Dear Friends

I wanted to write and send you my greetings. I hope you and those you love are in close contact and keeping well. Although we cannot be together for prayer, we are all held in the embrace of God’s love. As we await the great celebration of the resurrection, we remember that we are an Easter People. Even in our darkest moments we live in hope and share together in love.

Many of us, myself included, may be feeling a little discombobulated and disconnected. Fearful or anxious about the future, we are also aware of the social cost of responding to the virus by self-isolating. For those of us who are online, there is some opportunity to be in touch, and most of us can pick up the phone, but it is difficult not seeing people face to face.

However, I passionately believe that we are held together in prayer. And by prayer I don’t just mean a set pattern of words or a time of silence, I mean that through prayer we are spiritually united one with another in the presence of God.

On our last Sunday together for a while, we heard the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well. I really appreciate the honesty of their encounter. It seems to me that when we pray, we too need to share with Jesus in an honesty about who we are. Jesus says: “The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”. Prayer can become for each of us a sharing in this fountain of living water.

It may be that this forced time of distance from the building of the church can be for us an awakening to the spiritual reality of God’s love in our hearts and minds; an awakening which opens for us a deeper compassion for those around us.

On a practical note, please get in touch with me either by email (vicarcsj@gmail.com) or by phone 07590 514884. I would particularly like to hear from you if you or someone you know needs some support. St Mary and St John Church will be open 8–9am and 5–6pm every weekday, 12–1pm on Wednesdays and 3–4pm on Sundays. St Alban’s will open 8–9pm on Tuesdays, 9–10am on Fridays, 10am–12.30pm on Saturdays and 9–11am on Sundays. This is so that people who would like to visit our churches for silent prayer can do so. I will also be praying at those times, so please do join with me from your homes, so we can be together in the Spirit. We will be preparing some prayers that can used at these times. We will also be in touch via our email bulletins as usual. For those on you on Facebook, remember that we do have a Facebook Page: Cowley st John Parish, Oxford.

There is still a great deal of uncertainty about how we move forward together but our focus must be on caring for ourselves and for those close to us who need our support. I know some have signed up with Oxford Hub to support people in need in their street. I have been in conversation with the mosque about the need for faith communities to work together.

Jesus Christ is both present with us in our present struggles and also calls us to be living signs of hope and joy in the world. Please be assured of the prayers of the Ministry team here at Cowley St John. I know Sabina, Andy, Susannah, Katherine, Laurence, Rob and Petronella join me in assuring you of our love and prayers.

Yours in Christ,

Father Phil Ritchie