

Corpus Christi
Sunday, 14th June 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

'Be Still and Know that I am God.' (Psalm 46: 10)

This weekend, the feast of Corpus Christi heralds the UK Government's decision to allow places of worship to open again for a time of private prayer. This, I know will be a source of great joy for you all and marks the beginning of what we might remember as being 'normal' life. However, (and isn't there always a 'but' these days!) the situation regarding our churches being re-opened is not by any means as straightforward as we might have hoped. It isn't a simple case of unlocking the doors and letting folks come in. For each parish, the churchwardens and I have had to make a rigorous risk assessment in order to ensure we are complying with Coronavirus social distancing and infection control regulations. Many of the wonderful people who volunteer to run our churches are currently unable to assist in the opening, cleaning and supervising of our churches because they are themselves clinically vulnerable or shielding others in their household who are at high clinical risk. As your Rector, I am not prepared to put any of these dear people's lives at risk. As you might imagine, the very limited resources available to support the re-opening our churches seriously undermines the efficacy of complying with regulations which are in place, not to confound us but to SAVE LIVES! We must re-open our doors cautiously and judiciously – and with great love for all.

At the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak, I was branded by one or two parishioners as 'cowardly' for closing the churches against people wishing to spend time in private prayer. I do pray that these past three months have helped people to see that such measures are in place to protect you all from the ravages of a disease which has claimed too many thousands of lives – and not cowardice or laziness on my part.

Please visit The Downs Benefice Website to find the days and times that each of our Benefice churches will be opened. Each will differ, owing to the size of church and resources available to us to ensure deep cleaning between each opening.



'Agnus Dei' by Francisco de Zurbarán

Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace.

Though not yet able to share Holy Communion together – the body of Christ in bread and wine, I pray we will slowly be able to spend precious personal time in the sacred stillness of our beloved churches, sharing the space with those whose feet have trod these same hallowed stones, in some places for a thousand years past. With them, we come together across many centuries as pilgrims on the Way – the body of Christ in faithful prayer before Father, Son and Holy Spirit: ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven; dwellers all in time and space. In his *'Introduction to the Devout Life'* theologian and Bishop of Geneva in 1602, Francis de Sales, gave instruction that when it was not possible to receive Holy Communion, the faithful must *'at least receive communion of heart and spirit,'* in order to ensure a spiritual connection between our souls and God. Even though the church buildings have been closed during Lockdown, we have been upholding this spiritual union in our prayers and bible study, and now our parish churches are beginning to open again as a sanctuary to praise God in prayer, that we might emerge blinking into the light, filled with the peace of Christ and equipped to take His church out into a glorious and Spirit-led direction in His holy name.

As we come to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, I have a confession to make!

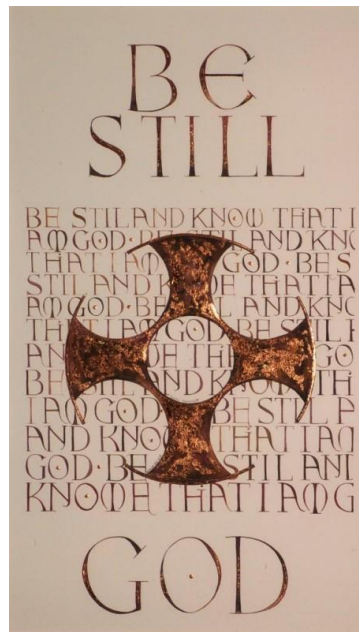
On Tuesday evening of this week, I was sitting in bed at about 11pm with my laptop, putting the final touches to the funeral service I was due to be taking the next day. My laptop battery was low, so I plugged in the charger and carried on typing. A few seconds later, there was a huge flash of light and the sound of an explosion. No, not a personal experience of Pentecost. Instead, my laptop charger had caught fire ... and with it my bedding! Plunged into darkness, as our electricity circuit cleverly kicked in, thankfully the resulting fire was small and quickly controlled. But the knock-on effect is that I cannot use my laptop until a new charger arrives. And nor can I access my Word documents, which included the beginnings of my Newsletter reflections for this Sunday!

I have learned several salutary lessons from this disconcerting experience. First, replace old electrical equipment such as computer chargers if the wires have become exposed as mine had. Second, do not try, as I did, to stick the exposed cable wires back together with Sellotape as an alternative to replacing the unit! Third, do not sit in bed using a laptop without first placing the laptop on a specially designed tray to stop the computer from over-heating on the bedding. Fourth, be sure to back-up data files on a regular basis. Last, and by no means least, give thanks to God, who not only gave me peace and a clear mind in that moment of potential danger, but also for protecting me, our cat, Hobbit, (asleep on my bed) and our son, Alexander, blissfully unaware of the drama in my bedroom until all the electricity went off!



'Pentecost' by Charles H Pabst

On the wall at the foot of my bed, is hung a beautiful calligraphy artwork in hand-worked copper by Tess Cooling, given to me by my 'home' congregation of St John's Church at Boldre in the New Forest, on my ordination to priesthood. It shows the words of Psalm 46 verse 10: *'Be Still and Know that I am God.'* These words have stood me in good stead throughout my ministry. They are the last thing I see at night and the first I read in the morning. Each day, they frame my waking prayers for the day ahead and offer God's salve to those for whom I pray. At night, they still my thoughts and help me lift the events of the day in prayer. On Tuesday night, they were the last thing I saw before catastrophe struck.



'Be Still' by Tess Cooling

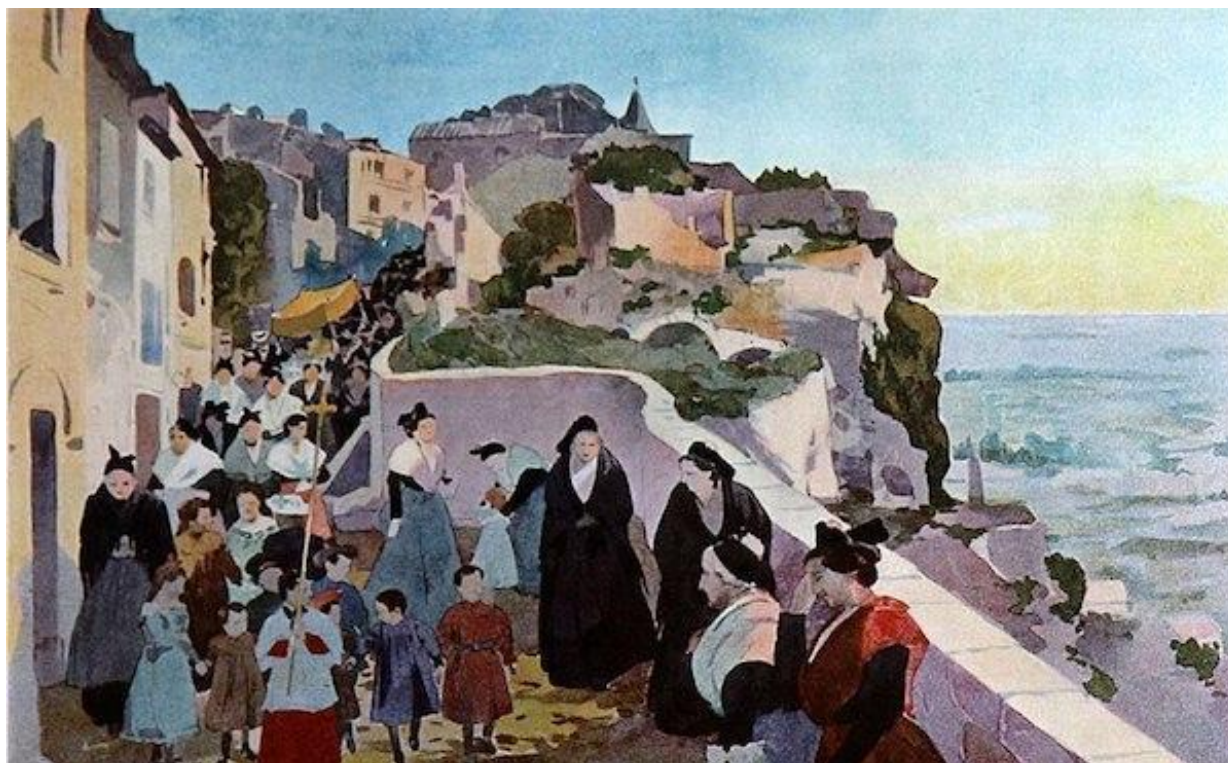
Knowing I could not access my draft Newsletter for this Sunday, the Lord prompted me to contact Alastair Barron, one of our gifted cohort of Lay ministers. The previous week, he had brought an inspired reflection on Psalm 46 to Charlotte Nash's Tuesday morning Zoom gathering for Morning Prayer. (Contact the Benefice Office if you would like to join this group). Alastair has kindly saved the day by allowing me to bring you his reflection now. *'Be Still and Know that I am God,'* seems an apposite place in which to dwell this Corpus Christi, as we reflect on the power and presence of the body of Christ in our Christian lives.

Yours in the peace of the Lamb,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

Reflection for Zoom Morning Prayer – given by Alastair Barron, 2nd June 2020



'Corpus Christi Procession in Les Baux de Provence' by Léopold Lellée

'Peace for our time' - those famous words spoken by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain on 30th September 1938, in his speech on the Munich Agreement. We know the declaration didn't work so well – but in this context, Chamberlain was speaking into the need for the avoidance of conflict and I guess that's the link into Psalm 46.

The psalmist, talking of God, tells us *'He maketh wars to cease He breaketh the bow and knappeth the spear in sunder and burneth the chariots in the fire.'* So, basically peace breaking out all over. But then, powerfully, the Psalm continues *'Be still then; and know that I am God'* or perhaps He might have said *'Be at peace then and know that I am God'*. These words offer us a causal link between God and peace – Peace is what He gives: it's what He wants, and that is what He wants for us.

The well-known blessing taken from Philippians 4 (Ch vs 7) begins *'The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the love of God*' clearly tells us, even if we don't understand it, that peace will be a blessing to us as we go through our lives, on our Christian journey, enabling us to know and experience God's love. God's peace is an enabler.

Perhaps we hold that thought in our minds in some way? At present, I guess we are all missing our worship together – the fellowship of being with each other in a church, in someone’s house, outside even. One of the things I am missing from our worship is that moment when we physically reach out to each other and exchange a handshake, a hug, a kiss even, and wish the peace of God on each other. *‘Peace be with you,’* we say to each person we greet. In this way, even though the peace of God apparently passes all understanding, we know instinctively that it is a great thing, and something we wish on friends and fellow Christians. On which note, it’s worth remembering that wishing peace on others is also very much part of greetings in the other two key monotheistic religions, the Jewish faith and also Islam – *‘Shalom’* and *‘Salaam Alaikum’* may be greetings you are familiar with?



‘Purify My Heart’ by Brian F M Barlow

The inclusion of *‘The Peace’* in our worship, echoes the words of Jesus as He came to the disciples in that locked room, and His first words in greeting were *‘Peace be with you’* – don’t be anxious, don’t be frightened. It is me. Yes, I am here, and everything is fine ...! Then he said these words again after showing them His wounds. *‘Peace be with you’* and then He breathed on them - and for the first time, they received the Holy Spirit.

So, the Peace of God.

Terry Waite's poetry describes peace as bringing harmony. The peace of God was described in one source I read as *'... a tranquil state of appreciation and faith when we submit to and trust the commandments of God and Christ. It requires a mixture of humility and courage to experience God's peace, seeking beyond the mere abilities of our own understanding.'* All of which seems fair - tranquillity through submission to God.

There's more than tranquillity or calm, though. That explanation talks of the trust which God's peace brings us and I get that. I also think, though, that God's peace brings a sense of assurance to each of us, given by Him, in our ability to do His work. It is an affirmation if you like that *'You can do this; I am with you in my Peace which I give to you.'* Only when we have this confidence - not in ourselves but in our abilities given by Him, can we be *'tranquil'* and unworried about whether we can be the disciples He asks us to be at peace.



'The Last Supper' – Jesus Mafa

All that said, there doesn't seem to be much peace around at the moment does there. We'd probably all agree that these are testing times – every aspect of our 'normal' lives is being challenged – our work environments, our finances, our relationships with family and friends, our leisure time and hobbies. Even getting a haircut seems difficult! And yet, we see God at work every day in and through our key workers, in our researchers, in the Thursday evening appreciation and clapping session, in a parent sending a gift to a child they can't visit; in a friend or neighbour bring some shopping or just being there at the end of a phone, or in someone simply baking and sharing cake. All these are things in these strange times that help us deal with our challenges, reduce our anxieties, and remind us that God *is* here. So in a way, peace is after all breaking out all over!



'Corpus Christi' by Cameron Walls

Deep peace of the running waves to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

Alastair

Alastair Barron
Churchwarden and BCM Lay Minister

Prayer for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

On Saturday, 13th June 2020, Her Majesty the Queen's official birthday will be celebrated at Windsor Castle with a Royal Salute from the military, replacing Trooping the Colour which has been cancelled owing to the coronavirus pandemic. As our Queen, and as head of the Church of England, she is the embodiment of Christ's faithful grace and so we pray for her and her family that they continue to know His peace.

Collect for the Sovereign from The Book of Common Prayer

Almighty God, whose kingdom is ever-lasting, and power infinite:
Have mercy upon the whole Church;
and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant ELIZABETH, our Queen and Governor,
that she (knowing whose minister she is)
may above all things seek thy honour and glory:
and that we and all her subjects (duly considering whose authority she hath)
may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey her,
in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost
liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.



Prayer for Corpus Christi

Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us
in the sacrament of your body and blood.

May we offer to our Father in heaven
a solemn pledge of undivided love.

May we offer to our brothers and sisters
a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom
where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit
one God for ever and ever. Amen



Psalm 46 - Deus Noster Refugium (BCP)

GOD is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the hills be
carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof rage and swell, and
though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.

4 There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God; the holy place of the
tabernacle of the Most Highest. 5 God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be
removed; God shall help her, and that right early.

6 The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved; but God hath showed his
voice, and the earth shall melt away.

7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

8 O come hither, and behold the works of the LORD, what destruction he hath brought
upon the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease in all the world; he breaketh the bow, and knappeth the
spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire.

10 Be still then, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, and I will
be exalted in the earth.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.