



December 2020

Dear Friends,

When I think of Christmas I think of special gatherings full of food, loved ones, and laughter. I think of special clothes, family pictures, parties. I think of big church gatherings singing carols, church nativities and light streaming through stained glass windows. But here we are approaching Christmas and none of us expected this. None of us expected social distancing to still be in place. No large family gatherings or Christmas parties with kissing and hugging. No singing - raising our voices to sing and celebrate Christ's glorious birth. God with us! At Christmas our churches are usually packed but numbers and distancing this deadly global pandemic means we will be sharing Christmas morning worship on Zoom from home.

To be honest, it doesn't feel so much like Christmas this year. It feels more like Good Friday. Heavy. Overwhelming. Full of grief and anguish. This has been a pretty intense year. Everything is changing so fast and my heart, my mind, and my soul can't keep up. This horror is still unfolding and I feel helpless. There's absolutely nothing I can do to stop it.

Some folks are making life-threatening decisions and sacrifices for our health, well being and protection. Where am I? Still tucked away in my house. There are times where it feels like I'm hiding. Am I denying? Am I blaming? Sometimes I'm bargaining. Everything is uncertain. What is going to happen? What is next for us? I wonder every time I leave the sanctuary of my house if I've brought it back with me? Will I be next? Or more frighteningly have I unknowingly got it and passed it on to someone else?

Maybe, like me, you want to turn back the clock, but we know we can't. We're living a historic moment, a world-changing moment and nothing will ever be the same. Nothing could have prepared us for this. Or for the consequences of the pandemic. Lives changed; businesses destroyed; millions unemployed, economic disaster, a national and international depression that will take years to climb out of. People frightened to leave home and mix with others; relationships stretched to their limits resulting in couples and family breakup.

It doesn't feel like Christmas does it? But, when I think about it a little more, maybe it feels like Christmas and Easter all wrapped up into one.

Like that first Easter when Mary Magdalene heads to the tomb. Grief and uncertainty are her constant companions. Everything's changed so fast and she can't process it. I imagine her continuing to relive the horror of watching Jesus being crucified. She witnessed it. She was helpless to stop it. Now everyone's scattered, everyone's isolated. They're locked in hoping death won't come for them. That sounds all too familiar.

But it's also a Christmas, Easter new beginning. A time for celebration - a new birth, a new beginning.. Is that what we've been given, a chance to start over? A chance to say sorry for the damage we're doing to this earth and work to change. A chance to realise what or more importantly who is important to us. We've realised we can quickly react to a changing reality - so let's do it. Let's make this a better world. Let's make us a better people through loving our neighbour. Somehow supporting those most affected by this pandemic.

The angels said to the shepherds '*Do not be afraid; I bring good news of great joy for all the people.*' It's Christmas! That still changes everything! Yes, it still feels uncertain but '*God is with us*'. Let your weeping and grieving give way to hope. Let your anxiety give way to action. *God is with us!* Hallelujah! Amen!

*Rev'd Nicki*