



17th April 2020

Pastoral letter from Bishop Philip to the churches and people of the Diocese of Truro:

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am writing this letter as we approach the day often called ‘Low Sunday’. To my mind that’s a great misnomer. Our gospel reading for this day speaks of the disciples being fearful and staying safe behind locked doors: they were ‘low’ indeed. And it’s a situation that might be all too familiar to us in this current crisis. But the risen Jesus met them in that context and said, ‘Peace be with you’. And his presence, and those words, made all the difference to them.

And how relevant that is to us now. Feeling fearful, behind locked doors, might have become the ‘new normal’ for some of us in this crisis. But the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead and is present with us to give us his peace means that this crisis, with its fear and its locked doors, must not become the reality that defines us. Our defining reality is rather the Resurrection, Jesus’ victory over death. We are above all else an Easter people!

So how as Easter people are we to respond to this situation? I want to say how delighted and grateful I am by the way so many of you have *already* responded. It’s been great to see how you have taken to social media to lead and take part in online services. But there’s also been so much creative energy put into loving and serving our communities too. And that pastoral work, being deeply rooted in our communities, loving and serving them as Easter people, seems to me to be what we must be about above all at the moment, meeting need and bringing the peace Christ alone can give. Even now I’m hearing of people connecting with the life of the church virtually in ways they never would have done before.

I’ve been delighted, too, to see how the church has been drawn into Cornwall-wide provision, with the recognition that we have so much to offer in caring for the wider community – and it’s been wonderful to see how so many people have ‘stepped up to the plate’ to meet those needs too. It’s great testimony to our faith in the risen Jesus and I’m very grateful to you all.

And because we are an Easter people, because the Resurrection of Jesus is our defining reality, we need to recognise that we are not heading back to the past, but pressing on to the future God is opening up for us. We might find that disturbing, but I believe this crisis is a disruption the like of which none of us has seen in our lifetimes: there is a lot about the landscape into which we will emerge that we simply don’t know, and can’t guess.

But we do know this: the risen Jesus goes ahead of us into that emerging landscape. It is not unknown to him, and he calls us on into it.

Today I want to call us all to press on into that future. It may be scary, it may be unknown, but we do not go into it alone: we go into it together. We go with Jesus at our head.

**The Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen
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And we need to go into it with fresh dedication and commitment. There are many ways in which we can express that commitment, some of which we may not have yet discovered. But I do need ask us not to let up on our financial commitment to the life of God's church - and even to increase it if we can, recognising that this is an integral part of our worship (and recognising too that some may have extra family calls on their income at this time).

It's almost inevitable that our income as a diocese is down. That's hardly surprising when we can't get near a collection plate! To that end we will be circulating details of how people can give differently in this time (without necessarily giving more than they would otherwise).

I do also need to ask parishes to meet their MMF call as it's been set. Our income may be down but the calls on our money have not lessened: in particular we have as many stipends to pay as we had before, and we have no other way of paying stipends other than through the money we receive. And whilst it's true we do receive some welcome funds from the Church centrally, I have had no indication at all that that funding will increase in the near future.

So today my call to us all is not to ignore the challenges and the problems of the present – far from it. We must rise to them and meet them however we can. But they must not become our defining reality. We are an Easter people above all. So we need to press on into the future that is opening up before us. And we need to go into that future with fresh dedication and courage and commitment – and hope.

That future may be very different from anything we are used to; it remains unknown to us. But we do know the one who holds the future. So let us dedicate ourselves to him afresh. Our physical doors may still be locked, but he comes to us behind them and says 'Peace be with you'. And he calls us out from them, saying 'As the Father sent me so I send you'. May we each and all of us hear and heed his call.

With my love to you all, in the name of the risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading '+ Philip Mounstephen'.

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