

Vicar's Letter #24: 3 October, 2021
"God's mercies...are new every morning."

Dear Parishioners

The Book of Lamentations contains the beautiful words:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion" says my soul,
"Therefore I will hope in him." (Lam. 3:22-24)

God's love always surrounds us, and each new day is an opportunity for us to renew our hope and trust in God.

Hope and trust are particularly relevant to my announcement today. In today's morning service at St James's Church I announced that I plan to have my final service in the parish at the end of January 2022, and complete my ministry here shortly after that. I will have been your Vicar for 17 years!

Any change such as this involves uncertainty. For me, there is a natural uncertainty about what my life and Helen's will be like when I stop being the Vicar of this parish. For you, the uncertainty might be about what the next Vicar will be like or about what the next several months will be like until that person is appointed. The Scripture passage above reminds us that however uncertain we may feel at this time, God is a totally reliable foundation for our lives. God's steadfast love and faithfulness will never cease being available to us. "God's mercies...are new every morning."

This sort of change also brings some sadness with it. We have shared significant and special times in this parish over the last 17 years, and have come to know one another deeply. Therefore changes to the relationship we have shared will inevitably have an impact on many of us.

As well as some uncertainty and sadness, I hope that there will also be thanksgiving - for the deepening of our spiritual journeys, for the sharing of our lives and for all that God has helped us to achieve and learn together.

And also, I pray that there will be blessing as Helen and I finish our time in this community - blessing for you in your journey ahead, and blessing for Helen and me as we follow Christ and serve God in a different place.

My ministry as your Vicar has been for me a source of learning and joy, challenge and fulfilment. It has taught me more about God's steadfast love and faithfulness. I have also been greatly enriched by many relationships that will always be an important part of my life. What I have experienced here has become a part of me.

Many people have said to me that they don't feel at all comfortable with the word 'retirement'. Now it is my turn to balk at it! I would rather say that I will be taking the opportunity to smell the roses a bit more and live life more contemplatively. I will work part-time offering counselling and spiritual direction, and take time for some of those things that have not been so easy to do in the midst of leading a busy parish. In January, Helen and I plan to move to Silverstream to live.

What customarily happens when a Vicar leaves a parish is that the Bishop appoints an interim Priest in Charge for the parish, and the Parish Nominators (in our case Mark Stone, Dan Reeves, Liz Friend and Rosy Moar) work with a designated member of the Diocesan Board of Nomination to identify and appoint a new Vicar for the parish. The Parish Wardens will keep you informed of developments.

In the next few days I will take some annual leave, but I will return to the parish for Sunday 17 October. From that time I will be actively planning for the Advent and Christmas services, which I hope we will be able to share under fewer restrictions than we face now.

Speaking of restrictions, I was very happy this morning to be back worshipping together in St James's Church, even though we were operating under the restrictions of Alert Level 2+. To be in the same place with our brothers and sisters in Christ, worshipping the Lord we love, is a great gift. Our return to worship in church was a sign of hope that we will continue to make our way through this pandemic together.

Blessings to you all.

Peter Bengé

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)