



## **Christ Church Stocksbridge**

## **Crane Moor Methodist Church**

## **Green Moor Methodist Church**

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021

Dear

Greetings to you at Christ Church, Crane Moor and Green Moor!

I'm glad to hear that some of you have been getting your jabs. It really feels as if we are moving forward. Though there are weeks and months ahead until we are back to being able to do many of the things we used to do, at least the sense of relief and joy I hear from people who have had their jabs tells me that relief is coming. Again and again we have to say a huge thankyou to the health service for its wonderful committed staff, including the researchers and scientists, who have made this possible.

Sadly I have to share with you the news that Ian Austin of Green Moor died this week. After a long struggle against unknown and undiagnosed illness, he slipped away with his family with him. It is a terrible blow for his wife Kathrine, and sons Duncan in Green Moor and James in America. Our hearts go out to them.

Our thoughts and prayers are also with Angela and Steve Dixon at Green Moor and their son, Christopher, who was diagnosed with Covid this week. We pray that he may soon be on the mend.

We were reminded this week that we are incredibly fortunate in this country. We may not be as organised as we would like. We still have to live with uncertain times and often the real truth is hard to find. There may be some differences across Europe in overall performance, and we may feel angry about the re-distribution in our own country, but spare a thought for those elsewhere. I have two areas in mind. In the developing world there are huge areas without any systematic health care and without any vaccines. We have both, and are getting both, ahead of most of the world. Our wealth and our history has allowed us to live within a culture where the norm is to be well and provided for. I cannot imagine how it must feel to be sick in some of the places that we hear little about.

And of course even a nation as powerful as America, can get things catastrophically wrong without the right leadership. This week I have had one or two email threads with friends who are American, both here and in the US. You know of my interest in their government and culture, since the days I studied their systems in the 1960's. So of course you won't be surprised to hear that CNN News live, *'the world's most-watched TV news'*, was on all day here on Inauguration Day for Joe Biden.

As I listened to his speech, though he didn't frame it in Gospel language, what he spoke of was woven through with threads of Gospel-speak. The context was that he had been to church in the morning, and he was replacing a man who held a Bible upside down and didn't know what it said inside. He spoke of truth, honour, integrity. He spoke of reaching out to 'others' and helping them in their distress. He spoke of being peaceable with each other, and creating a better, more perfect world. He talked of being internationalist and re-joining the Paris Climate conference. Political messages but riven through with peace and love. What a contrast.

My oldest American friend, whom I met here at college in 1971, as we trained for the church, wrote eloquently to me. He is retired, and a broken man after many years as the Bishop's chaplain in New York, serving the diocese. He was responsible for the care and support of the victims of the crisis of abuse in the church; a harrowing experience. In response to my email to him, John said this:

*"You and I have tried to tell people that life is all about the battle between two forces; the love of power and the power of love. That is what a Crucifix declares. When we look at a Crucifix we see suffering, in order to learn that when we see suffering we are looking at a Crucifix."*

This sums up for me the sense that we try to see Christ in those who are suffering. As we get our vaccines, we can only hold in prayer those who are not fortunate enough to have been born into the privilege in which we live. Our calling is to build our lives on the good news about the power of love, individually, and between people of many differences.

This coming week our Leadership Team at Christ Church will meet for the first time with its new members. They will be getting to know each other and thinking through how the coming months will be organised. We will again look forward and outward; our great strength here at Christ Church. So our thoughts and prayers and thanks are with them all.

Gwen and I send you all our love and best wishes.



Ian Lucraft

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