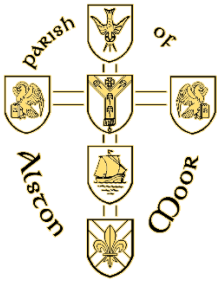


PARISH OF ALSTON MOOR

Including the churches of
St Augustine of Canterbury, Alston; St John, Nenthead; St John, Garrigill;
the Holy Paraclete, Kirkhaugh; St Jude, Knaresdale; St Mary & St Patrick, Lambley

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15th February 2021

Dear friends

Twelve months ago, as news of a deadly new virus from China was beginning to fill our television screens, and the first cases were being reported in the UK, I doubt whether any of us realized how profound and long-lasting an effect it would have on us.

The way we live and work together has changed beyond all recognition: we are wary of contact even with friends and neighbours, our homes are no longer places to offer hospitality, our church buildings are no longer places to gather on a Sunday, and the idea of shaking hands with a stranger is unthinkable. Children are unable to play together; adults struggle to combine work with home schooling, or face the stress and isolation of being furloughed; grandparents miss their grandchildren; and for many, financial anxiety adds to the difficulties. Even some of the introverts among us, who may initially have welcomed the solitude, are now finding it hard.

And of course many people – too many people – have died, families and friends have been deprived of the chance to attend funerals, and others are living with the symptoms of long Covid. Though the infection rates on Alston Moor have mercifully been relatively low, good statistics are no consolation to those who are bereaved or suffering.

But in all this, we have also discovered again how strong our community can be in adversity, how precious is the support of friends and neighbours, how much we depend on our community heroes at the GP practices, in the hospitals, the ambulance and fire services; the local shops and businesses; the volunteer drivers; latterly the snow plough, and so many others who quietly and faithfully keep the community functioning.

The churches too have continued to play their part, sharing God's love by offering pastoral care where we can, keeping our buildings open as havens for private prayer and stillness, delivering prescriptions and – most importantly – praying for this community and the wider world, day by day.

The new vaccines offer the prospect of a return to something nearer normality in the coming weeks and months, though I doubt whether life will ever return to quite what it was before 2020 – and perhaps that is not a bad thing: though there is so much that we miss, I think there is also a great deal which we can do better. We have learnt to travel less, to spend less, to use local businesses more, to be more self-reliant and resilient. The internet has enabled us to keep in touch with distant friends and relatives, maybe even to 'see' them more often than when we relied on visits.

Are we perhaps developing a clearer sense of what really matters in life, and what doesn't?

Church Life

Give something up for Lent??

It's traditional in Lent to give something up – but we've given up so much in the past twelve months, I'm not sure that would be helpful this year. So instead, I suggest something different. Why not put aside a few minutes each day – or as often as you can – with God, to think about how things have changed. Each time, try to think of one thing that has changed, or one thing that has stayed the same, since Corona virus struck. Ask yourself if that has been positive – in which case, give thanks to God; or negative – if so, ask God to give you strength to cope with it, or help you do something about it. You could write down your thoughts, and when we get to Easter, look back and see if anything strikes you: do you still feel the same about what you wrote? Is there a pattern emerging? Are there any significant changes you want to make to your life, as restrictions are relaxed?

Lent activity pack

You should have received a Lent activity pack, put together by the amazingly creative team who plan our All Age Sunday worship. Do enjoy it, and let us know how you get on! You might like to post photos on social media, or show us what you've been doing during our Sunday morning Zoom services.

Ash Wednesday service, 17th February, 7.30 p.m.

This year our Ash Wednesday service will be on Zoom at 7.30 p.m. Like our Sunday services, the Meeting ID is 357 123 751, or you can watch on YouTube live, or afterwards (search for Alston Moor Parish Churches).

You should have received a small packet of ashes to use during the service – or, if you prefer to use them at another time, there will be some prayers you can download from our website (www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/worship)

Friday evening Lent group

If you've felt starved of opportunities to deepen your faith, to ask those awkward questions(!) or just to have a good conversation, why not join our Friday evening Lent group? Starting on Friday 19th February, the group will start at 7.30 p.m. on Zoom (Meeting ID 357 123 751, like our services) and finish in time for us to say Night Prayer at 9 p.m.

We'll be looking at 'Life Changing Stories' from the Book of Acts – you can download the materials here if you want a sneak preview <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/bible/> – to explore how faith can change us, and how we live. And there'll also be plenty of opportunities to ask questions or discuss issues that matter to you but aren't in the materials.

There won't be any pressure to speak if you don't want to, or to commit yourself to anything else. But whether you are a long-standing committed Christian, just curious or dipping your toe in the water, or thinking about taking a new step in faith (being confirmed, maybe), you'll be very welcome.

Sunday and weekday services

It doesn't seem likely that it will be safe to hold services in church for the next couple of months at least, so we'll continue to worship online:

Sundays at 11.00 a.m., alternating between Holy Communion (Eucharist) and Prayer & Praise; with special All Age Activity services on Mothering Sunday and Easter Day.

Weekday services continue too: Morning Prayer, Wednesday to Saturday at 9 a.m.; and Evening Prayer, Tuesday to Saturday at 5 p.m.; as well as Night Prayer on Fridays at 9 p.m.

There will also be services in Holy Week, on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday (Easter Eve) – look out for details.

All our services are on Zoom – go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/357123751>, open the Zoom app and join Meeting ID 357 123 751, or phone 0203 901 7895 or 0131 460 1196. You can also watch our Sunday services on YouTube – search for “Alston Moor Parish Churches”, or go to www.youtube.com/channel/UCTcV_5yJpQt9Gv6Z0CR247Q/live. The details, and orders of service, are always on our website at www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/worship, where you'll also find suggested weekday services and readings to use at home if you prefer to pray on your own.

Private Prayer

All our churches are now open for private prayer. St Augustine, Alston is open on Sundays and Wednesdays 10.30 a.m. until dusk (but not on 14th, 17th or 21st February). The other churches are now always open. Do feel free to use them – but please observe the safety precautions (distancing, face coverings, using hand gel, signing in)

Looking after one another

Though the **Alston Essentials** van is no longer running, we continue to deliver prescriptions, and may be able to help with other items if you are struggling – do get in touch or ring the Alston Moor Helpline 01434 647247.

If you are struggling financially and live in the Cumbrian part of the parish, the **Alston United Charities** can help with a grant; if you live in Northumberland, in the civil parish of Kirkhaugh with Knarsdale, there are other charities which may be able to help – please get in touch with me, in confidence, if you need help, or know someone who does, or see www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/charities.

The **telephone chain** was appreciated by many people last year, but came to the end of its usefulness when the first lockdown ended. If you would like it to start again, **please let me know by Sunday 21st February**, and we'll revive it.

Keeping in touch

Don't forget to check the weekly notice sheet, at www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/whatson, and to read 'Faith in the Moor' at www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/fitm. Paper copies of both can be supplied on request

Supporting your parish church financially

Finally, many thanks to those of you who have so generously supported us financially in the past few months. Most of our usual sources of income (collections, fundraising events) aren't available to us at the moment, so we rely entirely on your donations to keep us afloat financially.

- If you can help us with a one-off donation, please go to our Online Giving page, www.alstonmoorcofe.org.uk/donate where you can donate to the church of your choice.
- To make a bank transfer or a cash donation, or to set up a regular donation, contact your church treasurer (Julie Coonan for Alston, Peter Venus for Nenthead, Vivienne Cullens for Garrigill, Pat Henderson for Kirkhaugh, Kim Boyce for Knaresdale, Sarah Forster for Lambley) or me.
- If you shop online, please consider signing up to www.easyfundraising.org.uk and choosing your parish church as your preferred charity: for every purchase you make from your usual retailers, your church will receive a small % of the price at no cost to you.

Finally,
God bless you and keep you;
God draw you ever closer to himself during this Lenten season;
and God fill your hearts with the hope of the Living Christ
for this coming Easter,
for the end of the Covid crisis which we all pray for,
and for whatever life holds in store for us in the months and years to come.

Your friend and priest

