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Briefing 21: Wednesday 8th July, 2020.

Dear Friends,

It was such a joy to welcome people back into our churches on Sunday morning and to worship God together. For those gathering at St Nicholas it was especially poignant, given we hadn't met there for over a year. It may not have been the homecoming we were hoping for, but it was still wonderful to be back.

For those of you who were unable to meet with us last week, I do hope you managed to connect with the service via Facebook. If you haven't seen the service yet, then please do take a look. You can find it here. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=328752311454161> The first 15 minutes or so is just the preparations, so you might want to skip that bit!

We will be using Facebook as our live streaming platform for a good while at least, with the link being freely available on the St Nicholas Facebook page. Sadly due to a lack of wi-fi, or indeed even a good phone signal, we can't live stream from Graveley, but I hope those who would normally attend Graveley will feel able to watch the live stream from St Nicholas.

As I made clear through the many emails last week, we have taken clear steps to keep everyone safe, with clear guidance being issued, good cleaning regimes set up, excellent stewarding and 2m distances between family groups all in place. So unless you still need to be shielding, I'd encourage you to come along to one of our services this weekend. There are currently 30 seats free at St Nicholas and 20 left at Graveley, and the form to book your seats can be found here: <https://forms.gle/qRY3fpM8PhuRU5kP7>. If you book using the form you won't get an email confirmation, the system doesn't work like that, but you can safely assume that there will be room for you on Sunday.

The form ends with a question about Holy Communion, and whilst we won't be sharing the Lord's Supper this weekend at St Nicholas, we are planning to do so soon, probably on the last Sunday of July. However, there will be communion at Graveley next week (19th), where the numbers are easier to manage.

The other big news last weekend was the response to the financial appeal at St Nicholas. Two weeks ago I set out our serious and urgent need to fill the £27,000 gap in our finances, and as of Saturday morning £40,000 in donations had been received and a further £2,500 pledged. To this we can add the gift aid which, whilst not available on all these gifts, will take the total up to around £50,000 – almost double what we had sought. Thank you so much to all those who have given or pledged so generously, and all thanks and praise to God who has answered our prayers far beyond our thoughts or imagination! What a great and glorious God we have!

As I said on Sunday, if you have been moved to give but haven't yet done so, please don't let the generosity of others stop you or think that there is no longer any need. There are still a number of non-urgent items we need to buy which had been excluded from the figures we gave 2 weeks ago, such as carpeting the bell tower room, the creche and the east end chapel, purchasing storage units and new stacking chairs to replace the old and rather uncomfortable wooden ones. What's more, the spiritual needs of our benefice will have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 lockdown, and we may well need new resources to be able to reach out effectively with the good news of Jesus. So if you are going to give or pledge, can I ask that you try and do so over the next week or so.

One of the questions that many people are asking is what a post-covid world looks like. Things are getting back to normal, but it is a different normal to the one we had before. That was true on Sunday as we were distanced from each other and not able to sing or share coffee inside after the service. Of course, some of those restrictions may be eased as long as the number of infections continues to die down, but if it doesn't, or we do get a second wave in the autumn or winter, we need to think through how we can function as a church in this strange new world. How can we safely share fellowship in person? How can we do outreach and evangelism in a world where people are more wary of strangers? How can we do effective children's and youth work whilst maintaining social distancing? And for St Nicholas, how can we make the best use of our renewed building?

So please do pray for me and our PCCs as we ponder these questions over the next few weeks. Both PCCs will be meeting later in July and we need God's wisdom and direction, as well as his anointing, to be effective witnesses and to make the best use of the resources in time, energy, talents and buildings we have been given. God will not hold us accountable for what we can't do, but for not doing what we can do and what we should do. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, as well as many, many blessings here – and our response, whether in money or time or energy should be one of willing and joyful service. Let's pray that would be the case, and that the LORD would guide us by his Spirit to make wise plans over the coming weeks and months.

On the topic of reasons to be thankful, let me point you in the direction of my **song for the week**. It has been produced by Speak Life and it gives us plenty of reasons to praise God. It's called 'We Have A Lamb' and you can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afH-QZL4Oh0>

If you are after a **wonderful book**, let me recommend John Pollocks wonderfully written biography of the evangelist George Whitefield. <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/2562/george-whitefield> The story of Whitefield's conversion will thrill you and his passion for preaching the gospel will challenge you. And as you read of the effects his preaching, the changed lives and revival that followed, both in the UK and in the USA, I hope that it will stir your hearts to pray for our own country.

As we've said all along, if you do find yourself in need, whether through Covid-19 restrictions or something unrelated, please do get in touch with me or Lynda Matthews, our pastoral coordinator, or someone else you know and trust in the church family. Our duty as brothers and sisters in Christ is to care for one another, and that can only happen when we share our needs and problems.

It's also good (and vital) to pray for each other, so next Wednesday evening, 15th July, from 7:45pm-9pm, we'll be holding a **church prayer gathering**. Please do your best to come along as we pray for our churches, our parishes, the wider world and one another.

2 small practical things for St Nicholas: Firstly, if someone with green fingers would like to have a go dead-heading the roses on the church path, we'd have a wonderful display later in the summer. And secondly, after unpacking almost all the boxes from storage we have some items that need new homes. These include some large material flags, some curtains, some banners and an ikea table. All free!

There will be a further brief email update on Friday which will include the service sheets for Sunday, but until then, may the LORD bless you and keep you; may He make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the LORD lift up the light of his countenance upon you and fill you with His wonderful peace.

Yours in Christ,

Dave