

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

February 2021

Dear Friends,

As I turn to write this letter for a new month; I am conscious that we are on the cusp of entering the season of Lent – a penitential season of prayerful preparation that leads to the momentous events of Holy Week and the glory of Easter. Janet Morley, in her wonderful publication ‘The Hearts Time’, suggests that the season of Lent is an apt time to engage in the work of the ‘heart’. We deliberately step aside from *ordinary* time and enter an *intentional* season in which to give focused attention to our journey with God. Through prayer, reflection, and spiritual discipline we invite focused thought upon what really matters in the life of faith and as we do so we are further challenged to relinquish the things of no import and indeed the things that encumber our progress in the life of faith. This seasonal turning aside; offering space for prayer, repentance, and new resolve; is not dissimilar to the *turning aside* of Moses in Exodus chapter 3 to give attention to the lit bush that is *not* consumed. It requires us to be surprised by the blessings of the present moment and in a moment of awe to find ourselves addressed, called, and redirected by the living God. Part of this calling for the prophet Moses is to become newly attentive to the pain and misery of an oppressed people – a people who are his own kith and kin – a community that he is wedded to through the covenant promises of God.

This year, we enter this season at a time of National Lock-down when the restrictions on our everyday life are still stringent and of course the season will also include the first anniversary of the beginning of the COVID crisis on March 23rd. In a spiritual season in which we are consciously encouraged to slow down and become more attentive to our own interior life; it is likely that the effects of the last 12 months will catch up on us. We may note the levels of weariness, frustration, and the painful ache of yearning for the familiar as we seek to pray. We may feel overwhelmed by the isolation as we long to worship with others in an embodied and physical presence. We may feel that our energy levels are depleted as we constantly find alternative ways in which to live and work. We may become painfully aware of how this crisis has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of our society and we may burn with anger at the injustices of our world. As God was attentive to the misery of the oppressed people of Israel; so, God is attentive to the misery and frustration of a people locked in a contemporary crisis. We hope, trust, and pray that we will emerge from this wilderness and we will do so carefully, wisely, and well and with a renewed concern for social justice. In the Season of Lent I invite you to entrust yourself and your loved ones to the care of the living God, to walk faithfully with Christ and to allow yourself to be addressed, called, and sent once more.

Finally, in this season of reflection, as we pause and take a breathe, I would encourage you to consider the following three questions:

In this season.....

What am I mourning?

What am I thankful for?

What am I hopeful about?

With deep peace and blessing,

Julian