’ I thought about my grandfather and what a big shot he was because, of course, the prayer ends with ‘For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.’ I went to bed feeling well connected to the universe for a long, long time. After all it was a Howard Family Enterprise . . .”

That’s a pretty good view of the universe for a child to have, that they are part of the universal family enterprise.

Jesus told many parables about the kingdom of God, and he used many expressions to try to explain what the kingdom was like. Two of his most popular descriptions are found in today's Gospel,

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.” and

‘The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.’

Can you think of anything in this world for which you would sell everything you own?

I can think of only one thing: the life of someone I love. If one of our children was sick and there was a cure that would cost everything we have, even including our own life, most of us would be willing to give it all up without a moment's thought.

We would give everything we own for the well-being of those we love, but that's about it. Nothing else that I can think of has that big of a hold on us. Yet Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is worth everything we have. Our money. Our time. Our energy. Everything. That's quite a statement. Everything we own. So, where is this kingdom of heaven?

Quite simply, the Kingdom of heaven is anywhere that God reigns.

For some people, this means that getting into heaven when we die is worth everything we possess. And certainly that is true. After all, when we go to heaven, the heaven that is beyond the grave, we leave everything else behind. So, we might as well give everything we own to get there. However, doesn't this imply that entrance to heaven is something we can purchase? If not with money, at least with good works?

Well then, what about the cross?

Central to our faith is the belief that, in terms of our salvation, Christ paid it all. You can't buy your way into heaven no matter how much you're willing to give. Eternal life is the gift of a gracious God. Surely it would be worth everything we have, but Christ has taken care of it on our behalf. Besides, if we had to buy our way into heaven, with either wealth or good works, I suspect that we would discover that it is far too expensive for any of us. We do not have enough wealth or good works to purchase a ticket through those particular gates.

But Jesus isn't talking about getting into heaven after we die. The Bible speaks of a kingdom that is coming to this world, a kingdom yet to be realised. I think that Jesus was thinking about the words of Isaiah who wrote, ‘They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’. Or, ‘The wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion . . . together; and a little child shall lead them’. The prophet was speaking of a kingdom that was coming to this world.

There will come a time when God shall reign in every heart. This is the kingdom that Christ was heralding. It is a kingdom of this world as well as the world to come.

I like the way someone once explained the workings of God. They said a great ocean liner leaves Liverpool, bound for New York. It leaves on schedule, it arrives on schedule. It does so because its captain and crew are in charge. Nevertheless, the passengers of the ship have a great deal of freedom, freedom to do good and freedom to do ill. Freedom to move around the deck as they please. But the day is coming when the ship will arrive at its port. God is moving this world through time and space according to His own good purpose, and the day is coming when we will reach our destination.

That's the kingdom of God Jesus was describing.

God's sure victory over the forces of darkness and despair.

God's kingdom is wherever God reigns.

People who travel a great deal internationally often say that they set their watches to their destination time as soon as they board an airplane. They start living in the time zone to which they are travelling. So it is with life in the kingdom. We look forward to that day when God reigns over this world, and we look forward to God's reign in heaven, and we set the clock of our hearts with those eternal clocks. This allows us to have a feeling of inner security and well-being that the world simply cannot give.



A free phone line of hymns,
reflections and prayers

**No action
required
on your
part except
to sponsor
me!**

I am planning to take part in this year's sponsored Ride & Stride on Saturday 12th September and am cycling to visit 20 churches in and around the Henley Deanery. I am hoping that you will sponsor me for this ride, to give me encouragement to cycle even if it's raining and to raise some much-needed funds for our churches. We've had a rather sparse year in terms of fundraising, so now is your chance to offer all that money you would usually have given at fêtes, flower festivals, quiz nights and benefice meals to a really good cause. Please see me to sponsor me or contact me (details below). You can also sponsor me online at <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/SarahNesbitt4> It's really easy. The amount raised (before Gift Aid) will be split half and half, 50% to Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust and 50% to our Benefice Churches, St Margaret of Antioch, St Peter & St Paul and All Saints. Of the money that goes to OHCT, if we have a project requiring funding, we can apply to OHCT for a grant and get some of that money back. In the meanwhile, it is used to support churches in even greater need than ours in Oxfordshire. You can scan the QR code below with your phone to go straight to the fund-raising page.

Thank you for your support.

Sarah (07770 930756; revsarahjoy@icloud.com)

The Ride & Stride is being undertaken within Government guidelines as applicable at the date of the Ride and as appropriate with full social distancing.





GOLF DAY

We are repeating last year's successful fund-raising golf day to generate much-needed income for St Margaret's

SATURDAY 10TH OCTOBER

**Golf at approximately 12.30 pm
followed by a simple supper**

Teams of 4
(Enter as a team or individually)

Cost £65.00 per person

Please contact Sue Wright for entry forms
susanpwright@hotmail.co.uk
or 07762 872208

We are also looking for prizes for an Raffle and Promises that we can Auction. Do please contact Sue if you can help with this. Not everyone plays golf but you could all participate in this bit!

SAVE THE DATE!



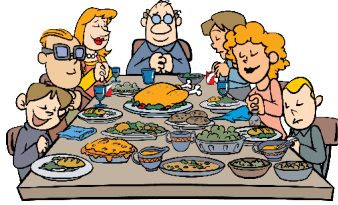
SUNDAY 27TH JUNE 2021
2.30 – 4.30

A fundraiser for St Margaret's Church

A garden party with cream teas, cakes and jams, pitch and putt, music, two tree houses connected by a rope bridge, and 8 acres of beauty to stroll around.

Situated at the end of a lane off Woodlands Road, courtesy of Jeff and Tracy Ellis to whom we are all so grateful.

**More information nearer the time
from Paul Barrett, Jo Taylor
or Karen Drakeford-Lewis!**



FELLOWSHIP LUNCH

Fellowship lunches will return once we are out of Lockdown!

WEEKLY PRAYER GROUP



The Tuesday Prayer Group is unable to meet at the moment, but if you would like someone held in prayer please contact

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Parish Magazine Editor

Sue Wright

as above

Harpsden Parish News is written for and by the people of this parish, and contributions are always welcome. However, the views expressed therein are those of the writers and are not necessarily shared by the Rector, the Editor and Churchwarden.