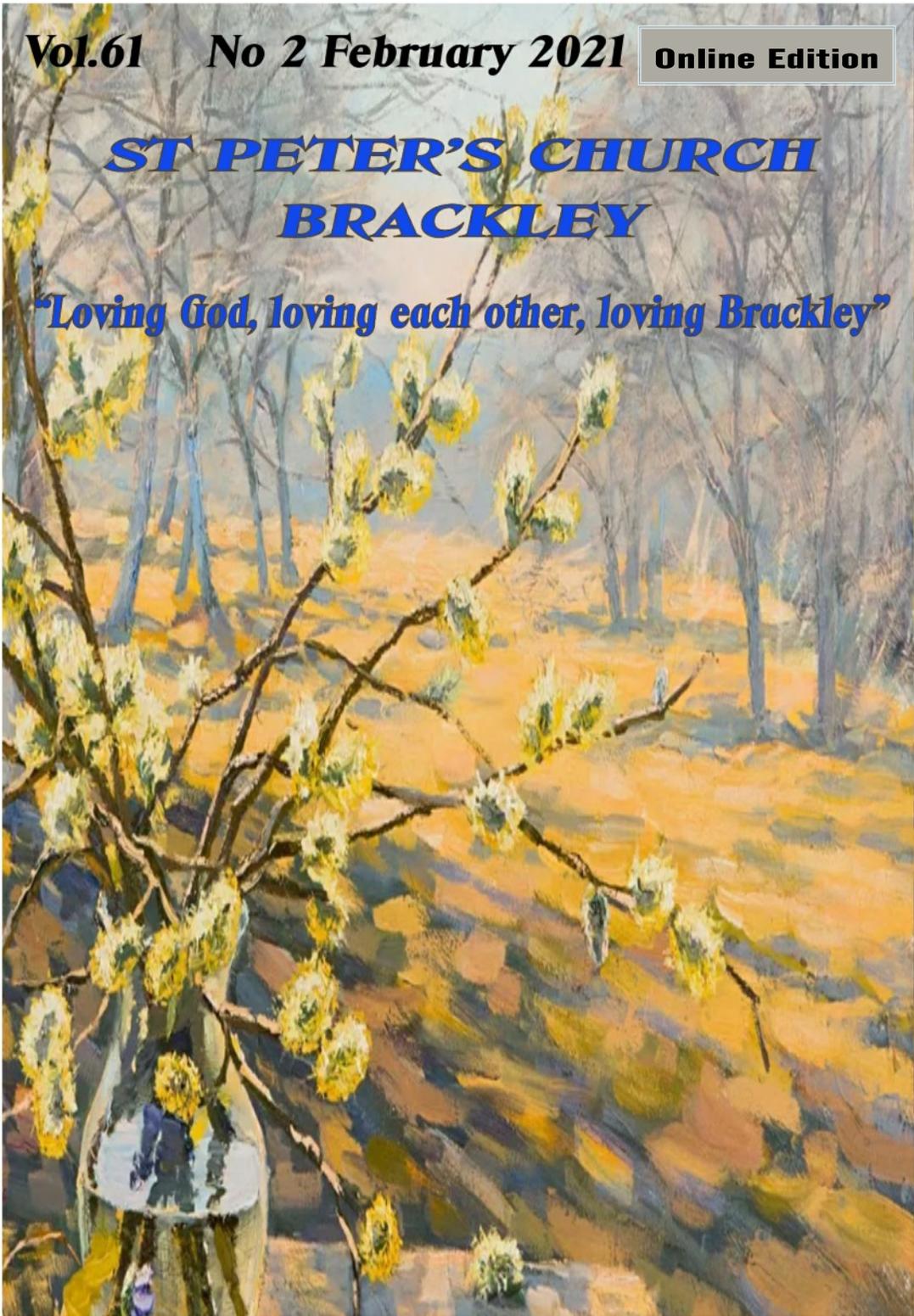


Vol.61 No 2 February 2021

Online Edition

***ST PETER'S CHURCH
BRACKLEY***

"Loving God, loving each other, loving Brackley"





To meet or not to meet? That is the question.

As you probably know, Sunday services did not take place in St Peter's Church building during the second half of January. This move, instigated by a marginal majority at our PCC, was in line with the advice of our diocesan bishop and also in keeping with the approach taken by more than half of the Church of England's 14,000 churches. Nevertheless, the decision to suspend physical services felt momentous, contentious and extremely sad. St Peter's Church has not been "closed" as such, since Christ's church is primarily a people and not a place (1 Peter 2:4-5), but choosing to keep that people disparate was a significant step.

Therefore, I thought it might be helpful to lay out just some of the reasons for and against meeting in person. No doubt, you could add to these. My aim though is simply to show that a godly and sensible case can be made for either view, in the hope that we might remain generous towards those who differ from us on this issue. Even more important than where we land on this "disputable matter" is whether we treat one another graciously regardless of our stance (Romans 14).

To meet?

A strong case can be made for continuing physical meetings come what may. The word "church" in the New Testament literally means a "gathering". Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Of course, in both cases, physical not virtual assembly was envisaged. To meet or gather in some online fashion is a wonderful blessing (available to some of us) that past generations didn't enjoy, but it is still unquestionably second best – as those who have been isolating for months or housebound for years will testify. This is an important principle to remember once we exit the Covid era: simply showing up at church, whenever possible, is a crucial way to keep going as a Chris-

tian yourself and to encourage others to do so. "Don't make a habit of skipping services," says the writer to the Hebrews.

In addition, many commentators have pointed out that now, more than ever, the Church should be stepping to the fore: offering Christ's unique resurrection hope in the face of death and practical love in the face of hardship and tragedy. Others make the point that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4) and therefore the Church's services are every bit as vital as Tesco's – more so, in fact. And while the physical harm caused by the novel coronavirus and its variants is measurable in terms of numbers and graphs, there is a great unseen spiritual, emotional and mental havoc being wreaked that is much harder to quantify and that may only become apparent in time. It is for all these reasons that throughout 2020, we at St Peter's chose to continue our physical Sunday services whenever the regulations allowed, in contrast to a large proportion of other churches both locally and nationally.

Not to meet?

Having said all that, a strong case can also be made for suspending physical meetings temporarily. Infection rates are markedly higher (both in the UK in general and in Brackley in particular) during this third lockdown than they were during the first two, when church closures were mandated. In Matthew 10:23 we find the principle that it is not somehow sub-spiritual to flee physical harm. Therefore, it has been very sensible for many of the medically vulnerable members of our congregation to remain at home over the past year, even when in-person services have been conducted.

What's more, the question of whether to attend church is not just a personal one, it has an impact on others, and one of the two primary Christian duties is of course to "love thy neighbour" (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27). Protecting our communities from inadvertent viral transmission chains is one very tangible way of fulfilling that command. Each of us at St Peter's has a duty of care not only to our nuclear and church families, but also to the wider Brackley community. We, of all people, ought to be willing to give up our rights for the welfare of others, just as our Saviour did, even when (or especially when) it comes at great personal cost.

So what?

I hope all this helps to show that there are good biblical arguments on either side of the debate. I believe there is no clear-cut 'right' or 'wrong' answer here. Would our public witness be more damaged by suspending or continuing? Either is possible. None of this is straightforward, and so much of how we view things will depend on our own particular experience, temperament and personal circumstances. In light of all this, please pray for the PCC to have wisdom and unity at our meeting on Thursday 4th as we discuss the plan for Sundays in February. Look out for an update towards the end of the week that will be communicated by email and on our website.

Regardless of the outcome, I hope many of you will join me on Zoom from 7:30 to 8:30pm on Wednesday evenings throughout February, either for the tail end of the Discipleship Explored course (3rd and 10th), or for the beginning of our Lent course (17th and 24th), as we listen to Bishop Donald's talks on the book of Hebrews. Brothers and sisters, we should make the best of a bad situation and, whatever this month throws at us, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

*New Baby
Boy*



CONGRATULATIONS

TO KATE AND REV'D RICH

ON THE BIRTH OF THEIR
SON

ON 23rd DECEMBER

GUS EMMANUEL MAXWELL

A BROTHER FOR JAGO

A lthough things are not perfect,
B ecause of trial or pain,
C ontinue in thanksgiving
D on't even think of whom to blame .

A-Z

E ven when the times are hard,
F ierce winds are bound to blow,
G od is forever able
H old on to Jesus .

I magine life without His love,
J oy would cease to be,
K eep thanking Him for all the things
L ove imparts you to see.

A-Z

M ove out of Complaining,
N o weapon that is known
O n earth can yield the power
P raise can do alone.

Q uit worrying about the future,
R edeem the time at hand,
S tart every day with prayer
T o 'thank' is God's command.

A-Z

U ntil we see Him coming,
V ictorious in the sky,
W e'll run the race with gratitude,
X alting the Most High God.
Y es, there'll be good times and yes some will be bad,
but...
Z ion awaits in glory...where no one is ever sad!

The one who kneels to the Lord can stand up to anything..

Rev'd Sylvia

Lent – more of the same or a time for renewal?

Well, here we are once again on the cusp of Lent – traditionally a season of penitential preparation for the great feast of Easter; 40 days of self-discipline with the promise of a party at the end of it.

Except, of course, that this year is different. This year, we approach Lent having already been subjected to a period of almost unyielding restraint and self-denial. We have been deprived of so much that for so long we took for granted: the freedom to go wherever we wanted whenever we wanted; to enjoy unhesitatingly the company of family and friends; to shake hands, hug, be at ease with one another. As Christian people we have been permitted to “assemble and meet together” (at least after the rigours of the first lockdown were eased), but our offering of worship has been muted by the need to keep safe. We have been socially distanced, separated from one another, masked; no sharing of the peace, no common cup, no after-service fellowship or coffee (who thought we could mourn the church coffee?!) and, possibly worst of all, no singing. For all the beautiful music offered by our Cathedral choir and other musicians, Christmas without carols felt (at least to me) an especially harsh deprivation.

And it feels like such a long haul now – indeed we are fast approaching a year of life under Covid, and we are all wearied of it. Like Narnia in CS Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it feels as if this winter of the soul will never end.

Well, of course, like all things, this will pass. The programme of vaccinations is beginning to pick up pace and maybe by Easter, life will be that bit easier; the “thaw” will be underway, the spring will come and we may begin to breathe again.

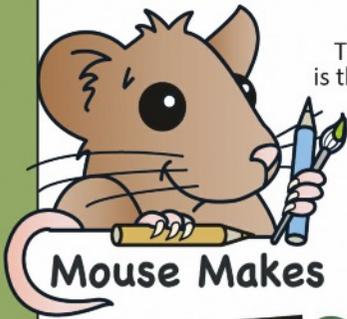
In the story of Narnia, it is the return to life of the great Lion, Aslan, after a cruel death, that breaks the power of the White Witch and ushers in the end of Winter. CS Lewis is of course writing an allegory of the Christian story, and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So as we brace ourselves for Lent, that extraordinary hope stands before us as a guiding light. New life will come – for our Church, for our society, for our world. It may not look like the old normal – and perhaps that’s a good thing – but God’s unconquerable love is offered to us all.

So may we embrace the challenge of this coming Lent, and not see it as an unbearable continuation of what has been but a time to hope, pray and reflect on how, under God, things might be and (by his grace) shall be.

May he richly bless you this Lent.

The Very Revd Christopher Dalliston
Dean of Peterborough



Mouse Makes

WHAT AM I?

The last letter of one word is the first letter of the next

E _ _ _ H

• What two things did God create first?
Genesis 1:1

_ _ S _ _

• What was the Earth without? Genesis 1:2
• What came before morning? Gen 1:5

_ _ _ G

• Who is the creator?
Genesis 1:1

_ _ D _ _

• What was separated from light? Gen 1:4

_ _ _ _

S _ _ _

• Which day did God finish work? Gen 2:2
• Who was created God's image? Gen 1:27

_ _ H _ _

• Who moved over the water? Gen 1:2

I _ _ _ S

By the **seventh** day God finished the work He had been doing. God *blessed* the seventh day and made it *holy*. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments the **fourth commandment** said to *remember* the seventh Sabbath day, to *keep it holy* and set apart for God.

FIND THE CREATION PAIRS from Genesis 1 and 2

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| EARTH | MORNING |
| LIGHT | FRUIT |
| DAYS | SEA |
| TREES | NIGHT |
| LAND | FISH |
| EVENING | YEARS |
| ADAM | HEAVENS |
| DAY | DARK |
| BIRDS | WATER |
| SKY | EVE |

DID YOU KNOW?
The first word of the Old Testament in Hebrew is **bereshith** which means "in the beginning". The Greeks translated this word as **GENESIS** which means *creation, origin and generation*

C R E A T U R E H G O D P
D G A L R E F R U I T E L
L O R I E S L B M O S E A
A O T G E T Y D A R K P N
N D H H E A V E N I G H T
D A Y T R R S P I R I T W
A S E E D S K Y B I R D O

Can you find these words in the word search?
GOD • HEAVEN • SPIRIT
FLY • DEEP • EARTH
DARK • DAY • LIGHT
NIGHT • STARS • SKY
SEA • LAND • BIRD
CREATURE • HUMAN
TREE • PLANT • SEEDS
FRUIT • GOOD • TWO

An Article from Parish Pump

The Revd Peter Crumpler, a Church of England priest in St Albans, Herts, and a former communications director for the CofE, considers romantic love.

Taking a mature look at Valentine's Day

You do not see many Zimmer frames, wheelchairs or hearing aids on Valentine's Day cards. They mostly seem to be full of young love, hearts and roses.

Young love is wonderful and beautiful, full of optimism, and plans and hopes for the future.



But love in later life is precious too. It is a love that has been forged through years of shared experiences and joy, maybe raising children together, perhaps enjoying grandchildren.

It's a love that's stood the test of time, and deeper, much deeper, than any shop-bought Valentine's Day card can describe.

That long-term love can also be shown by the devoted wife or husband who visits their spouse in a care home each day, gently talking with them when they are, perhaps, deep into dementia. Or sitting for long hours by a hospital bed. Or dutifully caring for them at home.

Love is a marathon, not a sprint. It starts with white lace and promises and grows over the years.

Mature love is about the commitment that spans decades and is seldom shown on the cards on sale in the High Street this Valentine's Day.



As a priest, when I marry a couple and take them through their wedding vows, I hear them make their lifelong commitment "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part..."

It's so wonderful to see the bride and groom smiling, and enjoying this precious moment, making vows that will, hopefully, span the rest of their lives. I love taking weddings - it's an immense privilege to be part of a couple's special day.

And I find myself pondering what the future will hold for them. I wonder what shape that lifelong commitment will take, as I pray a blessing on their marriage.

How much wealth or poverty will come their way? Will it be sickness or health that will accompany them through the years? How will they support each other as the years go by?



'Love is patient. Love is kind.' These are familiar words from the popular wedding reading in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. That patience, that kindness are qualities that can develop over years of marriage.

Just how much patience will be needed in the years ahead cannot usually be known on the wedding day.

So, this year, as I look at the rows of red or pink Valentine's Day cards on sale in the shops, I shall look out for cards that have a deeper message.

I shall seek out cards that celebrate long-term love. Cards that say something about the joys and challenges of growing older together.

Cards that go beyond hearts and roses to the deeper love that transcends love's first blossoming. I just hope I can find some...

Beware hand sanitiser!

Don't let vulnerable members of your family accidentally poison themselves with hand sanitiser. It can kill them.

Poisonings from swallowing alcohol-based hand sanitiser have more than doubled in the past year, to nearly 400. Doctors from the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine at the University of Oxford urge that more needs to be done to protect children, the elderly or anyone with mental health issues, from mistaking the sanitiser for a drink.

**If you would ever like to make a donation to
St Peter's Church,
your gift would be hugely appreciated.
Our bank details are as follows:
sort code 30-11-08,
account number 00060124.
Thank you.**

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