Letter from Andy

Do you ever get the feeling that you’re living in a game of bash the mole, where just as you get one thing sorted another pops up?

Last week we just about got sorted with opening for private prayer when out of nowhere Boris pops up and tells us we can open for public worship, but without giving us any details as to what that means.

I’m now getting to the point where we’re having meetings to plan the meetings where we’ll discuss possible courses of action in the full knowledge that by next week we’ll probably have a new set of guidance that completely counters last week’s guidance! Stressful doesn’t start on it.

So what do we know and what does the Bible have to say into this situation?

Firstly, each of the three PCCs met this week. Two decided to open for private prayer on the following days and times:

**Barwick:** Mondays from 10am - 12 noon and Thursdays from 4-6pm, starting from Monday 6th July.

**Thorner:** Saturdays from 10am – 12 noon and Wednesdays from 2-4pm with an expected start date of 4th July (though the church will be closed on Wednesday 8th July for a funeral.)

**Scholes** decided to wait until they could meet for public services.

In terms of meeting for public worship the Benefice council feel now is not the time to take that step and we are going to spend the next month seeing how the churches are used for private prayer before making a decision on opening for public worship.

When we are able to meet for public worship life will be very different from before. At present singing, sharing the peace, having coffee after the service and sharing the wine are not allowed, though taking the bread at communion is so long as I sanitise my hands both before and after distribution. Some form of social distancing will almost certainly continue for quite some time. So in other words there is likely to be a relatively long period of time where we are allowed to join together in worship, but that the feel and quality of that worship will be very different to the pre-lock-down worship.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about transitioning from one normal to another. The entry into the Promised Land, worship during the exile in Babylon, the early church, all were cases of the worshipping community having to find new ways of singing the Lord’s song.

There will be things that we will struggle with during this new period. What have we lost? What have we gained? There will be for some a sense of bereavement for the way things were, while for others there will be an excitement of the new. Each of us will pass through these emotional states in the coming months.

As we both struggle and stumble our way forward let us remember a number of things.

Firstly that God is already there. He knows the future and the past and walks beside us in our stumbling.

Secondly, while this may be a new experience for us, the church has regularly had to adapt to new contexts and has continued and grown and learnt from each new experience. Let us likewise learn what we can and gain from this time.

Thirdly, be kind to both yourself and others and aware of how you are feeling. Some may glory in the quietness of the lack of singing, but others will really struggle with it. Some will be very thankful that we’re not allowed to share the peace while others will yearn for the physical touch. Spend time recognizing how you are responding emotionally and physically to the new worship, when it comes, and try to find positives within and through the negatives.

Blessings.

Andy