THE CHURCH OF LOW FURNESS NEWSLETTER.

Welcome to our new look newsletter for the Church of Low Furness, serving the parishes of Aldingham, Dendron, Rampside and Urswick with Bardsea.

Wishing you peace and health this Christmas.

SERVICES – DECEMBER 2020

Date	Church	Service
Sunday 6th December 10.30am	Urswick	Holy Communion
Sunday 6th December 2.30pm	Rampside	Evening Prayer
Sunday 13th December 10.30am	Bardsea	Holy Communion
Sunday 20th December	*tbc*	Holy Communion
Sunday 20th December 6pm	*BBC Radio Cumbria*	*Doorstep Big Carol Sing*
Monday 21st December 6pm	Urswick	Healing Service (Blue Christmas)
Thursday 24th December 3pm	*Urswick Churchyard*	*Outdoor Crib Service*
Thursday 24th December 9pm	Aldingham	Holy Communion
Thursday 24th December 11.30pm	Bardsea	Holy Communion
Friday 25th December 10am	Urswick	Family Communion
Sunday 27th December 10.30am	Aldingham	Holy Communion

Please Note:
Social distancing and other safety measures are in place in our churches. It is a legal requirement for Masks or face coverings to be worn throughout services.
Our services were planned during lockdown and having just recieved confirmation of tier restrictions and regulations and how they relate to singing and services, including advice from the Church of England, services are subject to change and/or adaptation as the leadership team looks at what can be held. Carol services with congregational singing can only be held, with social distancing and restrictions, outdoors and we are looking at this possibility.

For up to date information please see www.churchoflowfurness.org.ok or www.achurchnearyou.com Or see our Facebook group: *Church of Low Furness* which includes regular Live services and links to Worship at Home Materials.



"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" Matthew 5:8

View from the Vicarage



Dear Friends,

The temptation to write a refreshing Christmas epistle to you all with no mention of Coronovirus, social distancing or tiered restrictions is enormous! I feel sure that there are many of you who, like me, would enjoy just a moment that felt 'normal', an escape from the intensity and constant challenge of this year. Alas, it might provide a light-hearted moment but it would be a missed opportunity, an opportunity to share a spiritual truth, that it is often in the most difficult moments of our lives that we find the deepest meaning. That, essentially, is my prayer for you all this Christmas.

This has been a difficult year; a year of loss, grief, and isolation in many different forms. It has been countered by many acts of kindness and community cohesion, though months on, even those good things are being tarnished by weariness now. This makes obedience to the rules and acceptance of separation harder to manage. Judgmentalism and impatience are on the rise. Perhaps, then, it's the perfect time for a season of goodwill?

So, what might we hope for this Christmas? At the time of writing I am still not allowed (despite what some papers have hurried to report) to organise outdoor Carol Services. But Churches can reopen for services and we have communion services planned throughout December, and also a Healing Service 'Blue Christmas' on Monday 21st and an outdoor Crib Service on Christmas Eve. Please do keep an eye on our website and Facebook Group for up to date information… if the situation changes and we can hold Carol Services, we will.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and no amount of social distance or limitations on support bubbles changes that fact, or stops us drawing close to the hope we can find in him. The simplicity of the fact of Jesus' birth, God's son given as a gift, who shows us the constancy and unchanging nature of God's love for us, might help us accept and discover hope amidst the struggles that this year has brought.

I have seen a picture shared widely on social media this week that says "The first Christmas was pretty simple. It's OK if yours is too." I think that's a good message and helpful way to understand the sacrifices many people will be making this year in choosing not to be together for the protection of another.

It's also a good message of the simplicity of love and faith. We may not be able to crowd in village halls and church buildings for carols, concerts, mulled wine and mince pies (a prospect I miss even as I write it) but we can meet in Spirit through prayer…it's a simple act of faith that has a depth of meaning and purpose that we can all benefit from in whatever we are carrying. I hope and pray that I will have an opportunity to see you over the next month, even in a masked and socially distant way. I am praying for you and remembering especially those who are particularly vulnerable, isolated or in need.

May you blessed, safe and well this Christmas.

Yours in Christ, Lucie

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THE CHURCH OF LOW FURNESS NEWSLETTER.



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Christmas is coming – but we don't know what it will be like and I'm not talking about the weather!!

I think 2020 will go down in history as the nothing-year. The year in which we did nothing – at least nothing we considered normal. The coronavirus has impacted everyone and everything since March. Including all our outreach efforts.
Furness Footsteps did manage to meet and go for our wanders – but only three times this year out of planned nine. The first was way back in February, the second in September and the third in October. We do take a winter rest during November through to January. Two of the walks we did manage were well attended – September not so due to absences and injuries to some of our regulars. That's what happen when you start playing tennis at full pace after a 6 month lockdown. So in terms of outreach, limited, but at least we manged to keep the group together and we can look forward to 2021. Maybe a later start but with the prospect of a vaccine we can contemplate what the new normal might look like.
Children's Gate have been in the same lockdown and were more impacted as they meet inside where the restrictions on social mixing are more stringent. At least Footsteps meet outdoors where social mixing is safer.
Similarly there was no Teddy Bears picnic this year. A big shame as the 2019 event was great success at keeping contact with the Baptism families and showing that Christians can have fun. Mind you we've not had many Baptisms (or weddings) this year either.
There have been some encouraging thigs in amongst all the doom and gloom. Digital church has taken off. This is church happening over the internet – not the same as the corporate worship we are used to, and want to get back to. But we have found that there are many more people accessing our digital church as we would see in person at some services. That has to been a positive, and something we need to carry forward to the future along with the in-person services. Digital Church opens up a number of possibilities for the longer-term future that may help people connect with God without physically attending the church building. An opportunity for those less mobile; those working shifts; when the weather isn't fit to turn a dog out!! Not necessarily something to be rushed into, but carefully considered in the light of our limited resources. The technology is there and a lot of people have discovered how to use it over the last 9 months.
Maybe we'll get a near normal Christmas – I do hope so as Christmas without carol singing and the church services will be missing some of the traditional parts of Christmas.

Until we meet again – God bless and stay safe. Graham

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" Matthew 5:8

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It's been a funny year, what with the current medical unpleasantness. At one moment it was Lent. Then suddenly without the coming together and joyous communal celebration of Easter, it's Advent. We've gone from penitential to penitential without having the party in between. So how penitential can we get?
An older lady is arrested for stealing a can of peaches.
When the case gets to court and she is found guilty, the judge decides to make an example of her.
'How many peaches were in that can that you stole?' He asked.
'Six' she said, with tears of remorse in her eyes.
'Then you are hereby sentenced to six months in prison. One month for each peach'.
As the poor lady is lead away, her husband - sitting at the back of the public gallery - leaps to his feet, shouting
'She also stole a can of peas!!'

A friend of mine described this year as 'awfully Puritan.' Apparently you're allowed to work but aren't allowed to enjoy yourself.
And now we've been told that they've downgraded Christmas. Or perhaps they'll allow us to have half a Christmas but then we've got to spend the next three months on bread and water locked in our rooms in case we enjoyed ourselves too much. Who knows?
Frankly it's nonsense. Nobody can legislate for Christmas. The Puritans tried it after the Civil War. Perhaps this year the authorities will re-issue the old December 1643 ordinance. This encouraged subjects to treat the mid-winter period, 'with the more solemn humiliation because it may call to remembrance our sins, and the sins of our forefathers, who have turned this feast, pretending the memory of Christ, into an extreme forgetfulness of him, by giving liberty to carnal and sensual delights'.
But Christmas as a way of sneaking back. In spite of us, in spite of the fact that we screw it up, Christmas can still win through. I'll never forget the Christmas Eve my Uncle George went to jail. It didn't take long before he got violent, abusive, screaming and thrashing around. I'll never play Monopoly with him again.
Perhaps this year we'll have to have a guerrilla Christmas. After all we cannot just troop along to services and put bets on how many carol services you can put a vicar through before they finally crack and break a mince pie instead of a communion wafer. We'll have to do more Christmas ourselves.
If you're trapped in enforced idleness, just send people a letter in their Christmas card. Send a letter to people who you don't send a card to. Build bridges of human contact with people because we've all been starved of it. Wear a silly hat through all twelve days of Christmas (even when out shopping, don't be afraid of upsetting respectable people). Put decorations up outside. Smile at people. Those who need a smile will be grateful and as for the poo faced who get upset about it, well they probably get joy out of being offended, so you've made them happy as well. Go on, treat yourself.