

Here we are in 2021, still in 'lock-down' but with the rollout of vaccines there is at last light at the end of the tunnel! Last year around this time, I wrote about the significance of the year 2020 as perhaps a year to clarify our vision. Although the year didn't turn out as any of us would have anticipated or hoped, my prayer is that you, I and each person on our planet has re-evaluated what life actually means, what is important. With this in mind, since live worship is (at the time of writing) still permitted, Colin and I made the decision to keep some services going as long as people felt safe to attend (up-to-date details on our website). All three churches remain open daily for private prayer, and I would ask you to respect everyone's safety when using the buildings by wearing your face mask, logging in/signing in, using hand sanitiser and maintaining a safe distance from anyone else outside your household whilst in or around the church.

Alongside the Coronavirus Pandemic, there has been the constant backdrop of the environmental crisis the world is facing, with the positive impact of the enforced minimal travel (particularly air travel) on the pollution levels. Whilst I have every sympathy with the many who have lost their livelihoods in the travel and tourism industry, my hope is that as life slowly begins to resume a more 'normal' pattern, we will continue to consider the potential environmental impact of each journey we make. We can and must learn from this time we are living through, growing in respect and gratitude for what we have, rather than greedily grasping for more, appreciating being part of a community and playing our part to benefit that community. This is as important within our immediate family and social circle as it is on a global scale. One thing that has come out of this Pandemic is the need for and value of kindness. Christian teaching is to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves: being kind is free, but its value is priceless.

To love your neighbour as yourself means 'loving' – that is, accepting and caring about – yourself as you are. In a society that has actively promoted self-criticism and dissatisfaction with who we are and what we own, loving self might seem an alien concept. It certainly doesn't mean narcissism, but acceptance of who we each are, as beloved children of a God who loves us JUST AS WE ARE! This doesn't mean we don't need to change what we are like over time, but it gives us a positive base to effect change from. Isolation can often have a marked negative effect on mental well-being; my prayer is for all who are feeling down or anxious at this time, and I think especially of our young people whose lives have been altered so drastically over the past year. Please get in touch if you know of anyone who is really struggling at the moment.

Hard as lock-down isolation can seem, it can give us time for reflection, enabling each of us to discover a sense of gratitude for what we have been given, and possibly also see new ways in which we can use this for the benefit of the community, whether locally, nationally, or globally. Food for thought....

A happy and healthy new year to you all!

Every blessing,

Helena