

April 2020 Edition 52

***Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God***

## Unprecedented Times

I wonder how you have found yourself describing the situation we are currently living in. It's at times like these that we find ourselves searching for words to describe something that we have never experienced before, as well as the individual challenges that we are facing. The word that appears again and again is "unprecedented". It's hard to deny its validity.

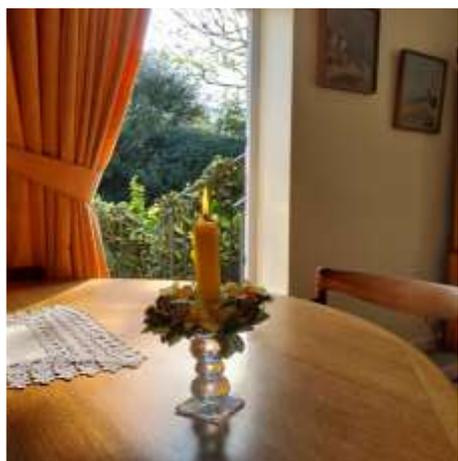
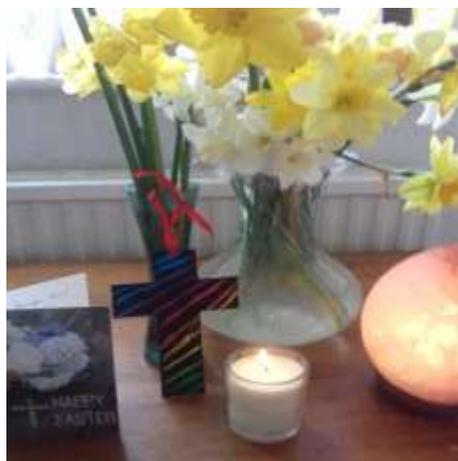
On Easter Sunday I was talking to a member of the congregation in the memorial garden. As we all know, this is our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, and we were reflecting on the very strange reality that this is likely to be the first time in 125 years that there has not been an Easter service celebrated inside St Mary's.

I dare to hope that in "unprecedented" times, we might not be quite as lost as we sometimes feel. The word "unprecedented" means "never done or known before". But let's break the word down a little more.

A precedent is a thing or person that goes before – or precedes – another. And perhaps that's where it might help us just a little that we are followers of Jesus. Because there is always one who precedes us, and that is Jesus.

The story of Holy Week and Easter reminds us that we follow one who is not afraid to be with us in our pain and suffering and who demonstrates in the wonder of his resurrection, itself so completely unprecedented, that God will never leave us. Whatever it is that weighs us down is experienced and known by God. Perhaps at a time when we are unable to be physically beside one another, it is more important than ever to know that God never leaves our side.

And of course the story of Easter also shows us that there is hope. We are reminded to look out for those glimpses of light, life and love; to be signs of those things for others; and to keep following the one whose love will never let us go.



## St Mary's in Unprecedented Times

It was only a few short weeks ago that our main concern on Sunday morning was how we would share the peace without actually shaking hands; whether we should receive communion from a shared chalice; and whether we should have refreshments after the service. How quickly things change. By Mothering Sunday the church could only be open for private prayer, and within a week the building was closed altogether.

In these last weeks we have had to live out what we already knew. That church is not about the building, but rather about the people and community; and that God is not confined by the walls of a building, but is present at all times and in all places.

From the outset I took the decision to continue to provide material so that we could all worship together on a Sunday, albeit in the safety of our own homes. There is therefore a Service of the Word to structure your worship, and the collect, readings and sermon are sent out weekly. For the period of Holy Week, John and I also produced a series of reflections based on the Stations of the Cross to support your prayer.

It will come as no surprise that technology is not really my thing. However, in the last week, I have recorded the Maundy Thursday/ Good Friday reflections and the Easter Sunday sermon so that you can choose to listen to the sermon, rather than having to read it. The feedback I have received suggests that it is worth continuing to do this, so each week's sermon will be recorded.

In addition, the Standing Committee has held one virtual meeting, and the April Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting will be held via Google Hangouts. At least two House Groups are also using Hangouts to continue studying together – as well as catching up with news and praying with and for one another.

Something I have always known about St Mary's is the strength of the community and the love in which we hold one another. I know that people are telephoning and messaging one another; that some hold conversations at a safe distance during their daily walk; that gestures of kindness, support and at-one-ness are forming a part

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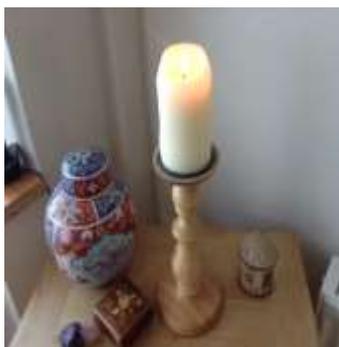
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of the fabric of our existence in these challenging times. I know this not least because people are taking at least as much care of me as I am of them – for which I am extremely grateful.

Our Easter celebrations this year were highly unusual, but the hope of resurrection fills our hearts and our lives. Many of you lit candles on Easter morning just as we would have lit the Paschal Candle from the new fire at dawn.

And we renewed our baptismal vows, reminding us of our belonging to one another and to God.

At the moment, as I am sure you are aware, it is impossible to predict when we will be able to gather once more at St Mary's. In the meantime, if there is anything at all that I can do to support your prayer, worship and spiritual life, please let me know. And let's keep being the church in whatever ways we can here in Cuddington.



## May Services and Events

At the time of writing the only event that is likely next month is a, probably virtual, PCC meeting on the 3rd Wednesday, i.e. 20<sup>th</sup>.