

A message to Pott Shrigley Church at the start of Lockdown, March 2020.

Dear friends,

The late philosopher, Roger Scruton, wrote, “Conservatism starts from a sentiment that all mature people can readily share: the sentiment that good things are easily destroyed, but not easily created.”

Wherever you stand on the political spectrum, it is easy to see the truth of that observation. And perhaps especially at the moment. How many large and small businesses, built up painstakingly over many years, may, in the current crisis, collapse almost overnight? How many social programmes? Voluntary groups and projects? It is tragic and heart-breaking to contemplate, and all will be affected in some way.

And we know it in the church, too. For as long as I have been a parish priest, I have seen myself as being in the business of growth, of building. But Church growth doesn't come easily: and when it does, it is very hard won – but very easily lost.

The vibrant worshipping community we have at St Christopher's has not just happened: it is the result of commitment, faithfulness, and dedicated hard work by people, and of God's infinite and amazing grace. But, at this moment, it feels like we could lose all that very easily. What will the church look like when we come out of the other side of this crisis? Will some have lost faith altogether? Will others have lost the habit of meeting together in worship? Will the church have lost its momentum, its vision, its spark, its way?

I firmly believe, in faith, that the answer to this is No. Because the Church is not its services, its buildings, its events, its meetings. It is the Body of Christ: many members, each unique, each precious, closely joined together in Him – even when physically separated.

But we still do well to pay heed to Scruton's dictum: what we have can be easily lost. I believe that the way in which we function as a church in this new environment will determine what kind of church we will be when 'normality' – or the new version of it – returns.

We are in the early stages of this; but we have started well and with a positive and faithful spirit. I believe it is fundamentally important that we stay connected – and that no-one is excluded: we are still working out how to do this, but where there's a will there's a way.

Shared prayer, encouragement, support, and Christian teaching; using WhatsApp, Facebook, phone, email, live streaming – all this and much more will play a part.

But we also need to be connected with the community beyond the church. How can we serve - not only as separate individuals but together as a body. The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote this to clergy today:

Being a part of the Church of England is going to look very different in the days ahead. Our life is going to be less characterised by attendance at church on Sunday, and more characterised by the prayer and service we offer each day. We may not be able to pray with people in the ways that we are used to, but we can certainly pray for people. And we can certainly offer practical care and support. Please do carry on supporting the local foodbank and buy extra provisions for it. Ensure the night shelters wherever possible are kept open. There are many very encouraging schemes happening right across our country in communities to focus on caring for the most vulnerable, so do continue to play your part in those.

I am meeting with the other Hope Churches leaders this morning to talk about how the great social action we do together can be sustained or adapted. And here at Pott, three separate people yesterday have asked if we can do more to support food banks – and I do have some information on that to follow.

It's perhaps fairly easy to start with good humour and enthusiasm. But some very trying times lie ahead for us; as individuals, of course, but also as a church. There'll be dark moments. There'll be tears. We'll get things wrong. But let's keep faith with one another, and with our Lord. Let's continue to serve, to pray, to worship, to love, to believe – and to build!

Your friend and vicar, David