

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,
To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:
Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.*

Thus begins the letter of Jude.

It is worth remembering that **we** are those who have been called, loved and kept. It is worth reflecting on what each of those concepts mean.

We sing so easily “I heard the Lord call my name . . .” without thinking of how profound that truth is. God knows your name – and calls your name as he calls you. He calls not because we deserve it or have any intrinsic worth that requires him to call. He calls because he loves us. He “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” to call and save us. And as he calls and loves us, he will keep us. He keeps us from stumbling or falling (Jude 1:24), and Paul says “He will also keep you firm to the end” (1 Cor 1:8). Our faith is all of God. And this truth is a comfort to me, for if my faith depended on *me* in any way I would be in serious trouble. But I can put all of my trust in God. And he will never fail!

When we recognise this truth, we will know God’s mercy, peace and love in increasing measure.

New Normal

I believe that we all need a measure of God’s peace as the restrictions imposed by the Covid lockdown seem to drag on and on. It becomes ever clearer that much of what we are doing now we will continue to do for the foreseeable future. (Though I do concede that at the moment “foreseeable” does not stretch very far into the future.) “Normal” meetings are conducted from the comfort of our homes and what traffic will be like and how long it will take to get to the meeting no longer feature in our thinking. It is now normal to be able to worship when it best suits us.

Indeed, over the last week or two, when I have met someone “in the flesh” it has seemed “abnormal” and a refreshing change from normal, virtual meetings.

It is becoming ever more evident that we will need to make the effort to get more familiar with and at home in the online, virtual world. The whole world has changed, and even when we are able to meet in person once again, much of what we have begun will continue. Even after the church buildings open again, our services will have to be conducted online as well as in the building.

Caution

As one looks at the news from around the world we see the problems that are emerging in the United States due to the fact they tried to go back to “normal” too soon. Infection and death rates are rising and they are having to reimpose many of their “lockdown” measures. Whereas many of the countries in Europe which were more cautious are managing to keep their rates much lower and more manageable. The lesson this teaches us to exercise caution.

The Johannesburg diocese has done this. A meeting of the Diocesan Standing Committee agreed that the churches were not in a position to open safely, especially at a point in time where we are seeing the number of infections in the Johannesburg and Gauteng area increase quite rapidly. The agreement was that the Anglican church will postpone opening buildings for services until October. And even then we will review the decision closer to the time depending on what the situation is like and what safety demands. Caution is required, and will be exercised.

Services

Recognising this reality, the parish leadership has agreed that we should continue working to improve what we are able to do at the moment. We will be recording more of the parts of the service in the church building

using better equipment so that our sound and picture quality will be better. (You will have noticed the fruit of this effort over the last couple of weeks.) A big “Thank You” to Courtney Lacy and Mervyn Low as they take time to record the various contributions and edit the result.

An upshot of our growing experience is that we will be making the services available earlier on a Sunday. We will now be uploading them by 07h00 on Sundays. This will enable some people to join the worship at the start of their day. (This is, of course, subject to the various elements of the required technology all playing along with us – which they generally do, but every now and again there may be an insurmountable glitch which will throw the plan awry.)

Contributions

It is a great encouragement to have so many people doing things they have not done before to keep the Body of Christ in this place functioning and ministering.

Every service not only has the participants, but also a number of ‘unseen’ people helping – Courtney and Mervyn on technical aspects and Shirley doing so much of the essential admin. To all of them – thank you (and I am sure that I speak for all of you too.)

There are also the people who continue to cook soup for the feeding scheme, knit beanies (which are very much appreciated), cook meals for families in times of crisis, help distribute the resources to the needy. Thanks to all of you, and also to Maria, Dorica and Meshack who all help manage the handout (as well as make peanut butter sandwiches and boiled eggs). And to Val Kuisis, Jenny Marcus and John Hoffe who oversee the outreach and social concern ministry – thanks.

A number of the committees that support the life of the parish continue to operate in the new reality. Thank you to the counsellors and Ellel team who help people (and are offering a workshop on stress – essential at this time). The Property Portfolio meets and manages the plant – ensuring that all is maintained and developed – a great blessing.

I am also aware of individuals keeping touch with others in the parish, not officially, but merely as an expression of love and concern for others that they carry in their hearts. And there are many, many other acts of generosity and love which we will never know about (well not until we see all things clearly in the presence of our Lord and King in glory.) This is true Christian Community. This is what Paul speaks of when he says we are all part of the Body and all depend on one another. Thank you all!

As you settle in to our new normal and reach out with the love of Christ, I echo Jude: *“Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.”*

Blessings!

Ian