

From the Vicar - April 2023

I hope that you are well and enjoying the signs of spring.

The daffodils have been lovely this year, and I love the longer days when the clocks change. Easter is approaching – probably the most joyful and hope-filled season of the church year and, for Christians, as significant as Christmas – if not more so.

During the Easter season, Christians celebrate Jesus's resurrection from the dead – his bursting from the tomb, and his victory over sin and death. Jesus's resurrection brings us a real and living hope that death will not be the end for us, either – that we, too, will rise to eternal life, and take our place in our Father's house, where God will wipe away every tear from our eye. We don't know exactly what heaven will be like, but many of us hope to be reunited with our loved ones there – with family, friends and, perhaps our pets, too. And so, for Christians, Easter is a season of joy, hope and celebration.

Before our Easter celebrations, we observe a season of preparation and – for some – a period of fasting and self-denial, with an increased emphasis on repentance (turning back to God), prayer and spirituality. As we attempt to draw closer to God during Lent, through prayer, Bible study and self-denial, many Christians find it helpful to go on a pilgrimage, or retreat. If that isn't possible, many find that taking a Quiet Day – away from work and other commitments – helps us to reconnect with God, and to prepare for Holy Week and Easter.

This year, I had the privilege of leading a small group on a Quiet Day at the Community of St Mary the Virgin, in Wantage. The Convent is a beautiful place, with a newly renovated Retreat Wing and Conference Centre, in addition to two chapels, the Sisters' rooms, and gardens. It offers a peaceful oasis; less than 10 minutes' walk from the shops in Wantage town centre. Quiet Days can be beneficial for those of any religion, or none. Although we joined the Sisters for worship, and ended our Quiet Day with a Eucharist, attendance at both was optional and all participants were welcome to opt in or out of worship, short talks and a guided meditation. During the Quiet Day, participants enjoyed space to slow down and withdraw,

temporarily, from the busyness of daily life. Some made use of the art room and resources there. Others read books, did some sewing, colouring-in, journaling, and enjoyed a stroll in the grounds and gardens. We were also well fed, with a two-course lunch and delicious cake. I would encourage anyone who has a busy life, and too many commitments, to consider taking an occasional or regular Quiet Day, to seek peace, to rest, to reconnect with God, and/or to reflect upon your life.

It will soon be Holy Week – the week leading up to Easter, in which Christians remember Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; his last supper with his friends on Maundy Thursday; his arrest later that night; his crucifixion and death on Good Friday; the emptiness and grief of Holy Saturday; and Jesus’s joyful resurrection on Easter Day. We will be holding a number of services in All Saints’ Church, and around the Benefice, which all are welcome to attend. I always feel that the joy of Easter Day is much more powerful if we have first journeyed with Jesus the challenging way of the cross, and sat with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday, before gathering again at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, then experiencing the emptiness of Holy Saturday, before the lighting of the Easter fire leads us from death to new life.

My hope and prayer is that, this Holy Week and Easter, you will know the peace of God, which passes all understanding; the unconditional and abundant love of God; and the hopefulness and joy of Easter.

God bless

Karen x