

Dear friends



**Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Though Easter Day seems a long time ago, we are still in the Easter season as we continue our journey towards Pentecost, reflecting on how we encounter the risen Christ and are sent out in his name as witnesses to the good news of God.

One of my lockdown 'gifts' has been discovering the conversations and lectures on the St Paul's Cathedral YouTube channel – in April Rowan Williams and Paula Gooder were in conversation about 'Resurrection'. Their discussion is rich and wide-ranging, but one part in particular caught my attention. Speaking about Mary and Jesus in the garden on the first Easter Day, for a moment they dwell on Jesus' words which are sometimes translated as 'do not touch me', but which are better rendered 'do not hold on to me', 'do not cling to me'...Rowan Williams even says something like, 'do not grab at me'...

In contrast, I have also been spending time with a hymn by Michael Forster which can be found at Singing the Faith 615 – 'Let love be real, in giving and receiving', with the refrain "as God loves us, so let us love each other: with no demands, just open hands and space to grow".

There is something about times when we feel vulnerable which often causes us to 'cling on for dear life'. To hold tight to what we know. In the short term this may bring comfort, and help to keep us safe, but it rarely enables us, or others, to move freely into whatever will come next.

When I was learning to pray, I didn't find the 'hands together, eyes closed' approach very helpful (though these days I sometimes find great focus in that position). Instead, I remember one of the 'wise ones' who accompanied me in that time encouraging me to sit 'open-handed' with God. It sometimes takes a real effort to open our hands, either physically or metaphorically...but it can bring change to our whole being. You might like to pause and experiment for a moment with the way how we hold our hands affects the rest of our bodies...

So, how might it be for us to live 'open-handedly' as companions, as disciples and as witnesses to God's love in Christ? Fred Kaan writes "Put Christ into each other's hands, he is love's deepest measure". I pray that we may be those who have the courage to approach God with the open hands of faithful discipleship, and to live with one another in God's world with the open hands of loving generosity and curiosity...

On a practical note, next month we will share Bible month – this year focussing on Mark's gospel. As Mark is a book which often provides the foundation for preaching in our churches, this year we will be encouraging preachers and congregations to experiment with reading longer portions of the book together, and allowing the text to 'speak for itself' in the context of worship. There will be the opportunity for those who might lead worship during this month to spend time together preparing for this on the evening of 12th May.

Peace, Jo