

Letter from the Vicar

Friday 4 September

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have just gone back through my archive of letters and realised that this is my 24th weekly letter to you during these extraordinary times. So much has happened (or not happened as the case may be!). The world, and this country, is in a very different place to where it was on 23 March when we entered lockdown. And yet some things have stayed the same or are in the process of returning to something that is more recognisable as 'normal'. Autumn is predictably upon us. The circle of life is still revolving with hatches, matches, and dispatches occurring around us. Schools are returning. And at long last all our churches will welcome worshippers to services this month with baptisms and our choir also starting again.

Speaking for myself, this week has been an emotional rollercoaster. Sophie returned to school yesterday for the start of a new school year. She's now in Yr 2 and so on Wednesday night the school uniform was laid out, new shoes labelled, hair washed, and a packed lunch made. The past few months have not been without challenge (home schooling was not much fun for any of us!) but we had grown used to Sophie being at home. Our joy at her return to school was tinged with a touch of selfish sadness. And yet to look at her face on Thursday morning as she danced around the house in anticipation of a new school year, told us exactly that she was ready to return.

Thursday was my first day back 'in the office' too after some annual leave. Usually I try to keep the first day quite simple so as to catch-up with emails/calls and check-in with our Parish Officers to find out what I need to know. Yesterday, though, was different. It started at the crematorium with the funeral of a 98-year-old man whose death had been expected. Fewer than 30 people were present and yet in the midst of the grief you could feel the love they shared and their thankfulness for all the time they had had together. A quick dash up the motorway ensured half an hour at my desk before heading to St John's to conduct Linda Gair's funeral. Quite different circumstances surrounding her sudden and unexpected death, but the same emotions of grief, love, thankfulness, and hope in the glorious resurrection of the dead. I also felt quite relieved the weather remained dry just long enough so that those who joined the ceremony outside did not get drenched. After Linda's funeral I accompanied her to the crematorium. Driving immediately behind the hearse it was impressive to see the respect afforded to Linda by other motorists and those whom she passed, many of whom stopped/made the sign of the cross/bowed their head. The remainder of the day was then spent either at my desk, in the Parish Office, or with the kids hearing about their day, feeding them, or doing bedtime. So many different emotions; so much change in one day, and yet this is a return to something like normal for me.

Abbie had a 'return to nursery' settle session at her rejuvenated nursery and it looked to me like she had never been away. Monday morning will feel very strange not having either of the munchkins at home – something I've only got memories of! Emma has embarked on a familiar September challenge of walking/running/cycling/swimming 1000miles in aid of the British Red Cross's project *Miles for Refugees*. The joy of completing the miles is offset by the fatigue at the end of each day and the thought that she is doing this in the comfort of our home whilst refugees are doing this surrounded by manifold dangers and in the hope of a better life void of war, violence, and oppression.

Change, challenge, and the recognisable. Joy, sorrow, and determination. These words pretty much sum-up my week. And perhaps they do yours too. One thing that is clear to me though, as we face the threat of entering into a 'local lockdown', is that there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is a future to be had where Covid-19 is not the reason we can or can't do things; a future that is

recognisable but different. But to get there we need to remain vigilant, we need to remain determined and focused. As a society we need to honour the sacrifices of all who bore the brunt during lockdown and so do our part now to reduce and contain the spread. As a Church we need to remain optimistically cautious for the future whilst observing good social distancing and hygiene. We need to remain faithful in prayer for all who have been affected or infected by this horrible virus and to pray for the future of our society. And we need to remember that the God who has called us into this wonderful relationship with him through Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is our rock upon whom we can depend, our shield and strength, the one who is changeless and yet who changes with each and every sorrow and joy we feel. He is the recognisable and the one who brings light and life and love.

In recent weeks we have spoken about what is required for our worshipping life to return to something like normal. Now, as our daily lives start to return to normality we need to start addressing once again, through word and action, our common mission in transforming our community, making disciples, and going deeper into God.

I hope you are all remaining safe and well, and secure in the knowledge of our God who loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

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