

# The Parish of Halas

## Together in Christ

CRADLEY HALESOWEN HASBURY LAPAL ROMSLEY



Hello everyone,

The lockdown eases, and with cautious, tentative steps we start to explore what it will feel like to meet again, and shop again, and eat with friends again, albeit in socially distanced ways. And church life is part of all that return to the things we have been four months without.

The first Sunday Services in England for fourteen weeks happened this weekend, but the advice we have received is very clearly that we should take our time, and not feel we have to be among the first. Bishop John, Martin our new bishop in Dudley and Nikki and Robert our Archdeacons, have been very clear in encouraging our Diocese to take it steady and that's what we're doing. We've only recently started opening our churches for private prayer and it feels right to ease back into things gently. There isn't one date for a big return in Halas, though Sunday, 19th July is when many of our Churches hope to begin to gather again.

Obviously, it won't simply feel like picking up from where we left off when shut down began. There can only be one Sunday service in any one building, though we may start to think about Quiet Times, Holy Hours or Compline Services on occasional weekday evenings to compliment our Sunday provision. The worshipping community at St Peter's Cradley have decided to start with non-eucharistic worship; St John's will be meeting in the cloisters at the back of Church on Sundays so that the nave can be available for weddings and funerals in the week. Each of our churches will be finding different, appropriate ways to worship in a new context. We may have music, but we won't be singing together for now. Communion will be under the form of bread alone and will need to be administered quite differently to safeguard everyone's health and wellbeing. Our first concern is: *What will keep people safe and what will minimise risk?* But we also need to consider: *How can we conduct safe worship that feels prayerful and doesn't feel like a gathering in a hazard zone where all the symbolism is of mistrust or fear or isolation?*

We want to take time to get things right. We're not dragging our heels but we are taking a couple of extra weeks in order to do things carefully in a considered way: hopefully we will all benefit from that.

We also want to make sure that the provision we make for people in church is matched by the provision that we can make for people at home. If you have been waiting, yearning even, to share in Communion these past weeks, then we don't want anyone to feel that they have to come to church to do that unless they want to and feel ready. So we need to have made safe arrangements to start bringing our worshipping life into gardens or open spaces for those who have been isolating where that is more appropriate - communion offered at patio tables for gatherings of two and three people when that is what feels right.

We will at some point have to talk about how we manage to offer much of what we have offered through lockdown while we are returning to gathered worship as well, when there are still only the same number of hours in the day and a finite amount of energy to get us through, but we are not about to stop mailing material out to those without internet access or posting worship and resources on line for those who can join us from home. Exactly what we can offer will change with time, of course, but we envisage continuing much of the Church at Home provision - on line and by home delivery - into the foreseeable future.

We hope this news reassures you. We want to be back together, but equally we want to honour the needs of those who are not yet ready for a whole variety of reasons. We want to draw on the experience of "being without" through these past four months, so that we can better discern what is truly important to us: what do we need to take up again? what needs to change? what is it time to lay aside? God is leading us by a rocky path towards fresh pastures. We need to take time to explore this new landscape before we settle again as a gathered flock, returning to the shepherd and guardian of our souls.

With love and prayers from us all,

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