

## Hello From Rev Barb

Hello everyone, I wonder how you are all doing in the current rapidly changing and challenging circumstances for us all. It is hard to keep up with the news and the myriad of messages that we are urged to heed. I don't know if, like many, you feel a sense of information overload and long for relief. And, only a few days ago, we were going about our usual activities and engaging with each other in person and in groups.

We keep hearing and reading the words "unprecedented", "challenging", "never before", "not in living memory" and we are concerned for ourselves, our families, those we know, our communities, our country and the world community.

These times of uncertainty and new ways of living, which we are told will last for a considerable period, are a test of who we are when our world is turned upside down and inside out. And, we may be feeling the impact to a greater or lesser degree and responding to the imposed restrictions in a variety of ways. In all of this, we are told to keep away from each other, to stay at home, to interact as little as possible. Even for the introverts among us, this is really hard. For the extroverts, whose lifeblood is social interaction, it must be incredibly difficult. We all need each other's prayers. Our community and those around us, especially those with no faith, need our prayers.

The world currently finds itself in a place of anxiety. Suddenly and dramatically, a place of normal seems very far away.

*What do people of faith do to keep moving forward and to focus on hope? One response that people of the faith had in ancient times was the practicing of rituals. Rituals give people the reminder of God's promises and faithfulness and the assurance that God is with us as we reach out in faith.*

The practice of the spiritual discipline of gratitude is one way we can focus on God's hope during these trying times.

### **Here are some suggestions for deliberate rituals that focus on gratitude:**

1. Take time at the end of each day to share three things that show your gratitude to God.
2. Within each family, take the word G.R.A.T.I.T.U.D.E and give thanks to God for something that begins with each letter of the word. Let everyone have a turn and choose something different each day.
3. Create a list of the things for which you are grateful, so you and your family can remember God's many blessings, even in the midst of sorrow, pain, loss and grief. Display in a prominent place and each day add to this list.
4. Encourage each family member to find a bible story or verse of Scripture that reminds them of their gratefulness to God. The motto of my secondary school takes the words of Psalm 119:105, "Lex Dei Vitae Lampas" (in Latin).  
Let us affirm this each day.  
*'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.'*
5. Remember the power of praise and sing songs of faith together, or apart. Perhaps you might like to ring someone and sing together. Do you have books of hymns and spiritual songs at home that you can use? I remember with much gratitude being with some of you, as we sang songs of faith at Dave Bretel's bedside, the night before he died. We are sure he heard these uplifting words.

The apostle Paul encourages followers of Christ to *"be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and*

*for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:18-20, NRSV).*

*And, also to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” (Colossians 3:16, NRSV).*

We have an opportunity to press the ‘reset’ button on our busy lives and bring our attention closer to home. This may provide its own challenges, but attending to our interior life and our personal relationships is ultimately life-giving. A number of prisoners at Fulham have said to me, that they have come to see their time ‘inside’ as being time given to them to ‘take stock’. In a time of crisis, can we focus in a new way on what is most important?

A colleague shared these words of hope from Emily Dickinson (1830-1886):

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,  
And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.  
I've heard it in the chillest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.*



In all that is occurring at the moment, let us remember that this coming Sunday, 29th March, will be the 5th Sunday in Lent and we are coming up to Palm Sunday the following week, as we travel with our Lord the road leading towards Easter.

You are all in my thoughts and prayers at this time. I will be in touch with all of you over the next few weeks. Please don't hesitate to contact me via phone or email.

Blessings,

Barbara

(0439 643 297)

stratforduca.minister@gmail.com