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Briefing 73: Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2021.

Dear Friends,

**The weapons and armour of the Christian – Pray in the Spirit on all occasions!**

We come to the last post about the weapons and the armour of the Christian, with the clearest indication yet that this is not a battle we fight on our own. It might have seemed that way, with commands to stand our ground, to grasp the belt of truth, to live lives of holiness and all those encouragements to put on and take up. But the Christian life is a spiritual battle which we fight in the strength of God through the Holy Spirit within us. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us understand the truth. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us live righteously. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the words to speak the gospel of peace and to stand firm in the faith. It is the Holy Spirit who assures us of our salvation and who helps transform our thinking so we see the world through gospel shaped eyes. And so Paul finishes his encouragement with these words:

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert always keep on praying for the saints. Ephesians 6:18.*

Praying in the Spirit does not imply praying in a different language, or in a heightened state of emotion. It is simply praying in line with God's commands (that we would stand firm, be holy, speak boldly etc etc) with the confidence that comes from knowing that God's Holy Spirit is within us, and that our Heavenly Father is listening and willing and able to answer and act.

And what power is at our disposal! Ephesians chapter 1 reminds us that the power that is at work in us is the same power which raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms! (Ephesians 1:18 – 23) Imagine that!

When you feel unable to stand firm, when the temptation to give in to sin is strong, then the same power that kept Jesus firm under even greater temptation and struggle, is at work in you.

When you feel tongue-tied, when you don't know the right words to say, then the same power that equipped Jesus to proclaim the gospel, even to his enemies, is at work in you.

When suffering comes, when your life feels like you are facing one battle after another, then the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and raised him to the right hand of the Father, is at work in you.

But how often do we continue to struggle on our own because we do not realise what spiritual resources are at our disposal, and because we do not ask. This is a lesson that the writer of that great hymn, what a friend we have in Jesus, understood. *'Are we weak and heavy laden? Cumbered with a load of care? Jesus only is our refuge! Take it to the Lord in prayer.'*

You have heard me banging this particular drum again and again and again, because it's a lesson I need to continue to remember, and it is certainly a lesson we need to learn as a church. When we fail to pray for ourselves, and for one another (all the saints), then the Christian life, and church life, becomes a hard, hard slog. But through prayer we have access to God himself who loves us and who has all the power of heaven and earth at his disposal! So let us pray! On all occasions, with all kinds of requests, that we may continue to stand firm in the glorious gospel of Jesus.

Grace and peace...

*Dave*

## Changes to COVID Protocols after the ending of legal restrictions on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July:

After the government lifted all legal restrictions on Monday, the Church wardens and I at St Nicholas, and the PCC from St Marys Graveley, have spent some time discussing what changes we can and should make in the light of our own situation and the Church of England's guidance. Our new practice, which follows below, is, we feel a gentle step towards 'normality', exercising caution, as stressed by the Church of England and central government. Our new procedures will, of course, be kept under close review and no doubt adapted over time. But before we come to the detail, I wanted to make two general points.

However you feel about social distancing measures, the use of face coverings, or the government's handling of the pandemic, let's remember to **bear with one another in love**, thinking the best of one another and treating each other with kindness and patience. These are testing times, but we must not give the devil a foothold by allowing ourselves to feel spiritually superior over others because we do or don't wear face coverings, or because we will or won't sing. I do not believe there is a morally clear position to take on these issues, so we must all wrestle with our own consciences and do what we feel to be right before God. And should you feel angry or resentful of others, then let me refer you to Ephesians 6:18!

Secondly, in all times, but especially in testing times, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and our hope in eternity. As Christians we have sure and certain hope in eternity, and God's promise to be with us with his Spirit now. The world is not out of control. Our lives are secure in the hands of God. Our future is certain in God's eternal kingdom. That doesn't mean we can be reckless and expect God to save us from all physical harm. It does mean we can live in the confident hope that we will not be tested beyond that which we can bear, and that even our trials are used by God for our good and his glory.

With that in mind, these protocols will be in place from this Sunday in both churches:

- ✓ We will continue to use the on-line booking system, as it helps us plan our seating. However, we will always make room for people who do not pre-book, taking their details when they arrive.
- ✓ The NHS QR code for logging in to a venue will also still be available.
- ✓ Everyone should use the hand sanitiser on arrival.
- ✓ We would prefer face coverings to be worn on entering the church until you reach your seat, and our welcomers will be doing so. If you want to sit and enjoy the service without wearing a face covering, please sit in the front 5 centre aisle rows at St Nicholas or at the front in the north aisle at St Marys. If you sit anywhere else, we would ask you to keep your face covering on during the service.
- ✓ In terms of seating arrangements, we will continue to use alternate or widely-spaced pews, and make sure there is a gap between different households using the same pew to encourage social distancing.
- ✓ We will be encouraging congregational singing, although you do not need to sing if you don't want to. We will also restart loaning out Church Bibles to those who would like one.
- ✓ Communion will continue to be in one kind– with the same method of distribution as now.
- ✓ Those involved in the worship group at St Nicholas and the choir at St Mary's, as well as those leading services and preaching in both churches, will no longer use screens or visors as a matter of course. Instead, they will take a lateral flow test no more than 24 hours before the service, using screens when this has not been done.
- ✓ Refreshments after the service will continue to be enjoyed outside (weather permitting), where we hope everyone will remember to give one another space.

I also want to reinforce some very important steps we can all take:

Please **do not come to church**

- if you have tested positive for Covid,
- if you have any symptoms of Covid and/or are waiting for results from a PCR test,
- or if you should be self-isolating. To do so is to recklessly endanger members of your church family.

Please consider using a lateral flow test 24 hours or so before you come to church, particularly if you want to go '*face covering free*'. These are free and easily available from local chemists and through the post. They are quick and easy to administer and if done correctly, are very accurate in detecting Covid. More details are available from: [Order coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rapid lateral flow tests - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/order-coronavirus-covid-19-rapid-lateral-flow-tests)

Finally, if you haven't done so already, please consider getting fully vaccinated. As the evidence has shown, the vaccines provide a highly effective way of keeping yourself safe from serious disease, and of reducing the risk of passing on the virus to others. Vaccines are now available to all adults, and it is also often possible to bring your second dose forward if you are still waiting for that.

Do please continue to pray for me, the church wardens and both PCCs as we seek to navigate these confusing and difficult days and often have to balance a range of factors when making our decisions.

## IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**Come + pray!**

**TUESDAY MORNING from 7am-8am on Zoom.**

Log on for all or part of the time: Please Contact Dave for a link.

**Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm-10pm.**

Come + join us and pray for God's Holy Spirit to move in us and across this town that we might know more of God's love and power in our lives and see many brought to Jesus.

**Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.**

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> 12noon-2pm and Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> 10am – 12 noon.

**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> from 2:30pm-4pm, Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> 12noon-2pm and Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> 10am – 12 noon.**

**CHURCH FAMILY BBQ:** The weather for Saturday afternoon looks very unsettled right now. However, given how quickly things can change, we won't make a decision until Friday. Do watch out for the updated information then. If we have to cancel, we will reschedule for another Saturday in the coming weeks.

**WALKING GROUP:** A good number of people have shown an interest in heading out on some walks together, so David Cattell (husband of Karen) will be planning a walk at some point in August, and then initially once a month. Details will be available soon!

**READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS:** This week we continue our series in Genesis, and for those who'd like to read the passages before coming to church on Sundays, the readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

25<sup>th</sup> July: Genesis 8:1-9:17      1<sup>st</sup> August: Genesis 9:18-29      8<sup>th</sup> August: Genesis 10:1-11:32

**A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY:** August Bank Holiday Monday afternoon – teas in the church yard at St Mary's Graveley. PLUS the Maze will be open and there will be various activities around the church and grounds.

**FURTHER THEOLOGICAL STUDY?** Jacky Swanson has been studying a theology course with the Kings School of Theology (KST) for the last couple of years, and finding the tutors and teaching excellent. KST have recently produced a promotional video giving details about themselves and the courses they provide. Please see the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2AI13I2fg> If you have any questions about the course, please do get in touch with Jacky.