

Friday 24 April 2020

Dear Friends,

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:10-20

The Lord has been encouraging me very much with this passage. What can we learn from these verses?

1. **It's ok to feel weak.** I feel weak! But our strength comes from being 'in the Lord and in his mighty power' (vs 10). Now is a time to 'lean hard' into him.
2. **This is part of a bigger battle** (vs 12). It's medical, logistical and economic. Battle is hard and it brings fatigue. That's why many of us are tired. But let's remember that behind everything that is happening, this is a spiritual battle. Pressure will come in full frontal attacks and from the flanks and even from behind us. It will hurt and there will be costs.
3. **The Lord supplies 'personal protective equipment'** (vs 13-17). The good news is that there are no shortages of the Lord's provision for his people in this area. His spiritual armour is readily available to us – we simply need to put it on.
4. **Prayer is key** (vs 18-20). Many of us are discovering again the deep joy of praying on our own and together. We watch or listen to the news and there is so much sadness, (tempered by the positive stories the media share in order to keep spirits up). But we are to be alert to what is happening, not wearying of events, but praying into and over them. It has been a wake-up call from our comfort and complacency. It is time for the Lord's people to be an army of prayer warriors. Please pray for me in all of this – that I will be fearless in declaring the Gospel.

News & Prayer

I am conscious that as we prepare to enter the fifth week of lock down we are all facing many challenges. Separation and isolation from friends and family is hard. Unemployment and furlough is hard. Social distancing for some is hard. But let us always remember that there are some around the world whose lockdown means they cannot earn money to eat that day. Our news focusses on us – we easily forget that there are others on this planet for whom the lockdown is bringing much hunger as well as loss. With that global perspective in mind at Sunday worship this week we hope to hear about Gospel work in Colombia and possibly from a bishop in Australia.

We give thanks that schools are now offering online classes for young people. Let's pray for them and their teachers as they adjust to this new way of learning. Let's remember also, those in vulnerable families and those with special needs for whom online learning may bring new challenges. Phil Taylor continues to meet with young people online - pray for them all that they will know the depths of God's love through all this.

We have now furloughed two of our staff (Jane and Rose), as there is insufficient work for them. They will continue to receive full pay as a result of the government support scheme which provides employers with 80% of the cost of this. This was not an easy decision to make and in no way reflects on their work or worth to us. With income from facility lettings being reduced to zero and Sunday offerings down, our cash flow has been affected and we must be wise in using the resources we have available. Please be mindful and prayerful of the need to go on giving to the Lord's work.

Many of us have become familiar with 'Zoom' meetings and live streaming. We do need to be looking forward to when current restrictions are loosened and some of us can begin to meet again. However, this remains some way off and for now we must continue to gather using online media. I suspect that our online meetings will now be a permanent feature of our life together.

Our vestry and trustees meet on Monday 27 April. Following this meeting we'll all receive an update on vestry membership, future plans as well as a financial update.

This Sunday I am preaching twice and at the same time! I was due to be preaching at Westhill Community Church in Aberdeenshire but for obvious reasons I won't be going. Instead, I've made a video recording for them which they'll use while I speak at our online worship. Strange times.

Online Worship, Gathering and Communication

Please read beyond my signature at the bottom of this letter for details of our online gatherings this week – I learned that some stopped reading the pages that came after that last week!

We continue to use Facebook Live for much of our online presence. A reminder that you do not need a Facebook account to participate in our live worship times. You simply need to go to <https://www.facebook.com/stthomasedin> and look for a red symbol which says 'Live'.

Online worship is also available live on our YouTube Channel (please subscribe!) at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1r0Eq3PqBmxioDssYXCbGQ>

Most days this week, I've also been publishing a short video 'Thought for the Day' during our (early!) morning exercise. These are available on the St Thomas' Facebook Page.

Some serious work has been going on to enhance our website. This is ongoing but please do visit <https://www.saintthomas.org.uk>.

Our Twitter account has also been reactivated. Search for @StThomasEdin.

If you are interested in taking part in Online Worship on Sundays either with reading or praying, please let us know. You'll have to be able to make an audio recording of your reading or intercessions in advance and then send the file to me electronically.

We are also using an application called 'Zoom' to pray and meet together. If you need advice about this or anything about our online presence, we can help. Simply contact me.

Please do join the closed St Thomas' Facebook Group, where you are encouraged to share scripture, prayer concerns and encouragements. Contact me for details and we will add you.

We continue to be thankful for all the work the musicians and technical people are putting in to making videos of the worship songs for Sunday. Please keep those involved in prayer.

If you have prayer concerns or needs, please let me have them by email, text or message. You are very much in my thoughts and prayers. I am available to listen if that would be helpful.

All love In Christ,

For details of the **finance figures for the six months to 31 March 2020** please log into the church website and view under the Monthly Reports sub-section of the **Resources** tab.

If you have any comments or queries, please contact Agnes Murray.

St Thomas' Church Online Week Beginning 26 April 2020

Online Worship & Gathering

All worship events are available online at:

<https://www.facebook.com/sthomasedin>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1r0Eq3PqBmxioDssYXCbGQ>

Sunday 26 April

Online Worship @ 10.30am – ‘Following the Good Shepherd’

Monday 27 April

@12pm – Midday Prayer

Tuesday 28 April

@9.30pm Night Prayer

Wednesday 29 April

@12pm Midday Prayer

@2-3.30pm Rooted Bible Study

To join Zoom Meeting, see details in Church Office email of Friday 24th April

Thursday 30 April

@ 10am - ‘Zoom’ Coffee Online

To join Zoom Meeting, see details in Church Office email of Friday 24th April

@ 9:30 pm Night Prayer