

Plymouth, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear friends,

As many of you will know by now, Trinity URC has cancelled all activities and church services for at least one month from Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March. We have also shut our doors to outside groups who hire church rooms. This decision was not taken lightly. However, with the growing threat of the Corona pandemic the elders felt it our responsibility to take action at the beginning of the week rather than waiting for government direction, in order to keep people safe.

We are in the midst of uncertain times with many challenges ahead. The next weeks and months will show who we are as individuals and as Christians and what our communities truly mean to us. We have a responsibility, not only to ourselves and our families but to the wider community, to live in a way that puts no one at risk. This means first of all keeping people safe from attracting the virus in our church buildings. Secondly, it means taking care of everyone involved in healthcare and other services that need to keep running. We can do so by staying away at a healthy distance from others or isolating ourselves.

Trinity URC is a church where the majority of people are actively involved in being a warm and welcoming faith community. Many people living near the church are less lonely and flourish because of activities we organize. Having these activities cancelled and being asked to distance ourselves from others may feel counterintuitive to whom we believe we are, or called to be as followers of Jesus. However, we are above everything called to walk the way of Life. At this time that means trying to preserve life when and where we can. Our isolating may ensure that someone else lives. In the meantime, we just need to find new and creative ways of being church and much is already happening in that respect.

There are WhatsApp groups being created, support systems put in place, creative thinking is blossoming and this is only the beginning. The URC will begin online church services from this Sunday (22<sup>nd</sup> March) on their national website. These services will also be directly accessible on the Trinity website. Please ask you elder if you are interested but need some practical help. They will direct you or contact John Pasmore for you. I am aware that not everyone has the ability or wish to be involved online. Please know that we will also stay in touch by telephone. Furthermore, pastoral letters will come to you on a regular basis as long as we are able to do so.

Let me finish by reminding you of the love and faithfulness of our God. In the midst of all this, God is with us in Jesus. Times are not uncertain to him. Rather, times are in his hand. We are close to Easter, when we remember that Jesus died on the cross, in order to show the magnitude of God's love for us. And by the power of God's Spirit he rose again, opening up the way to Life. Jesus, the One who once was willing to wear a crown of thorns, of immense suffering, now lives at God's right hand wearing the crown of victory over illness and sorrow and death. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him and he promises to be with us until the end of the world. In him, God comes close to us, reaching out to us, touching us. In this time of distancing and isolation, let this God embrace you, hold you and keep you safe. May his peace guide and guard us all.

*Henriette Wentink*