

# MAGAZINE

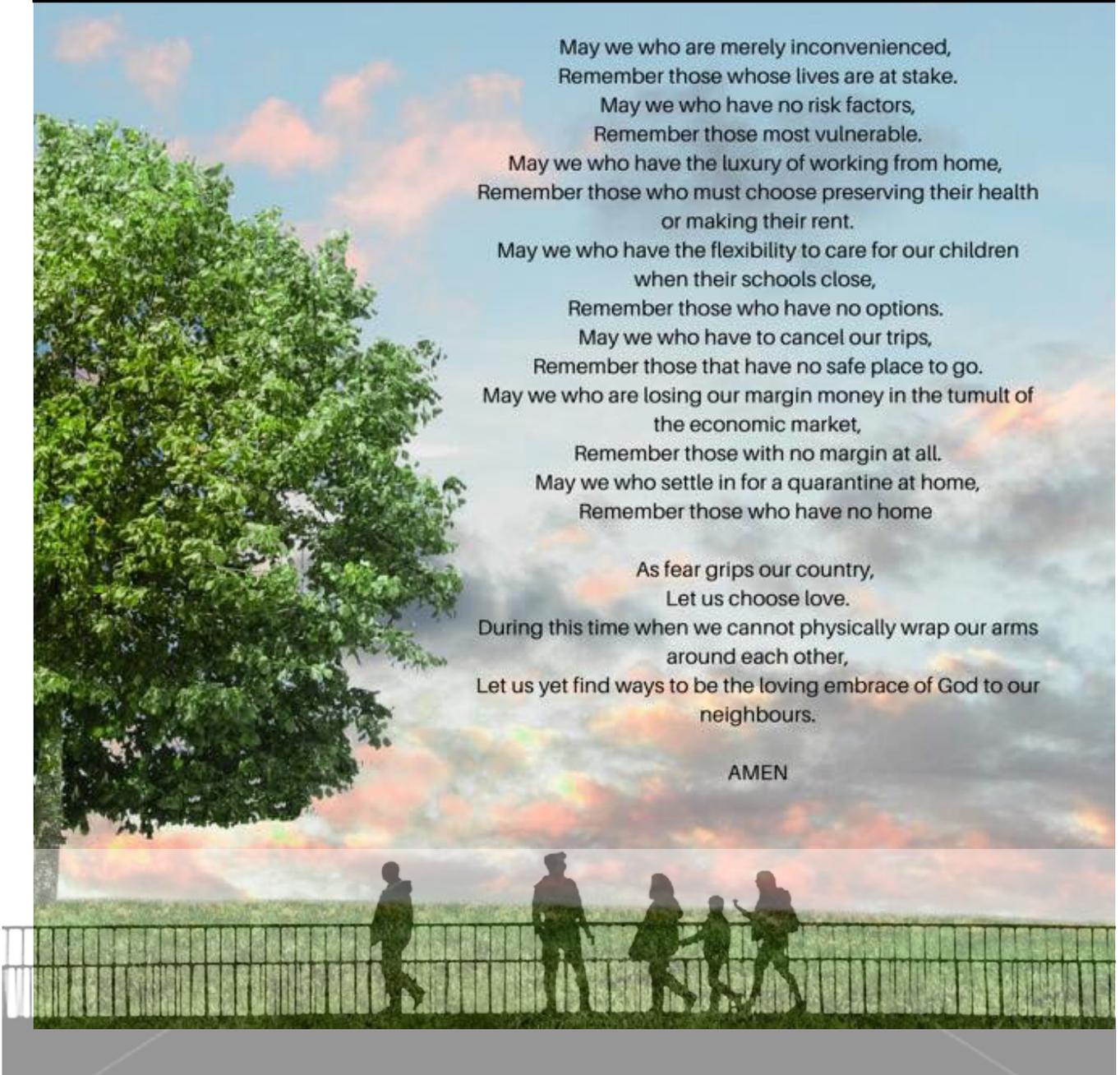
October – November 2020

70p

May we who are merely inconvenienced,  
Remember those whose lives are at stake.  
May we who have no risk factors,  
Remember those most vulnerable.  
May we who have the luxury of working from home,  
Remember those who must choose preserving their health  
or making their rent.  
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children  
when their schools close,  
Remember those who have no options.  
May we who have to cancel our trips,  
Remember those that have no safe place to go.  
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of  
the economic market,  
Remember those with no margin at all.  
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home,  
Remember those who have no home

As fear grips our country,  
Let us choose love.  
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms  
around each other,  
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our  
neighbours.

AMEN



## **Church Contacts**

### **Priest in Charge**

The Rev'd Fr. Paul Messam

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vicar@elstow-abbey.org.uk

### **Lay Minister** (Reader)

Mr John Hinson

### **Church Wardens**

Mrs Andrene Kerr-Robinson

Miss Chris Woollard

**Baptism & Wedding enquiries should be made in Church on  
any Saturday morning between 10.00am – 12 noon**

The Elstow Abbey Website can be found at  
**[www.elstow-abbey.org.uk](http://www.elstow-abbey.org.uk)**

Find us on Facebook  
**[www.facebook.com/Elstow Abbey](http://www.facebook.com/Elstow_Abbey)**

and on Twitter  
**[@Elstow\\_Abbey](https://twitter.com/Elstow_Abbey)**

As well as our You Tube Channel



# Welcome back

We have not produced a Church Magazine since March/April. None of us then any idea just how long these strange times we are living through were likely to last. In fact we still don't, I fear as I write this by the time to post has been delivered things may yet again have changed. The future consequences of coronavirus are going to be challenging, to say the least. I think we are now beginning to realise that we are not going to returning to anything normal for quite some time yet. How will our churches fare when all our buildings are fully open again and worship looks like something we remember without masks?

During lockdown in the summer we ran two groups online that worked through material from Emmaus which asked such questions as 'What is church?' 'What does church do?' and 'The worship of the church'. One could say that the reasons for churchgoing can be put into three slots, 'Culture', 'Faith' and 'Community'. Many churchgoers would probably recognise in themselves elements of more than one of then following:

**Culture** is for those who feel comfortable in church. They like the history, the language, the buildings, the liturgy and the music, which have probably been a part of their lives since they were children. All hold comforting memories.

**Faith** is a link with the meaning of life and its eternal promise, somewhere to seek guidance through worship and sacrament, and on which to lean in times of trouble. A belief in the words of Jesus that they are not on their own, even if sometimes it feels like it in this world.

**Community** is for those who like coming to church or being associated with it as a flying buttress (a phrase of Winston Churchill, who described himself as someone who supports the church from the outside). They don't have to have a commitment to the faith of the Church but are sympathetic and don't mind being with those who do.

As we now slowly all emerge from lockdown and self isolation it is likely that the 'old normality' will not be the 'new normality' and this provokes a few thoughts:

- How many people, now out of the habit of regular community worship, will wish to return to it?

- How many people on the periphery of church life, will come back to it, at least in the short term?
- How many of those who have had a regular commitment to the church, for example by helping out during the services, reading, leading prayers etc, singing in choirs, doing flowers, ringing bells and polishing brasses will feel that this is a good time to make a break and do something different?

So far our total average numbers returning to church on a Sunday is about two thirds our normal numbers. And this has been encouraging. However, as we look ahead it is becoming clear that what we currently have in place is likely to remain for a while longer. Looking ahead what will the Remembrance season look like? What will Advent and Christmas look like in church. So many questions with sadly so few answers... yet!

While we can we will continue with three services every Sunday as well as online worship on our You tube channel. We hope to start exploring the possibility of live streaming services soon.

As church people, we must consider where we go from here. The Church, everywhere in the infected world, will need to know our answer to its call. To thrive, it needs us back.



# For everything there is a season...



It scarcely seems possible that more than three years have passed since I was ordained deacon and began my curacy at Elstow. I have to admit that my knowledge of Elstow Abbey before my first meeting with Paul was limited to the fact that it had a detached tower, a ring of six and a steep ladder to the ringing chamber! About the parish of Elstow I knew nothing, and I don't recall ever having set foot in the Abbey before.

My meeting with Paul was memorable in many ways. Rather bizarrely, we discovered all sorts of connections with people and places on our journeys – 'it's a small world' soon became a very overworked cliché. But it was the Abbey, its setting, history and building, and the wonderful diversity and potential of the parish

that captivated me, along with Paul's obvious enthusiasm and vision. I remember the tour taking in the old village, the new development at Abbeyfields and the more established Gostwick Estate and marveling that all this was Elstow parish. I'm delighted to say that in my time at Elstow I have got to know people from all these areas and have enjoyed many a cuppa in homes right across the parish and further afield.

The Abbey is, of course, an awe-inspiring building with a long and fascinating history. I have always loved the fact that we have two female patrons, St Mary and St Helena, and that the Abbey was founded by Judith, niece of William the Conqueror, and was home to Benedictine nuns. The role of women, including both of John Bunyan's wives and his eldest daughter, Mary, have been a source of strength and inspiration to me in this 'Historic Church with a living Pilgrim Faith'. One of the first things I had

to get to grips with was the role of tour guide to the large number of people who flock to the Abbey as pilgrims or visitors, both from the local area and overseas. South Koreans, Americans, Australians and groups from the Netherlands are all frequent visitors, and it is always a joy to share the various histories of the place (the nuns, John Bunyan, Far East Prisoners of War) as well as telling them about the living church that gathers here today. It has also been a fantastic privilege to share the history and the present-day life of the abbey and its surrounds, including the Moot Hall, with groups of school children and youngsters from the uniformed organisations. I've enjoyed some brilliant conversations with people of all ages and with all sorts of perspectives and learnt lots from them.

Which brings me to the community in and around the Abbey. It's easy, perhaps, to forget that the Sunday congregations are only a part of the ongoing life of the Abbey. On the other six days, too, people are drawn to the churchyard, to the peaceful and secluded surroundings, to the buildings and, during the summer months, to the hospitality of the Tea Gardens. It has been a particular joy to be involved with Little Pilgrims and Soup n' natter and build relationships with those who attend and those who help. I have every confidence that, when we are able to meet more freely again, both groups will continue to flourish with the dedicated and skilled leadership they now have. It is always an enormous privilege to share the stories of all those who find their way here, in sorrow or in joy; and of those who live and work here too. Humbling stories of trials endured, hardships overcome, and celebrations shared have challenged and strengthened faith, and given the opportunity to ponder, marvel at and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

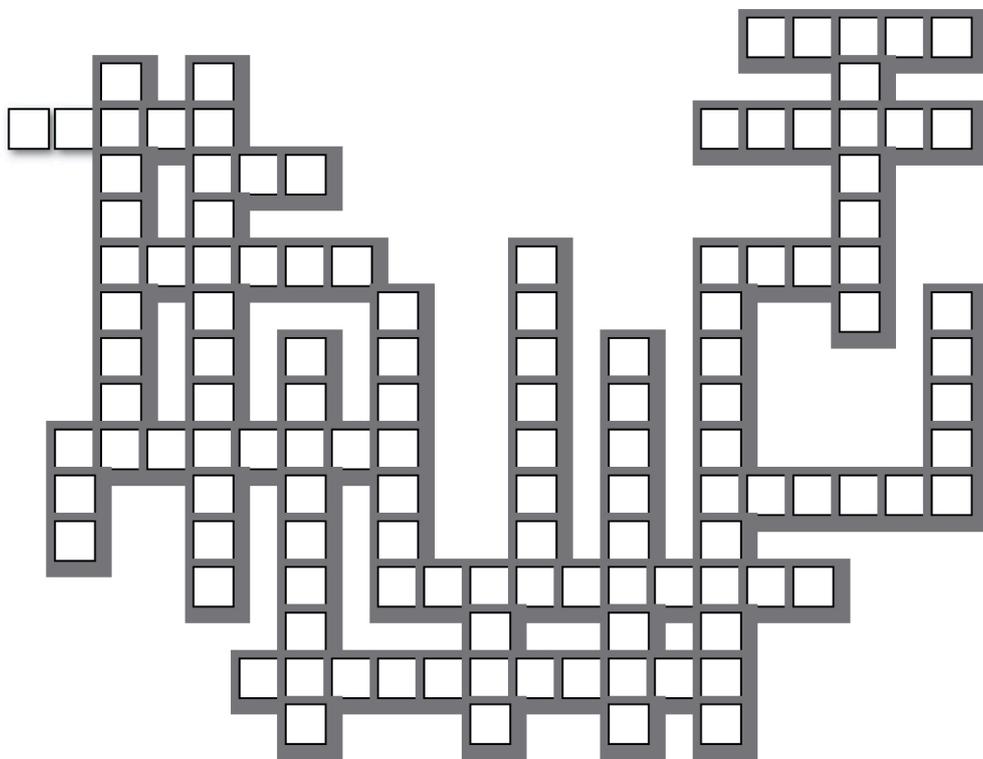
But it is, of course, from the community of faith who worship at the Abbey on a regular basis that I have learnt the most as I've taken my first steps in ordained ministry. It felt an awesome step to take, leading worship, preaching and officiating at funerals, weddings and Christenings, and I have frequently felt completely inadequate to the task. Your patient support and encouragement have been really important in shaping me to be the priest that God is calling me to be and I am truly grateful to you all for bearing with me and teaching me so much. The relationship between training incumbent and curate is key to a successful curacy, and I will be forever grateful to Paul for kicking me out of my natural comfort zone and encouraging me to find and develop my voice. I have grown into the role of priest and leader and grown in my own faith too. Grateful thanks to

Isobel as well for her generosity and grace. I know what it is to be married to a training incumbent! It has been a joy to spend the past three years with you all, and I hope and pray that what I have learnt from you all will, in due course, be put to good use in the diocese of Bath and Wells. I will continue to think of you all often and pray for you and the mission and ministry in this special place. I would love to be invited back to see Hillersden Hall in the not too distant future... But that's another season...

With every blessing, Kate.

## The Bible

Fit the words into this Bible Fill In Puzzle!



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### 3 LETTERS

GOD  
SIN

### 4 LETTERS

JEWS  
LOVE

### 5 LETTERS

BIBLE  
FAITH  
PEACE

### 6 LETTERS

CHURCH  
GOSPEL  
ISRAEL

### 7 LETTERS

BAPTISM  
MESSIAH

### 8 LETTERS

GENTILES  
MINISTRY

### 9 LETTERS

DISCIPLES  
SACRIFICE  
SALVATION

### 10 LETTERS

HOLY SPIRIT

### 11 LETTERS

FORGIVENESS  
JESUS CHRIST

### 12 LETTERS

RESURRECTION

# The Queen of Sheba

The Queen of Sheba, whose arrival was heralded so famously by Handel in his oratorio, *Solomon*, is, at first sight, a rare example in the Bible of a wealthy, powerful and independent woman.



However, few details are given as to exactly who she was (she has no name or ancestry) and there is disagreement as to where she came from. Some even doubt her existence at all. Historians, archaeologists and theologians put cases for the Queen of Sheba emanating from Yemen, Ethiopia, Egypt or Nigeria and all of these countries claim her as their own. She *may* be a traceable figure in Jewish history; Jesus himself referred to 'the queen of the south' who visited Solomon. She certainly appears in Hebrew oral traditions and the Quran, although many of these references are distinctly mythical in nature, involving speaking birds and animals.

It is perhaps not surprising that we know so little about her. Modern scholarship favours Yemeni origins, but wherever the Queen of Sheba came from, she was undoubtedly a woman of colour. And we know that the histories (or should that be 'herstories') of women, and particularly of black women have long been ignored and unvalued.

And, of course, in many senses, the story in the first book of Kings that we heard this evening, the story of the Queen of Sheba, is not hers. The reality is that the narrator includes few details about her, or indeed invents her, because her primary function in the story is simply to provide external confirmation of *Solomon's* greatness.

Solomon's wisdom, riches and honour are well-known within his own land and region, but his influence and reputation need to be seen to have

spread abroad as well. And what better to demonstrate this than to have an exotic foreign queen come to pay a visit to check him out? Solomon is, after all, nothing if not a ladies' man, with 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines.

But back to the story! The Queen of Sheba, having heard glowing reports about the *wisdom* of Solomon, travelled a significant distance and was wowed by everything she saw. Solomon's wisdom, his riches, the temple, the palace, his retinue – it was all breath-taking. And take her breath away it did!

"I can't breathe", she may well have said, when confronted by all that opulence, all that 'wisdom'. The *wisdom* that gives much to the few and leaves little for the many. The *wisdom* that treats people and their stories differently because of their race or colour. The *wisdom* that dehumanises others or exploits them for personal gain.



What if we were breathless, angry and moved to action by the *gap* that exists *between* rich and poor? Or what if *inequality, racial* inequality, took our breath away? As it takes away the ability to breathe of our sisters and brothers of colour? Inability to breathe, as this Covid-19 virus has brutally brought home to us, takes away our capacity to live. Having our identities stifled, suppressed and defined by others likewise prevents us from living the lives we were meant to live, and from being the person we were created to be. What if, instead of being dazzled by King Solomon's extravagant lifestyle, we focused rather on the nameless queen whose function is only to enhance someone else's reputation?

On 30<sup>th</sup> July the Church commemorated, as it does each year, the roles played by William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano and Thomas Clarkson in bringing about the beginning of the end to the slave trade in this country. And yet it was only less than a week before that, more than two hundred years later, that the Diocese of St Albans produced an Ethnic Minorities Charter, stating that we are committed to ensuring that all people stand before God equally, and declaring that any form of racism is completely

unacceptable. Why has it taken so long? And there will be those, inevitably, who will ask whether such a charter is really needed... in this day and age.

In an interview on the BBC, a black, female head teacher recalled a meeting with colleagues and parents in which it was said accusingly, "You are acting as if you were in charge." Why is it, in twenty-first century Britain, that we are still unable to conceive that a woman of colour *could* be 'in charge'? Why is it assumed that she is merely 'acting a role'? A *role*, what's more, that doesn't really belong to her. Why is it that we have such a problem with wealthy, powerful, independent women? And what is this *wisdom* that transforms them into *less* than they really are? And tramples their identity until they exist merely to serve the needs and desires of others.

There's a saying, isn't there? Who *does* she think she is – the Queen of Sheba? Wouldn't it be great if the answer to that question came back a proud and resounding "Yes!"?

Amen, sister, Amen!

*Rev'd Kate*

### **1 Kings 10.1-13 (NIV)**

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones – she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness."

And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

# Local is back!

Odd things have been happening to my world in these past weeks of lockdown.

It's got bigger. I've been speaking regularly via the web with friends in Australia and the United States. Worshippers from Canada and South Africa are taking part in our online church services. Other churches are telling the same stories, with increasing numbers of people logging on.

It's got smaller. Even with the relaxation of regulations, many people are still working from home, home- schooling and mostly exercising within walking or cycling distance from where they live.

It's got faster. Arrangements for a funeral in my family were speeded up, with registration and funeral planning carried out over the phone. A doctor's appointment by telephone significantly cut down waiting time.

It's got slower. Shopping takes longer with queues that people would have complained about before the lockdown. The shops have done a great job to keep the shelves stocked and maintain social distancing.

I've been thinking about what the long -term impact of the Covid-19 lockdown might be. One of the key outcomes is that local is back.

For decades, we've been hearing about globalization, and how the world is a much more connected place. It is, and the internet has kept many vital businesses running these past weeks. But we've also come to value what's on our doorstep and in our local streets. Neighbours have become more important. We're valuing local shops, pubs and restaurants, parks and open spaces. All the people working hard to keep local services going.

Christianity is now a major global religion, with billions of followers around the world. But it began local. It began with Jesus Christ, travelling by foot, preaching and healing around a small area of the middle east. From its local roots, the faith spread around the world.

Today, churches around the world are deeply rooted in their local communities and are seeking to follow Christ's example of love and caring. Each of us is rooted into our family, into our key relationships and into where we live. During this pandemic, each of these has grown in importance.

*Peter Crumpler is a Church of England priest in St Albans, Herts, and a former communications director for the CofE.*

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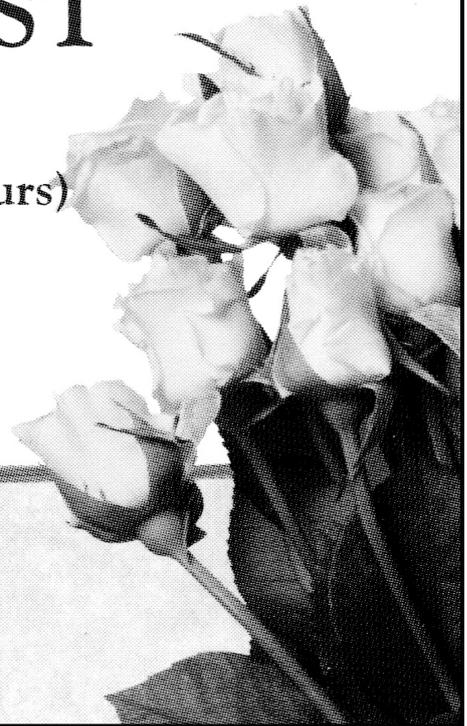
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We're local to Kempston, Harrowden and Shortstown, so whether you're up for a party, watching sport, meeting with friends and family or just relaxing and taking the time to unwind, The Red Lion is the pub putting the sizzle in Bedford.

**The Red Lion**  
470 High Street, Elstow, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK42 9XP  
01234 359687

# The frailty of life

We know from history that at times of crisis and emergency, such as war or plague, that people turn to God. I suspect that is as true now as it's ever been.

According to one survey, during the lockdown, a quarter of adults in the UK have watched or listened to a religious service and one in 20 have started praying. Many churches I know who are recording services and prayers online report that they are getting many more viewers than they would have expected.

I'm sure that it's true – that when we are faced with such a threat to our lives we instinctively look for meaning and protection in our lives. This pandemic has come as a terrible shock to many. We have all been lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that our technological mastery over the natural world means we are immune to natural disasters.

While the majority of people who contract Covid-19 survive, it reminds us that we are much more frail and weak than we like to think. As the prophet Isaiah says:

*'All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.'* (Isaiah 40:6-8).

Isaiah's words really resonate at this time. In more normal times we can avoid facing up to our vulnerability, but this pandemic has forced us to recognise our weakness and fragility.

However, this shouldn't lead us to despair or fear; rather it is an opportunity to worship and praise for His constancy and care. I think our worship online has been a real help to many over the past few months, and I'd like to thank all those who have taken part and given so much encouragement, keeping us together in praise and worship, and giving us a message of faith and hope. I hope we can continue to share our worship online – if you get the opportunity to watch online, please do.

I've found that as we come back to the Bible and the message of our faith, our eyes are lifted from our current worries and back to God. Yes, we are frail human beings, but that is not the whole of the story...

In Peter's first letter he quotes this passage from Isaiah and says, 'For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God' (1 Peter 1:23).

Peter contrasts our own mortality with the eternal Word of God, which bring us new birth and life through the power of the Spirit. Jesus died for our sins and rose again to make us right with God, so that through faith in Him we can know eternal life.

I hope that as we draw nearer to God as this pandemic continues, that we realise we don't need to be afraid of our human frailty. May we each discover that our God is a dependable foundation on which to build our lives, and our firm hope and confidence as we face eternity.

*Fr. Paul*

# All Souls Service

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November

6.30pm

*A service of reflection and tranquillity to remember with thanksgiving those who have died and whom you hold in your heart with love.*



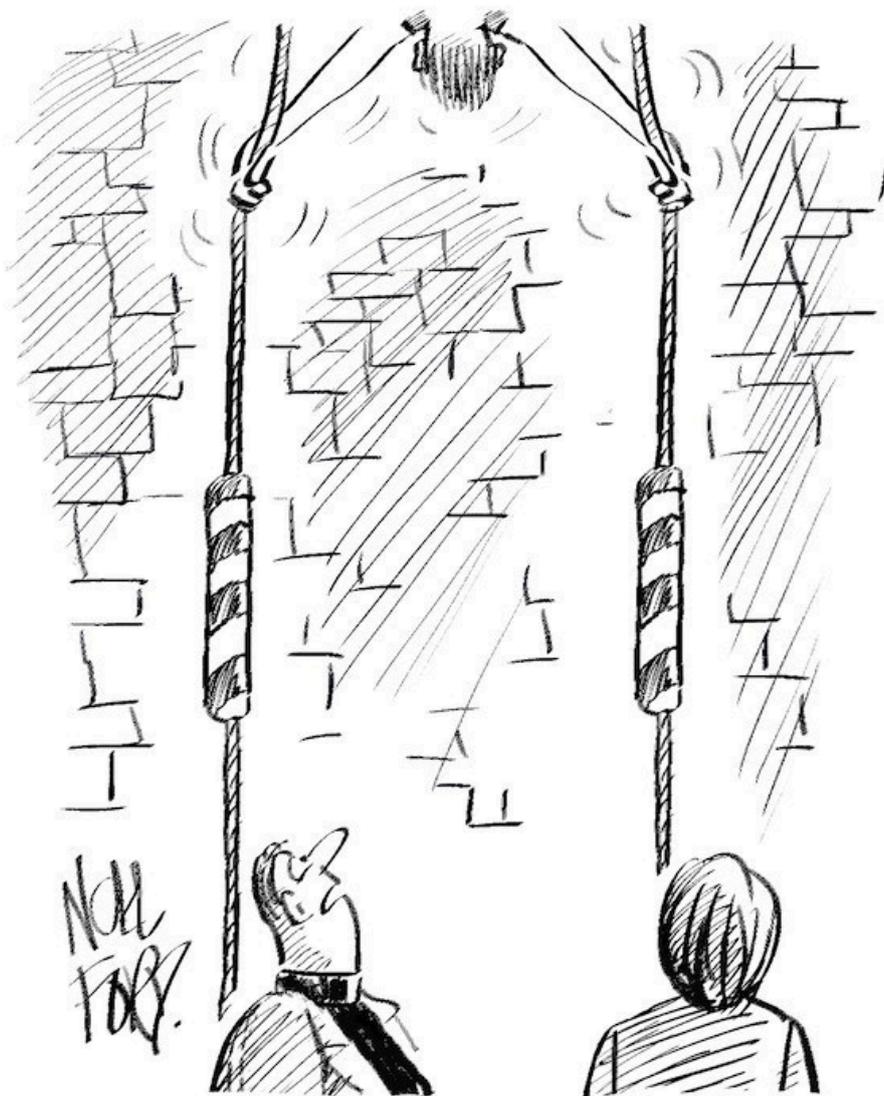
*Sung by the  
Elstow Abbey Singers*

**Attendance strictly by advance booking only via the website**

**[www.elstow-abbey.org.uk](http://www.elstow-abbey.org.uk)**

# Ding Dong!

On Sunday, 16 August 2020 between the two morning services, all six bells once again rang out across Elstow. Alternate bells were rung from two different floors, this being the first ringing since 15 March and the lockdown. Complying with guidelines the bells rang for just 15 minutes (8-2-0 in G). Elstow is possibly the only tower where all bells have been rung while maintaining more than 2m (horizontal and vertical!) social distancing and with all other safeguards in place. The ringers of 3 and 4 have learned within the last 2 years and were ringing without the benefit of rope sight for the first time.



*Eric took social distancing while bell ringing very seriously.*

# Brave New World

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Act 16. 9

We are called to a brave new world.  
To be pilgrims in a foreign land.  
Even though we stand on solid rock.  
we are surrounded by shifting sand.  
We do not know what lies ahead  
There are new rules we find unclear.  
It seems so distant from where we've come.  
But then we find that God is near.

Now we can no longer meet unmasked  
That every touch can carry harm.  
We must keep our distance to be safe.  
But can still offer hope and calm.  
In this confused world there's panic, fear.  
It needs Christ's peace more than before.  
This is not the time for us to hide.  
New routes of love we should explore.

So as Paul across the Aegean Sea did stare  
And dreamed of the Macedonian's plea.  
So let us enter a continent strange to us.  
To bring the message that will set the fearful free.  
Learn the language of width band, U.R.L.s and apps.  
To communicate in a way they will understand.  
Travel hopefully to find bold ways,  
To keep our distance but still hold the hand.

The Spirit does not sit and wait.  
He does not rest when there is far to go.  
Let his restless heart stir us onward too  
To follow paths, to us he wants to show.  
We are torch bearers to dark places lost.  
Ahead of us The Spirit has led the way.  
We will find when we reach our next destination.  
The Spirit has been working hard preparing for our stay.

*David Wells*

# REALLY WILD PLAY



➤ Free activities for children with their parents/carers

**Elstow Abbey, Church End,  
Elstow, Bedford MK42 9XT**

*(please meet at the entrance to the church)*

*Two sessions each day:*

**Morning: 10am - 11.30am**

**Afternoon: 1pm - 2.30pm**

*Recommended for children aged 4 - 8 years*

**Dates are as follows:**

**September: Saturday 19th, Saturday 26th**

**October: Monday 26th- Friday 31st daily.**

## **Autumnal Exploration**

**Let's get really wild this autumn!**

**Find out what lives beneath the logs when bug hunting, plus  
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# Parish Giving Scheme

We are so grateful to God for the ways in which Elstow Abbey Church has grown over the past few years. Thank you for being part of that growth and for your commitment and contributions to the life of the church. As we each commit our time, money, prayer and love, we are seeing our church and community change – one life at a time. We are determined not to rest on our laurels but to continue to build up the church for the next generation, as the Holy Spirit leads us. As you will appreciate, everything we do, and want to do, has a cost in terms of resources required; whether time, skills, effort or money. The day-to-day running of our church adds up to about £80k per year. We receive no income from the national church: we are entirely reliant on giving from our congregations (plus some fees from weddings and funerals). Because our income depends almost entirely on voluntary donations, it can be hard for us to plan for the long-term when we do not know what our income will be. Planned financial giving by our congregations therefore plays an absolutely crucial role in helping the Church Council to make plans for the future. We are so grateful to everyone who contributes to the Church.

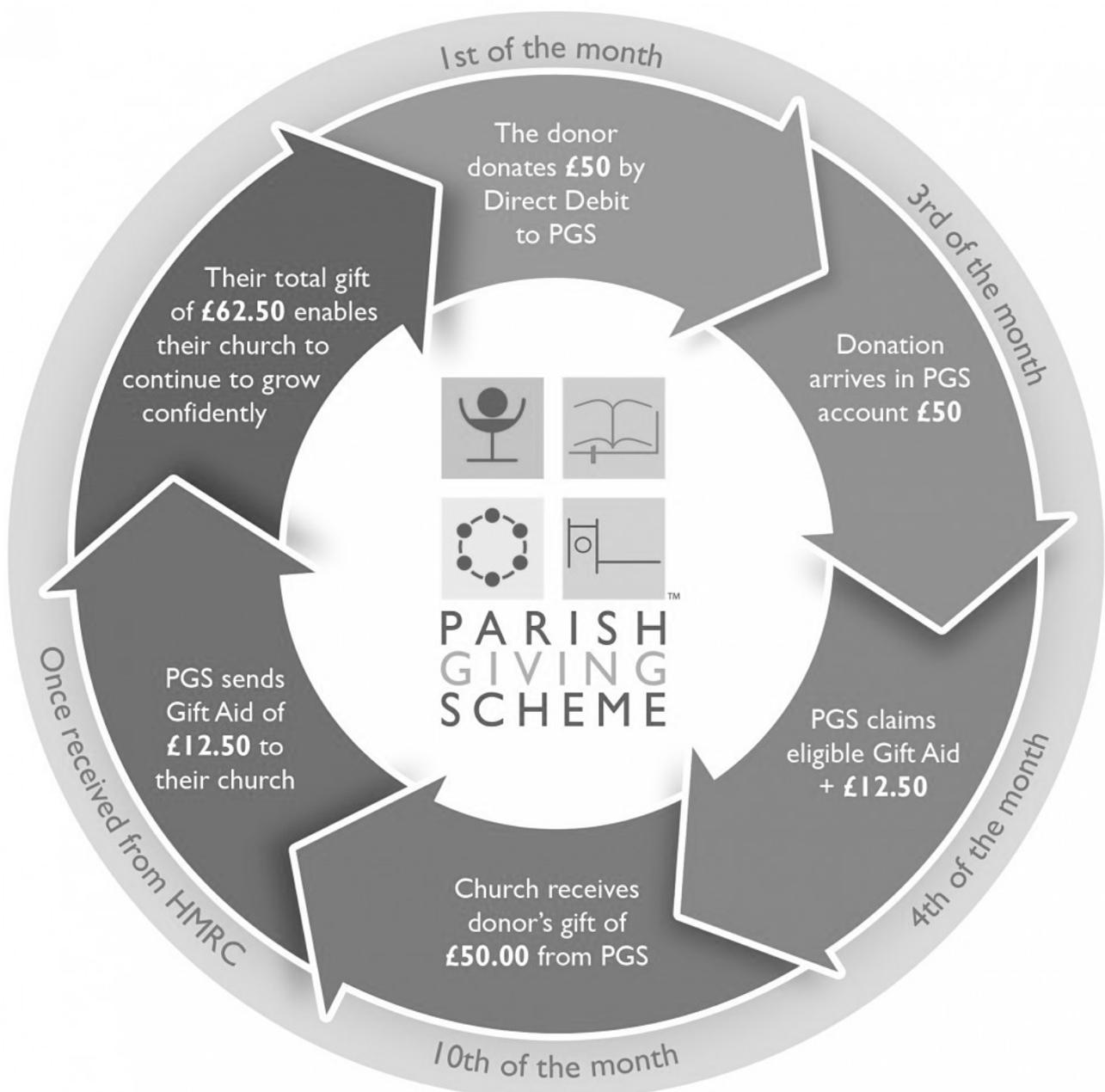
A key part of our strategy and foundation for future growth is the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS), which we launched in 2018. It is a simple and easy way for anyone to support our on-going work financially. The PGS offers a secure way to give by regular Direct Debit, helping the church to receive money and Gift Aid payments in a timely manner, thus improving cashflow. The Parish Giving Scheme has increased our confidence in long-term planning and decreased our administrative burden.

If you consider Elstow Abbey to be your home church, we need your help if we are going to continue to see growth in the future. Through your generous giving via the Parish Giving Scheme, we can plan more confidently for the future with a regular, admin-efficient source of income to help support the on-going mission and ministry of the church. However small the amount you give may seem to you, it will be a significant contribution to the future of All Saints.

To get more information about the Parish Giving Scheme please speak with either a church warden or Fr. Paul.

The Parish Giving Scheme enables a planned giver to donate to any parish registered with the scheme. Donations can be made on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. They are collected by Direct Debit on the first day of the month. The donations are then passed on to the specific parish by the tenth of the month. The Gift Aid is then remitted to the parish once the PGS office has received the money from HMRC. The timing of the Gift Aid payment will accordingly vary each month.

Here's what the process looks like, based on an example gift of £50 a month:



## **SUNDAY SERVICES**

*Subject to last minute changes due to local Covid restrictions*

*All services are currently said services each lasting about 30 minutes.*

- 4<sup>th</sup> October      9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Holy Communion  
                         6:30pm Evening Prayer
- 11<sup>th</sup> October     9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Holy Communion  
                         6:30pm Evening Prayer
- 18<sup>th</sup> October     9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Holy Communion  
                         6:30pm Evening Prayer
- 25<sup>th</sup> October     9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Holy Communion  
                         6:30pm Evening Prayer
- 1<sup>st</sup> November    9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Holy Communion  
                         6:30pm All Saints & All Souls service of memories  
   – sung by Elstow Abbey Singers
- 8<sup>th</sup> November    9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10:00am Mattins  
                         10:45am Remembrance Sunday on Elstow Green  
                         6.30pm Holy Communion (BCP)
- 15<sup>th</sup> November   9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10.00am Holy Communion  
                         6.30pm Evening Prayer
- 22<sup>nd</sup> November   9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10.00am All Age Holy Communion  
                         6.30pm Evening Prayer
- 29<sup>th</sup> November   9:00am Holy Communion  
                         10.00am Holy Communion  
                         6.30pm Taizé Worship

*The church is OPEN every Saturday morning  
10:00am – 12noon for private prayer*