

From the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, London

9th April 2020



Dear Friends,

These are 'strange times' to be living through. And this is probably the strangest Holy Week that St Paul's has known since the seventeenth century. Used as a barracks, stable and shopping mall under Cromwell in the 1650s, then after the Great Fire in 1666 having no building to worship in for another 30 years; that was probably the last time that there has been no community at worship inside St Paul's in the run-up to Easter. We remember and pray too for the millions of Christians with no church worship either, and those of other faiths without their places to come together. And we might also remember the community at Notre-Dame in Paris whose building was so badly damaged by fire exactly a year ago: our situation is much more temporary than theirs.

Many people are now on furlough and unable to work. And I want to thank you, as well as assure you of our thoughts and prayers at this time. When there's a crisis like this we want to help, to sort it out, to do something; and yet for many of us, what will help right now means not working, and it's hard. Do keep in touch with others, and see what you can do in your local communities to help others through the crisis, and remember that it will pass.

A huge thank-you to those who are still working, looking after people and caring in so many ways for the wider community: we are very grateful to you, and recognise the strains that home working or travel or caring for others can bring, and the creative and positive service you're giving to others. And also for those who volunteer to be alongside neighbours and strangers, helping to safeguard the fabric of our society and the lives of individuals.

Life for nearly all of us has been stripped back to a greater or lesser extent: isolating, staying away, staying in; hard and potentially hazardous work and care given by some, suffering and grief for others; being at a distance, sometimes away from those we love, while using what means we can to come closer together. And we may be concerned about what the future will hold, and how we will meet its opportunities and demands. However hard we try to manage, we have to confront the reality that we aren't ultimately in control of our own destiny.

The Christian experience of Holy Week and Easter is the experience of letting go. Jesus and his disciples, both men and women, are in the hands of others. Like the participants in the gospel story: we may have to stand at a distance and watch; or we may suffer; or we may experience the loss of family or friends. In Jesus we believe that God enters into our experience, even that of suffering and loss and death; but that through all that, God's new life waits for us, now and into the future.

The Cathedral's doors may be closed to protect others; but we aim to welcome people into our community of worship, which continues as the church at prayer in the on-line world and in our homes and hearts. We invite you to join with us in prayer over this Easter weekend, as we not only remember Jesus' death and resurrection, but also hold before God all those who are suffering and grieving.

Simple service sheets for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are available here:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/lent-and-easter/maundythursday>

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/lent-and-easter/good-friday-2020>

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/lent-and-easter/easter-day-2020>

They contain words for a simple 'pray at home' service, as well as links to sound and video files so that you can listen to the St Paul's Choir singing hymns and anthems, and also see or hear reflections (from myself on Maundy Thursday; from Paula Gooder, our Chancellor, on Good Friday; and from Sarah the Bishop of London on Easter Day).

In addition to this you can download a pdf of activities for all the family here:<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/SM4/Mutable/Uploads/medialibrary/Holy-Week-Resources-for-Families.pdf>

These have been produced by our Schools and Family Learning department.

There are also specially commissioned reflections from the Adult Learning department, daily Monday to Friday, from now until Pentecost. You can find those here:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/learning-faith/adult-learning/daily-reflections>

– you will find the direct links in the left hand menu, but I would advise signing up to the mailing list to have them delivered direct to your inbox, by going to:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/maillinglist> – making sure you select Adult Learning in the list provided.

Also on Easter Sunday don't forget to click here:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/worship-music/worship/choir-of-the-nation-join-our-hymn-flash-mob>

to listen to the hymns from the Choir of the Nation. Tom Daggett our outreach worker has worked with sound engineers to mix tracks sent in from all around the world of singers joining in with three great Easter hymns – Jesus Christ is Risen Today; Love's Redeeming Work is Done; and Thine be the Glory. Listen and join in with them on Easter Sunday.

For now, we wait and watch, 'standing at the foot of the cross'; but as Jesus rose on Easter morning, so a new day will come. Our prayer and hope is that you may find peace in the midst of it all.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Do pass on to others, should you wish.