

The Parish of Halas

Together in Christ

CRADLEY HALESOWEN HASBURY LAPAL ROMSLEY



The Halas Clergy Team is odd. That will surely not come as a surprise to any of you, but one particular way in which we are unusual for the Church of England is that in a team of four priests, three of us live alone. In the nature of our work we often find ourselves talking to people who, after a lifetime with someone they can't imagine being without, suddenly find themselves, now in their seventies or eighties, living alone for the first time in their lives. When your home has always had other people in it, that can be terrifying. It reminds us that living alone is a skill in itself - or rather a whole lot of little skills that we build up over time.

The same is, of course, true of living with other people. The daily compromises, knowing when to bite your lip or sit on your hands, knowing when a word of affirmation or encouragement is what is needed, even if it's not what you're feeling. It is a skill honed over years, ageing with us through times of eagerness, love and delight and times of weariness, irritation or anxiety.

However, we're not always good at admitting that whether we live alone or with others, it takes specific skills, just like playing the guitar or making a soufflé or stripping down an engine, and skills need practice. They involve sometimes trying it out and getting it wrong, learning from other people's experiences as well as our own, sharing tips and giving one another space to try things out.

In these times, for most of us, the way we live has changed. Coffee with friends isn't an option, and even a walk in the hills becomes a much more regulated thing. We might be able to phone people, but not see them. We might never have realised how much going out to work made being at home easier. Even if we are used to not leaving home, chances are there are fewer visitors now. Empty nests become family homes again, trying not to revert the tensions that ruled the house when the returning generation were teenagers ten years ago. Small children, unable to run the pent up energy out of their little bodies or see their grandparents, start to display the anxieties they are too young to put into words. And one way or another, a lot of this will go on for months to come.

It will take us all time to develop the skills we need. We'll need to be tolerant with ourselves as well as one another while we adjust. We can't turn this around on a sixpence! And we shouldn't be ashamed to talk about it either - to ask our friends for tips, to maybe sometimes explain how weird it's all feeling or how our behaviour towards one another in tense times is not what it feels like inside our heads. Even when we all feel fairly bright, we can often see how we are each behaving in ways that betray an underlying level of anxiety. That doesn't mean we feel anxious, just that we don't behave or react in our usual ways, or we sleep fitfully or find small things overwhelming, because something's going on inside while we adjust to new ways and learn new skills.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness... to grow more patient with ourselves while we catch up with changing times and to be kind to others while they adjust too is hopefully the work the risen Christ is trying to accomplish in us. It will take a while, but it's good to know that it's not something we have to achieve all on our own.

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