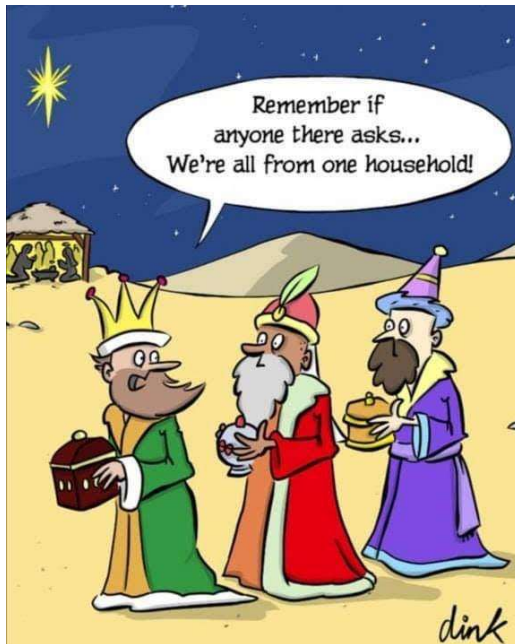


# St Mary's News

**January 2021**

(under Coronavirus lockdown again)



## *Includes ....*

Articles by Tony and Cath  
Day of Prayer Bible Study  
Urgent Call to Prayer

## Restoration and Redemption

At the time of writing there is no denying the level of stress and anxiety we are experiencing in what is essentially our third lockdown. Whilst we can have great hope as the vaccine begins to be rolled out, we are constantly being bombarded by alarming news of the NHS at breaking point, unprecedented events in America, the ramifications of Brexit, an economy that is in shreds and notwithstanding the constant threat of climate change. We face unbearable levels of uncertainty at a personal, national, and global level. How we crave for good news and a return to the life we knew just a year ago.



While it is uncertain when things will start to get better, we as God's people have our faith – we have the hope and Good News that is played out in Easter to hold onto. Out of Good Friday comes Easter Sunday; out of the depths of despair comes hope and promise; out of uncertainty comes faith; out of death comes new life.

Leading up to Easter we have the time of Lent. Traditionally this was a time of preparation for those preparing to be baptized at Easter – and it remains a time when the whole Christian community is amongst other things encouraged to engage in study and self-reflection. This year more than ever the central themes of Easter should be at the forefront of our reflections – those of rebirth and transformation; release and freedom – not only as we allow God to use this time to bring us closer to Him but also as we pray and prepare for life beyond the pandemic.

At times it is hard for us to imagine ever getting back to normal, but we will, and there is much that Scripture can teach us on this. There are many examples of restoration and redemption and in particular the return from Exile. It is hard for us to imagine being forced to live in a foreign land and have to assimilate to an alien culture and way of life, but of course in many

ways our experience of this lockdown is one of being forced to abandon our familiar ways of living and adapt to a more constrained existence.

The Exile caused the Psalmist to lament: ‘By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?’ (Psalm 137:1-4) Despite the constraints of lockdown, and thanks largely to Zoom, Facebook and the BBC, most of us have been able to continue to worship God even in this strange land of lockdown.

In the Bible we read of the Jews returning from Exile and in the Book of Nehemiah we read about the rebuilding of Jerusalem. There is much for us to learn from Nehemiah as we prepare to embrace life beyond this current crisis and after the worst of the pandemic is behind us. Just as Nehemiah was called to rebuild Jerusalem, I believe St. Mary’s is called to help rebuild Watford – not with bricks and mortar but rather the rebuilding of our community, or perhaps more accurately the heart and soul of Watford.

Clearly there are many heroes in Watford: the key workers from NHS doctors and nurses to those working in supermarkets and other essential jobs. We have seen many individuals working tirelessly doing community work; volunteering to help those who are most vulnerable in our community. However, I see a great spiritual need developing as we re-emerge back into normal life. As we come out of survival mode, many will start to ask deep questions about life and will be at a loss as to where to find the answers they are looking for. Some will be counting the cost - perhaps the loss of loved ones who they were not able to say goodbye to properly - others will be overwhelmed with exhaustion, guilt, hopelessness, or a range of other emotions. For many there will be a sense of bewilderment. Many will be looking for signposts to point the way forward to a place of peace and inner healing.



St. Mary's can offer a place of sanctuary as it has for the past 800 years. It has seen a lot of history and its walls have heard the cry of anguish at many different times in its long history. Our building has stood as a monument to the steadfast reality of God in our community over the years, but it is the generations of faithful people, the Church itself, who have prayed and worshipped in our building over the centuries - and it is we, the Church of today, who are being called to bring the eternal message of hope to our community and help it rediscover its heart and soul.

We can learn much from Nehemiah; within his story there is much that can help inspire us in the coming months as we embark in the difficult task of playing our part, in the rebuilding of our community. Nehemiah begins his work with prayer and lament as he hears of Jerusalem's destruction and the anguish of her people. As he surveys the broken walls, he begins to plan -



drawing up plans for the rebuilding of the walls and gathering a workforce. At times he is faced with opposition, but he continues resolutely with the task at hand. There is time for remorse and reflection; a time to make resolutions not to make the mistakes of the past; finally, there is a time of rededication and

celebration as the work is completed. In the process Nehemiah builds something stronger than what there was before and through it all - because of his obedience to God, in focusing on the vision God gives him, in persevering in the face of worldly attack - he sees God's handiwork.

Let us do as Nehemiah did. We don't need to wait for our prime minister to declare the lockdown is over before we begin our work. Our work can begin right now, and like every major task that we are called to perform it begins with prayer. I encourage you all to hear that urgent call of prayer. Elsewhere in this magazine you will read how you might practically respond to the call of prayer. I would also encourage you to attend our next Connect Together which will be on Wednesday 3rd February. At that meeting I plan to introduce an especially adapted Lent course which I pray will not only help us prepare for our Easter celebrations but also a return to a more normal way of life. In a way the return to normal life will feel very much like

a form of resurrection and good news, but it will of course be a mere shadow of the true resurrection – that which took place in Jerusalem some 2000 years ago of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*The Revd Tony Rindl*



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**We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm. Some have yachts, some canoes, and some are drowning. Just be kind and help whoever you can.**

# Are you okay?

Are you okay?

On the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020, The New York Times published an opinion piece by Meghan Markle titled: The Losses We Share: Perhaps the path to healing begins with three simple words: Are you OK?

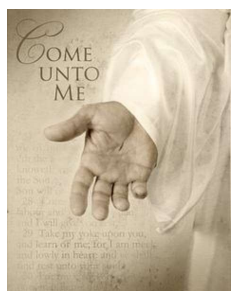
In her article, Meghan reflects back to a moment when at the end of their South African trip, at a point when she was exhausted, a journalist asks her “Are you OK?” and Meghan’s response is, “Thank you for asking,”... “Not many people have asked if I’m OK.” I will be honest my first response was surprise – surprise that one of the most famous women in the world surrounded as she is by so many people is not asked that question often. It made me think that maybe she isn’t so different from me in my daily struggle of getting through life while secretly pushing down emotions and thoughts that often threaten to overwhelm me; it made me think of how much power there is in those three small words; it made me mindful how I don’t ask that question of others enough.



Three small words...let me ask you them now...Are you okay?

Meghan tells a story about how once she was in a taxi and she sees a woman on the sidewalk, on her phone in floods of tears. For a moment she hesitates and thinks about stopping to help, but then the taxi driver reassures her that someone will stop and so she goes on with her life. Years later as she writes the article, as she reflects on all that is going on in her life and the lives of those around her – what with grief and isolation and lockdown, etc – she remembers this incident. She asks the questions: ‘What if no one stopped? What if no one saw her suffering? What if no one helped?’ Would you have stopped to help? I have to wonder whether I would have – how many times have I not stopped to help – how many times should I have asked those words but did not: Are you okay?

These three little words are powerful – but use them carefully. I remember once a boss asked me the question and then responded that he was just being polite and wasn't really seeking a response: that hurt; it made me shut down. I have often wondered why... and why these words are so powerful? It is because they open up the opportunity for people to respond honestly; they give permission for an individual to be vulnerable enough to share how they are truly feeling - as they feel heard, acknowledged, valued; in the safety that the words engender, a person can release some of what they are feeling; it allows you to share what you are carrying with others so that together you can bare the load.



In Matthew 11.28–30 Jesus tells us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Then there are those words from that famous hymn (based on 1 Peter 5.7) “Cast your burdens, Unto Jesus, for He cares for you.”

There have been times I have felt strongly prompted to start services with those words and a pause – creating an opportunity for those feeling anxious and burdened to put down their concerns even if it is for a short while so that they can focus on the service and God's voice and love. On a personal level though I often feel these words feel a little trite, simplistic even – I want to respond that if I could put aside these anxieties, fears, worries, burdens etc, don't you think I would have already! Oh, if it were that easy to let them go! Sometimes it is a process – it takes time – it is something we have to learn how to do. I remember I was walking alongside a friend who was going through a very dark time. One day the counsellor took me aside and remarked: 'It has taken her many years to take on this pain; it may take just as long for her to learn to let it go'. Looking back over my life I can see the truth of this – both in the learning to take on the pain and brokenness and in the process of letting God, loved ones and often professionals help me to unpack it, deal with it and finally let it go. God understand this, just

as He understands us – we see this in the process of seeking forgiveness, in the rite of healing.

So often when we ask those words ‘Are you okay?’ – or we are asked them – they seem to have the opposite effect to the one intended. I don’t know about you, but I was raised to get on with things regardless of what life throws at you – to be embarrassed if I garnered sympathy, the belief that admitting to being broken and accepting help was showing weakness, that to cry was wrong. I have learnt through my studies in Psychology how wrong I have been and how dangerous such viewpoints are – that crying is a natural and healthy way of releasing feelings and stress; that letting people help you is not weakness but that it takes a lot of strength; that it is only in acknowledging what is wrong that you can start the process of healing. For many, talking therapies do work but it requires a strong commitment, hard work and the need to be vulnerable and honest with yourself. The bible too shows us how wrong having such viewpoints are – Jesus himself wept and showed himself broken; Jesus welcomed the broken to him and healed them; Jesus took time out to reflect, pray and take care of himself.

It has been my experience that it has been at those moments when I have felt most broken, that God has been able to use me the most. Have you heard the saying: ‘Don’t worry, God will never ask more of you than you can give?’ Well, it is wrong! God will ask more – He will ask of you things that are impossible for you to do on your own and in your own strength. Why? Because God yearns to be in partnership with you – and you and God can only truly be in partnership if you lean fully on Him, doing it in His



strength. And that, my friends, is where I am battling because I do not like to give up control! To truly lean on God’s strength, I have to let God break down all that wrong conditioning of trying to do things my way, on my own, succeeding only on my own merits. It requires me to step out in true faith i.e. to step out without knowing whether it will go the way I want it to and to totally rely on God.





Have you ever watched ‘Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade’? There is a scene where the hero has to walk across a huge, deep chasm. There is nothing but a gaping hole, but he needs to step out anyway – in the face of the overwhelming evidence that there is nothing there, that to step out will mean he will die, he has to find the faith to step out anyway – to trust that something will miraculously support his feet and save his life. Often that is how it feels like to me when walking with God. That does not always mean that I succeed – but oh when I do how amazing and miraculous is the result.

It must have taken Meghan Markle much courage, vulnerability and faith in what she had to say for her to pen that article in a well-read and prominent newspaper such as The New York Times. It takes much courage, vulnerability and faith to share our pain, to testify about what we believe in, to tell our stories. One of the surprisingly joys of lockdown has been the opportunities engendered through phone calls, in the online ‘Meet at the Moon’, Zoom drop-in coffee sessions and break-out rooms after services and as part of Connect Together which has provided opportunities for people to ask and respond to the inherent question: Are you okay? How can we build on these in the coming year – how can we create opportunities to heal, share our burdens, support and learn from each other?

We need to stop and ask people the question ‘Are you okay?’ more – our hurting world requires it of us, but we need to do so gently and with courage and faith. Gently because of all that answering that question requires. Courage and faith because it may not produce the result we were expecting – sometimes you are exactly the correct person to ask that question in that time, but sometimes you may not be and if you do ask the question you have to be okay with whatever response you receive. Having asked the question is good enough – leave the response to God and His healing grace. And if you are the one being asked...take your courage and faith, listen to your heart is telling you and embrace the love and healing God is offering to you.

So, are you okay?

Please do reach out and contact Tony, Josh or myself (or in fact any of the Connect leaders and others who have been prompted to reach out in such ministry). Please feel free to contact me on 07961564385 / [familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com). Don't worry if it is my day off or at an inconvenient time – if it is, I will simply call you when I am available.

If you would like to read Meghan Markle's article you can find it here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/opinion/meghan-markle-miscarriage.html>

I wish you and yours a Happy New Year and pray that throughout 2021 you know God's love and presence – that you experience that joy, peace and hope which comes only from God and which passes all understanding, which shines as a beacon no matter the darkness.

God Bless

*Cath*  
(07961564382 /  
[familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com))



# World Day of Prayer Bible Study

This year the 'World Day of Prayer' service has been written by the women of Vanuatu (in the South Pacific). They have had a difficult few years with both Cyclone Pam in 2015 and Cyclone Harold in 2020 causing great devastation. The theme for the service *'Build on a Strong Foundation'* has a special significance for the 300,000 inhabitants of this archipelago of 80 islands.



Prayer services take place all over the world and in Watford, St Mary's will be Zoom hosting the preparatory

**Bible Study - Matthew 7:24-27 to be led by the Revd Josh Brocklesby on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm** (for Zoom details please email [pam.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:pam.stmaryswatford@gmail.com))

All are invited to join.

The service itself will take place on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March – further details next month.

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## Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership

While the Church is not open, WTRRP is using the space to load up food parcels and take away for delivery every other Thursday.





## An Urgent Call to Prayer

Our Father God,  
we come to you on behalf of the human race.  
We humble ourselves in the name of Jesus  
by the power of the Blood of Jesus.  
We take authority in the name of Jesus to say:  
Coronavirus we destroy your power to mutate,  
multiply and infect people's lives.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit  
we neutralize this virus  
and eradicate it from face of the earth.

We pray according to God's word

"Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them." (*Mark 11:23*)

Lord we present ourselves in your presence with fasting and praying for a period of 3 days.

We are meditating on:

*Isaiah 58 - True Fasting*

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back.  
Raise your voice like a trumpet.  
Declare to my people their rebellion  
and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

2

For day after day they seek me out;  
they seem eager to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that does what is right  
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.  
They ask me for just decisions  
and seem eager for God to come near them.

3

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,  
‘and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
and you have not noticed?’  
“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please  
and exploit all your workers.

4

Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot fast as you do today  
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

5

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for people to humble themselves?  
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed  
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?

6

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?

7

Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter —  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing(AA) will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

9

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.  
“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

10

and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light(AI) will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.

11

The Lord will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen( your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.

12

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

13

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath  
and from doing as you please on my holy day,  
if you call the Sabbath a delight  
and the Lord’s holy day honorable,  
and if you honor it by not going your own way  
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

14

then you will find your joy in the Lord,

and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land  
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

*2 Chronicles 7:14*

... if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and  
pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear  
from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

*Daniel 9:3*

“So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and  
supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.”

The Daniel fast was not powerful because of what Daniel gave up, but rather  
because of the humility of Daniel's life.

The rewards of fasting are both spiritual and physical and the power that  
comes with this spiritual discipline is exponential! You need to learn to fast,  
Child of God, and see His power and abundant life move in your situation!

“Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not  
eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in  
the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to  
the law; and if I perish, I perish.” (*Esther 4:16*)

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
“Return to Me with all your heart,  
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;” (*Joel 2:12*)

### **What does fasting do spiritually?**

Before we finish together I want to point out something in most of these  
fasting and prayer scriptures. Look at the examples in Daniel and Esther  
specifically? Those people were in a desperate spiritual state as well as a  
desperate physical state. Their lives were in danger. Life was hard in a way  
we will never understand in the 21st Century Western Church. When they

needed to draw near to God, when they needed answers, when they needed spiritual breakthrough they took prayer to the next level and fasted.

Those are some amazing fasting scriptures for breakthrough! If God showed up for them He can show up for you. Write those verses out, pray over them, remind God of His promises and be strengthened in your faith today!

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (*Hebrews 13:8*)

The reward of fasting in the Bible is always a closer walk with God, healing either spiritually or physically and peace even when life is hard.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (*Matthew 9:14-15*)

We need the armour of God:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and



requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

*(Ephesians 6:10-18)*

Scripture describes times where God was moved by fasting. So much so, instead of sending judgment, He granted mercy. One such account involved King Ahab. "There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel." *(1 Kings 21:25-26)*

Yet, when the Prophet Elijah delivered a message from God to Ahab, of His anger and the calamity to come, Ahab tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. *(1 Kings 21:27).*

When he did, God noticed how he had humbled himself before Him, and because Ahab humbled himself, God did not send the disaster upon him. *(1 Kings 21:28).*

Even the most wretched of sinners can move the heart of God to receive mercy, by humbling themselves through fasting.

Another remarkable story is found in *Jonah 1:1-2*, where God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it because of its wickedness before God. Unlike his previous experience where he ran away and ended up inside a whale, this time he obeyed. Jonah preached of the coming judgment to the city of Nineveh (*Jonah 3:4*), to which they responded from the greatest to the least, by believing God, fasting, and putting on sackcloth (*Jonah 3:5*).

As the story goes, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened" (*Jonah 3:10*).

**A fasting prayer for mercy:**

Dear Father,  
what a compassionate, merciful God You are.  
All Your ways are perfect.  
Lord, we come before You to humble ourselves at Your feet,  
asking You to bring mercy where judgment has been earned.  
We are deeply sorry for allowing our hearts to be led astray  
by our own desires and the things of the world,  
for the ways we have turned away from You,  
and sinned against You and You alone.  
Although we have been disobedient  
and our sinfulness deserves punishment,  
You forgive and pardon those who humble themselves before You.  
Where judgment is warranted, You give mercy.  
Forgive us Lord and be merciful to us.  
Soften our hearts, God, to be tender towards You,  
to seek your face, and to long for your presence in our lives.  
For you alone are our hope.  
In Jesus name. Amen.

God bless us all.  
Valéria King



## Tony writes:

*There is no doubt we are now in the middle of national crisis that is also being mirrored in many of other countries around the world. Without doubt this is a time for urgent prayer. I am very grateful to Valéria for putting this together. I fully support this initiative and we are currently making arrangements to come together in prayer on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> January between 9.30am and 12.00noon. You will see that Valéria is encouraging us to fast and pray, a discipline that many Christians adopt especially in times of emergency such as this. I appreciate this may not be your practice or for health reasons or some other reason it may not be possible to fast, but I would encourage you all to at least respond to the call of prayer.*

## Services

We are sorry that the church building  
is closed once again.

We will continue to  
pray, worship and care for each other  
from our homes during this difficult time.

### Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service via Zoom;  
4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom;  
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

### Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

### Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the Church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer  
via our Facebook page  
or the website [www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)

# Who's Who at St Mary's

*(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)*

## Vicar

The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480  
tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

## Curate

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596  
jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

## Churchwardens

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390  
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

## Children & Families Worker

Cath Da Costa | 07961 564385  
familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

## Office

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*currently only open on a Monday morning*

[www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)