

30th November 2020

Dear Friends

This has proved to be a long season; much longer than any of thought or anticipated in March this year when the first lockdown began but now at last there is good news and the hope of effective vaccines being widely available early in the New Year. We can begin to imagine the end of this long season of our lives. When it comes it will be welcome, long awaited, much heralded and worth celebrating. We may yet have the 'back to church' Sunday I was dreaming of earlier this year.

It has set me to wondering what we do with the fallow seasons of our lives. To be fallow is to let something rest in what would usually be a growing season. It may seem this is empty and pointless, after all nothing seems to be happening in the fallow field that the farmer leaves without a crop, yet all the while remarkable things are happening beneath the soil, its simply that we don't have eyes to see it. In our own lives sleep is like this. We spend a third of our lives sleeping and yet our minds are being renewed and refreshed while we sleep, giving us perspective and even hope. There is so much we don't understand about sleep, but it is essential to our mental health and our well-being. In a similar way we need moments when we are simply doing nothing. Idleness can be good for us. Children need to experience this too. In these days of electronic entertainment and a culture that encourages parents to fill their child's every waking hour with meaningful activity, it is difficult to see children need the experience of boredom. Boredom is boring but it can be the moment when our innate creativity may kick in and a thirst for adventure and discovery well up within us. We all need fallow seasons. The problem may be in the timing. Fallow seasons are unwelcome because they often occur when we are not expecting them. For many people, this long Covid season is a fallow season.

Of course, you're experience of the pandemic may be very different. You may have faced additional responsibility, experienced unwelcome stress, and found that you are very busy. When this season is over you may need a fallow season when you can rest and reflect, wonder and ask yourself what is my life about now? Others will have found that their whole experience of the pandemic may feel like a fallow season. In

one way or another I believe we may all have experienced some sense of this. I am especially conscious of this when people talk of missing their families and missing those vital moments that bind families together, birthdays and anniversaries and graduations. You may feel quite keenly that you are missing watching grandchildren, nephews, and nieces as they grow. When we can resume life in a more familiar way there may be a rush of reunions and delayed celebrations.

As we look forward it will be fascinating to see the ways that our lives will be different from the way they were before. We will all be more aware of the need to wash our hands and the risks of airborne infection with masks becoming more common in crowded public spaces. Video conferencing through apps like Zoom for meetings, gatherings and events will also be a choice more of us take up. I think it's likely that even when we can open the church for public worship without spatial distancing, we shall continue to live stream our worship.

Meanwhile we are still waiting. Last Sunday was the first Sunday in Advent. We lit the first of the Advent Candles at New North Road. Advent is a waiting season as we wait for the celebration of the birth of Jesus and remember the people who were waiting for that day, not least Mary his mother through the long months of her pregnancy. She wasn't alone. In the temple Simeon was waiting and wondering when he would see the child God had promised. We live in an impatient society that is suspicious of fallow seasons but waiting is an essential element of Christian spirituality. Not only is patience a fruit of the Spirit, waiting for the God's timing is essential part of learning to move with the gentle rhythms of God's Spirit and to walk in step with. I close with these words from a lovely song.

Your friend and pastor. **Mark**

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.
When our hearts are saddened, grieving or in pain,
By Your touch You call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.