



Minister's Letter - April 2020

Dear Friends,

John Lennon's song, 'Nobody Told Me', contains the lines:

*'Nobody told me there'd be days like these
Strange days indeed – most peculiar.'*

The song was recorded in 1980 and released in 1984 but, though forty years old, it speaks to our situation with considerable accuracy. Or, very nearly four hundred years ago, the English metaphysical poet and Church of England cleric, John Donne, wrote that *'No man is an island'*. In these days, some of you might find yourselves thinking: Well it sure feels like I am!

And of course what has made this all the harder is that none of us saw it coming. In the past, we've known of bird flu, SARS and so on, but these viruses never really threatened to come here! COVID-19 has shattered any illusions we might have had of being safe and secure and immune to such things. In a matter of a few short weeks we've gone from the first case being identified in the UK to the entire country being in lockdown and the economy having ground to a halt in many of its vital aspects.

For me personally, I've had to do some fairly major mental gear shifts. The last six months of my life have been about two things: trying to make sure that as much as possible was in place here and preparing for the new challenge of being Moderator. Then, I took my leave of you on March 1st and 'flitted' to Edinburgh on the 5th. But within days of having made that move, everything started to change and it began to look less and less likely that it would 'business as usual'.

And so it proved to be. First, the General Assembly was cancelled and then one by one EVERY SINGLE ENTRY IN MY DIARY was stripped out! With nothing to do and nothing to prepare for, there was nothing for it but to come back to Arbroath and so I 'flitted' out of the Edinburgh flat just three weeks after moving in!

The intention remains that I will be installed as Moderator on the weekend of 16th/17th May. However, it will be a year like no other. The installation will have to take place in private rather than as part of a service and, once installed, I will simply come back to Arbroath and largely get on with things here, given that – as I said earlier – there will be nothing in the Moderator's diary.

I will be involved in some things nationally – largely around communicating across the church and nation. Much, if not all of that, will have to be done digitally and the content of it will, of course, depend on how the crisis has progressed. Maybe the situation will have eased by the summer or, in worst case scenarios, we may still be on a 'war footing' throughout the rest of the year. As yet, none of us can be sure.

But I can say this: I've never had a greater sense of being absolutely sure that God is in this with us and that his promises are as good for now as any other time. When God assures us that he will be with us when we have to go through the deep waters and with us when the flames are burning all around us, we can be sure that he will be with us through this COVID-19 crisis (Isaiah 43). And we can be equally sure that his promise never to leave us nor forsake us applies now as ever it did (Matthew 28:20).

I believe these things for myself and pray that you will for yourself. Yes, it has been really disappointing for Elaine and I to see everything being cancelled in terms of the Moderator role, but I believe that God will still use me as he intends and that it will be for the good. I will simply continue to make myself available, saying, 'Here I am, Lord'. I encourage each of us to do the same in our own situations.

Meanwhile, here at St. Andrew's Church, we're busying ourselves working out answers to some never-before-asked questions, such as: how can you be a church when your doors are closed and when you can't meet together? We've always placed such an emphasis on the church being a family and on our fellowship one with another. How can you maintain that when there are such stringent restrictions in place regarding social distancing and movement?

In attempting answers to these questions, we've launched a version of Sunday worship online. Of course, we were well prepared for that, given that we've been streaming our services for several years now. It's not the same as meeting together but it's a great alternative for now. We're painfully aware that those with no internet access won't be able to share in these services but we're rolling out a system whereby typed versions of the services will be distributed to those who need them. (The extent to which we can do that will of course be governed by the rules and guidelines in place.)

(Continued overleaf.)

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ST. ANDREW'S ARBROATH
Member Records
March 2020

Baptisms and Blessings - None

Weddings - None

Funerals - May Smith

Martin and Ian, our pastoral assistant, conducted other funerals though none were of members of our congregation. Nonetheless, we remember the bereaved families in our prayers.

IMPORTANT DATES

MAY EDITION

Word Processed files, as attachments, should be sent directly to the Editor.

Please DO NOT embed articles in an email as these then need additional formatting work.

Monday 20th April (Word-Processed file)

To help us keep in touch with each other, we've created various social media groups and have launched Zoom Rooms which allow for people to meet together, to chat and discuss and pray. And for those who can't be part of those kinds of tech solutions, we've started a programme of phoning – saying hello, checking if everything is okay and offering such practical help as may be required. It's still lovely to talk on the phone – and perhaps now more important than ever! It would be great if we were all doing a bit of that – just checking in with each other on a regular basis.

And given that this is St. Andrew's Church, we're still reaching out! Working in tandem with Angus Council, we've been distributing food parcels to the most needy and vulnerable individuals and families in our community. And towards the end of March, we distributed 212 Messy Church activity bags to families across the town. These have been greatly appreciated and especially given the closure of the schools and the need for parents to find positive activities to keep their children active and happy!

(These activities fall under the category of 'essential services' and so can still be done, and our staff members come under the heading of 'religious staff' and as such are classed as key workers, still able to offer certain services.)

So John Lennon was right: these are indeed strange days! But we've still got much to be thankful for and we're still going to be the church even if in new ways.

When will things return to normal? Will they ever? Will the world look very differently in years to come as a result of this crisis? Time will tell. Meantime we have a solid rock to stand on: God is with us and God will be with us.

With every blessing,

Martin and Elaine

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Guest preacher, Jonathan Parkinson, and Caring For Life staff members, Erin and Steve, with Joanna and Pat, following the worship service on 8th March.

Heather, Joanna, and Pat hosted a supper party for CFL Supporters from across Angus and Dundee on the previous evening at Community Spirit.