



**ASHFORD TOWN PARISH
MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM RECTOR
APRIL 2021**

On mission

On Easter day and during the weeks that follow, we'll be hearing again those passages from the New Testament that describe encounters between the risen Christ and his followers – how sorrow turns to joy.

Something else happens too. In his suffering, his followers had forsaken him, and with his death, they had lost their direction. But when they meet Jesus raised from the dead, they find themselves entrusted once more with work to do for him – though not on their own, not unaided. 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8). 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20.21–22). 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28.19–20).

The church's Easter season stretches between Easter Sunday and Pentecost. These two great celebrations are tightly bound together. To meet the risen Christ is to be sent by him to do his work in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot have him just for ourselves: 'Do not hold onto me', he says to Mary Magdalene, 'But go to my brothers' (John 20.17). If we would dare to trust in him, we must be ready to go where he sends us, knowing that he travels with us on the way.

The Parish Lent course was a wonderful opportunity to explore together what it means for us a family of churches to be sent by Christ in the power of the Spirit to share in his work in this place. What a lot of ideas were shared during those four weeks! We're going to be building on that during the rest of the year through a process called Mission Action Planning, or MAP for short. It's been widely used in the Church of England for nearly twenty years.

MAP has four main phases: 'Review', 'Discern', 'Plan', and 'Act'. We'll be focusing on the first one, 'Review', in April and May. Part of this is taking stock of where we are as a family of churches here in this parish: how are we responding to Christ's call and sharing in God's mission? What are our gifts and our strengths? Where are limitations and our struggles? The Lent course has already given us lots of good material for that, and responses to the follow up questions will help to fill out the picture – do send yours in if you haven't already.

That's only one part of it, however. Another part is listening to the people around us – the communities here in Ashford whom we have been sent to serve, as witnesses to the risen Christ. What are their needs, their concerns, their priorities, their hopes? Where are the hubs, the resources, the networks, that sustain people? Who are our partners as we seek to share the good news in deeds as well as words? We're just starting an exercise called 'Listening to our Communities' that will enable us to start gathering answers to those questions. I'm very grateful to those who've already agreed to help with that.

I hope that at some point during the time between Easter and Pentecost – perhaps towards the end of this month or early on in May – I'll be able to meet online with each church community in the parish, to share

with you some initial reflections on what we've been hearing so far from our churches and from our local communities, and to give everyone the opportunity to respond to that and contribute further to the evolving conversation. Look out for announcements about that.

I'll also be working with other members of the MAP Coordinating Group (Cathie Aldis-Saunders, Bonnie Appleton and Jerry Fox, supported by Peter Ingrams from Diocesan House) to pull together some of the themes that are beginning to emerge in the 'Review' phase for a presentation to the whole parish at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on 22nd May. After that, the expectation is that we can begin to move into the next, pivotal phase of MAP: 'Discern'. More on that another time!

It's good to be getting MAP moving in this Easter season, the time between Easter Sunday and Pentecost. Believing in the risen Christ means being on mission with him, carried by the movement of the Spirit.

The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen