St Mary’s Ticehurst and St Augustine’s Flimwell

To: Congregation members and those on our circulation list

Dear Friends

CHURCH AT HOME - UPDATE as at Monday 18th May
– Ascension (21st) & Pentecost (31st), with Thy Kingdom Come in between!

Church Buildings. It was thought that the easing of the lockdown would be very gradual, and certainly for church buildings that’s been the case. The government announcement reiterated in its Places of Worship Taskforce briefing that church buildings remain closed until 4th July at the earliest. What has changed in our Diocese is that the incumbent may now use the church for prayer and broadcasting, but is not required to do so. Given that the safety conditions placed on this are considerable and onerous, I will most likely not use the buildings until they are open for public worship, when the ‘making it safe to do so’ is more justified.

Livestreamed Services. Sundays at 11am in the ‘Vicarage Studio’ via the Facebook Page @stMarysTicehurst A week ago, we were delighted to have Richard Karn playing the piano for us in Heathfield, and yesterday it was a pleasure to have Peter Johnson reading our two lessons from his home in Flimwell! Ascension Day, Thurs 21st May at 3pm. A BCP Communion will be livestreamed from the Vicarage, akin to St Mary’s 8am service. So there’ll be no music, but the sermon will be short and participatory sections on screen. Lessons: Acts 1.1-11 and Luke 24.44-53 (NRSV). A recording will be available on our FB Page. Sunday after Ascension Day/Easter 7 (24th). This will be a more informal all-age type communion. A service sheet will be on our website & www.achurchnearyou.com/church/4924/service-and-events/events-oneoff by Sat.

Day of Pentecost (31st) et seq. Service sheet enclosed for those not on the internet/email. Readings tba.

Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus. It began in 2016. This year’s theme is ‘Prayer and Care’. Those of you who can, I do encourage you to join Bishop Martin daily from Fri 22nd to Sat 30th at 12.00 noon, for c.15 mins of livestreamed intercession, worship, and silence from his Chapel in Chichester, via www.chichester.anglican.org. For those of you not on the internet, we have (after much research by Penny) ordered TKC Prayer Journals which we hope won’t come too late. A copy can be downloaded by internet users at www.thykingdomcome.global/resources/prayer-journal-2019.

Sermon. With/on the back of this update is a copy of my sermon delivered on the 5th Sunday of Easter. Especially for those of you not on the internet – DAILY HOPE … a free national phone line of hymns, reflections and prayers, as well as full worship services from the C of E. 0800 804 8044.

Hearing You helpline. Run by the Diocese of Chichester giving COVID-19 pastoral support. 01273 425047.

Family Support Work/Foodbanks. Our Deanery (Rotherfield) have asked that parishes consider helping our Diocesan charity FSW at this time. See Update of 4th May for more details (and for Nourish Foodbank’s).

Church Finances. Offerings to the Vicarage are much appreciated. Or put them by! Using BACS is helpful, to: Nat West, sort code 60-22-15 – Ticehurst PCC, 71164383 or Parochial Church Council of Flimwell, 35098651

Email Circulation List: If you’d like to be on our circulation list, please do email me or Di Freeman.

DO CONTACT ME IF YOU NEED TO CHAT! And if you haven’t spoken with Penny or myself during lockdown! God bless you all.

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This update has also been placed on the homepage of our website www.ticehurstandflimwell.church
In John ch.14, the first half thereof, Jesus has begun his farewell to the disciples at the Last Supper. At the risk of sounding like Leonard Sachs compéring the Good Old Days, it’s a passage well known for its apophthegms - concise pithy sayings, maxims, that contain insight, truth. Jesus makes startling promises to the 11 (Judas Iscariot has left): he will prepare a place for them to be with him & God the Father; knowing him, even now they know the Father; whatever they ask in Jesus’ name he will do to glorify the Father. And that amazing v.12 (changing translation to the NIV if I may) “The one who believes in me will also do the miracles that I do, & in fact, will do greater things than these”. Gulp. Whereas Jesus’ challenges are addressed to those who became the Apostles, this v.12 says THE ONE who believes in me, surely including those (us) who claim that we believe in him. Yes, I know, it’s bad enough coping with lockdown without being challenged afresh with another of Jesus’ ‘hard sayings’. Now, being challenged …

A PCC were having a rough time, all 11 of them. Their church’s guttering & down pipes all needed replacing; their reserves would be spent & more (if they could find it). The local community wasn’t a wealthy one, no grants were coming in. The Heritage Lottery Fund? Okay, it’s based on gambling, but it was a long shot anyway. Hang on, they realised round the table: the Lottery - let’s pray to win the Lottery! The big night comes, but no success. Then the church roof starts to leak (profusely) & rotten timbers are found. The dodgy rain goods are causing plaster to fall off. The PCC pray harder - hold a prayer marathon - but on the next Lottery night still no success. The building is in danger of closure. They hold an emergency prayer meeting, with much supplication & wailing: Why are you not letting us win the Lottery, O Lord? And God at last intervenes: “MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE ONE OF YOU HAS TO GO AND BUY A TICKET!”

But let’s look at Stephen. In the Acts of the Apostles ch.7, we heard his vision of heaven, his execution & prayers for his killers. We sense ‘greatness’ in this, in him, but acknowledging that St Stephen’s Day is Boxing Day (bizarrely) & not today, it’s worth just briefly re-winding. Stephen appears at the start of Acts 6 in the very early days of the Jerusalem Church grouped around the 12 Apostles. They are struggling with food distribution to those in need, favouritism being alleged by the Hellenist (Greek) believers. So the Apostles consult & delegate the task to seven Hellenists, ones filled with the Spirit & wisdom, including Stephen. He may have been one of the 3000 baptised just after Pentecost, when in Acts 2 Peter addressed the multi-national crowd intrigued by the coming down of the Holy Spirit. Stephen’s ministry developed from serving (deaconing – the Gk diakonia) to signs & wonders, he being ‘full of grace & truth’. In Jesus he found something so good, exciting, real & alive, that his proclaiming of the new faith threatened those of the old religion. He was dragged before the Sanhedrin where full of the Spirit, his face shining, he spoke of how Israel’s history & the prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures were now realised in Jesus the Messiah. His trial incomplete, he was stoned to death.

Stephen’s story has much to teach us of not just the ‘greatness’ of his witness, a martyr’s faithfulness & bravery, but also of his initial ministry: the serving, organising, sharing in ministry & leadership to work through necessary change using the people’s different gifts. It tells us that God’s calling can change: he wasn’t an Apostle but he was urged to proclaim the good news of Christ boldly. With the Spirit at work in him, he certainly inspired others. And among those observing his death was a young Saul of Tarsus. A terror of early Christians, he himself was converted, incredibly so, by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul recalled Stephen’s courage c.25 years later, his vision of heaven, his exceptional words: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them", showing his Christ-like example of forgiveness. Stephen’s death was a turning point: persecution followed, Jesus’ followers were dispersed, but took with them the news of that forgiveness, of salvation for all who also respond with faith. And the good news of Christ spread.

Is there truth for us in Jesus’ words to the Apostles ‘You will do greater things than mine’? There was for Stephen, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He knew his calling, as did the Apostles. The calling of us differs, one from another, & rarely results in martyrdom (where we are), nor in archiepiscopal preferment. And it can change. But if you don’t feel called to great works, that’s fine: you’re not sadly unambitious, failing. Sharing in God’s mission begun by Christ for all Creation, we can influence the world around us, with a kind word or act, being generous of spirit & with our resources, unafraid to be known as a Christian (or even an agnostic, open to the possibility of God)! Church has the job - the joy - of sowing, watering & feeding seeds, & worshipping our God who only is truly great. In our God small things sown can achieve the greatness of the Kingdom grown, a world transformed. Amen. Ashley Evans.