



THE CUMBRIA DISTRICT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

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Holy Week and Easter 2020

Dear Friends,

The long journey through Lent and Holy Week to Easter has this year been overshadowed, devastated, by the Coronavirus pandemic. Not since 1918-19, when Spanish Flu wrought havoc in a war-weakened world to claim 40 million lives, have we experienced something like the present pandemic in such a widespread way. The precariousness of life has suddenly been made very real, and our assumptions about 'normal' and about what we take for granted every day have been revealed for their fragility. Initial grudging adjustments to social distancing have given way to a fearful steering clear on pavements and in shopping aisles, in case it is we who catch it next. From the wider fears that Covid 19 will decimate the poorer, displaced and overcrowded peoples of the world, to the loss of immediate loved ones in our families, congregations and neighbourhoods, the disease hovers over us all. Where you have lost a loved one, our hearts go out to you, and we hold you in our prayers.

Into this world came Jesus of Nazareth, faithfully journeying to Jerusalem and the Cross, standing then as now with all who are fearful, oppressed and suffering; absorbing all the evil that ever there was, our own, and that which has worked its way into corruption and disease; to be the means whereby every tear, one day, shall be wiped away, that all may know the freedom, life and grace that God longs to share. Through the Holy Spirit, God in Christ walks close with us now, connecting us between the gaps and distances, inspiring us to seek the good, inspiring those who care for others, risking their lives for those who struggle to breathe.

In Christ's anguish and betrayal, and suffering and dying; in Christ's deadness and waiting; in Christ's rising and empowering, God is with us all, and for all.

Whether you are struggling to make sense of this strange time, working surprisingly hard as work invades the boundaries of home without the variation and relief that you might usually expect; or whether you are laid aside, or isolated and alone, longing for company and stimulus; or whether you are out there, doing your best as a key worker, or keeping home and family together, or worrying beside or for a sick loved one; may God be with you, encouraging you in your endeavours, inspiring your gratitude for people and things of goodness, bringing you hope and peace even in the deepest distress; for these are the things of God, and God's love endures.

God loves through the smile of the otherwise avoiding stranger; or through the old 'friends' of memory and pastime and comfort; or in the beauty of warm spring days; or through the kindness of others and the consistency of family and friends; or through the rhythm of faith and the pages of the bible, or through reflection and worship in new ways; and sometimes too through shared deprivation and sacrifice. Through all these ways, God loves, for God loves through the one who poured out his life for us, whose Resurrection even the stones would shout out aloud, and, which, in the end, we can and will celebrate again.

God bless you, and may God bless all,

The Revd Dr James Tebbutt