*“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8)*

To say these are unprecedented times hardly cuts it right now, does it. It is no exaggeration to say that none of us has experienced such total disruption to society as we are facing today, with business, education, travel, sport and entertainment all closed or severely curtailed, and our own personal movements increasingly and heavily restricted. What might have seemed just 2 weeks ago as the actions of a totalitarian state are now regarded as normal, and almost welcomed in order to protect us – utterly amazing! I was speaking to one of the older members of the congregation just a couple of days ago about this and he wryly observed that even in the dark days of the Second World War the Germans didn’t manage to shut the pubs! (Or the churches, for that matter).

Yet it is very clear from what is being seen across the world that **these current restrictions and ‘hardships’ are absolutely necessary**. The scenes emerging from the hospitals in northern Italy are truly shocking; **just one month ago their first case of Covid-19 was confirmed, and today (Sunday) Italy has 59,000 cases and 5,500 dead** (compared with 5,700 and 281 respectively in the UK). That’s a sobering thought in reflecting on how things might develop here. And even if we are spared such a catastrophe, there is no doubt that we are in this societal ‘lockdown’ scenario for a number of months yet – and the signs are it will get worse before it gets better.

Vitally, the rate of spread of Covid-19 is entirely determined by how we, as a society, respond to the call to avoid social interaction: **each of us has to take our personal responsibility VERY seriously right now**. As was said at Saturday’s Downing St press conference “If you do it you are saving somebody’s life. **This is the time, in your lifetime, whereby your action will save somebody’s life**. It’s as simple and as stark as that.” (Stephen Powis, NHS England). The church, in demonstrating the love of Christ for the world, should be right at the forefront in setting this sacrificial example to others.

It’s also true that this crisis is developing across the world at an alarming rate. The number of cases worldwide has grown fourfold (to over 300,000) in the last month and doubled in the last week. The good news is that around a third of the reported cases are recovering, but we can’t escape the fact that this is a deadly and very contagious virus, particularly for the older generations.

So, how do we respond – and where is God in all this darkness? Oh, and anyway, weren’t you supposed to be giving us a message about Sharing Resources?!

**God is ready to share his resources with you**

Let’s start with God – as we always should in all of our life! As we enter this ‘new normal’ way of life we are naturally apprehensive at what lies ahead, quite possibly frightened for ourselves, our family and friends, and wondering how we will cope physically, emotionally and financially. Well, be in no doubt: **God has all the resources you need!** He loves you and knows you, and will give you exactly what you need to get through this – all you have to do is ask! “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). So, as you trust in Him he will give you:

* Peace in the chaos: Jesus said “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” (John 14:1)
* Protection from harm: “You will not fear the terror of night … nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday … it will not come near you.” (Psalm 91:5-7)
* Purpose in the emptiness: “’For I know the plans I have for you’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

**Let this time of extremity compel us back to the Lord** for the strength to see this through. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16).

**… so you can share God’s goodness with others**

It is distressing that we have just seen the first Sunday when the church has not been able to worship together – and this is going to be the case for some time to come. However, the church might not be meeting but the church (God’s people) is still operating! Although our individual movements are greatly restricted, many of us are still out in the world (at a safe distance), doing our food shopping or doing important jobs serving others to help keep society functioning. And, thanks to modern technology, we can still interact with family, friends, neighbours, etc. In all of this we can be a blessing to others in showing God’s love through our lives in so many different ways (even without physical contact). Perhaps God is using this time to impress upon us how the church should really be, unconfined by our church buildings. The Holy Habits were never more relevant than they are now!

So, let’s be church now by, loving and responsibly:

* Sharing our time: in conversation with one another in our isolation (especially those on their own)
* Sharing our faith: encouraging one another from God’s Word, to lift one another’s spirits in these dark days
* Sharing our hope: that God will see us through and bring us out stronger as we wait on him
* Sharing our energy: offering practical support in food shopping, fetching medicines, doing repairs, etc.
* Sharing our inspiration: in finding original, safe ways to help and entertain, young and old
* Sharing what we have: being prepared to lend or give things to others who lack them (e.g. toilet rolls!).

In doing so, **let’s together create a new approach to society that truly has the mark of Christ at the heart of it**. Let’s make Jesus be the centre of Bents Green church in our response to Covid-19 and so make Jesus known in word and deed in powerful new ways. To God be the glory!

**Let’s close in prayer**

Now you can see there couldn’t be a more appropriate time to be considering our Sharing Resources theme (trust God to order things that way!). And there’s one more resource that we can and must offer as we face these uncertain times – prayer. **Make it a daily habit throughout this crisis to spend just a few minutes in prayer** for your family, your friends, our church, our nation and our world – for, in the words of an old gospel song, “if we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now”. I can’t think of a more appropriate call to prayer than this:

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin **and will heal their land**.” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

God bless and protect you, and those you love, as you continue on the path to be a more effective disciple of Jesus, whatever lies ahead.

*Produced by Martyn Read on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  Holy Habits is "an adventure in Christian discipleship", based on Luke's picture of the early church in Acts 2:42-47.  Find out more* [*here*](https://www.brfonline.org.uk/collections/holy-habits)*.*