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Dear Friends

The Baptism of Christ

As the New Year begins, I find myself reflecting on the past and the present. This time last year I was preparing myself to begin curacy. I remember my final session at college entitled "How to be a Curate, the beginning of a new chapter". We were told that most of our time would be spent visiting, getting to know people, and supporting our communities. For me this was one of the most important and life-giving aspects of ministry where I, like many, feel most called. Unlike others, I was fortunate to have been on a short placement at Radyr before starting curacy. Leaving college with no party, no saying goodbye and no chance to hug (everyone knows I am a hugger), made closure difficult. In those three years we had all experienced highs and lows, questioned everything we thought we knew about faith, were broken and put back together again, all in the name of formation for ministry. So I was ready enthused and full of energy to start my curacy.



Despite everyone's best efforts, none of this prepared me for what was to come. Does any college course ever do that? Not really and, let's be honest, nothing would ever have prepared us for the pandemic that has descended upon us. The first lock down was almost surreal. I battled with my feelings of past and present. What can I do? Return to the NHS? Surely my skills could be put to good use? Having prayed long and hard and being reassured that my curacy would begin, I had to trust in the path set before me and I am thankful to all those who I could talk to at that time.

So I write to you today sharing my thoughts and feelings around being a curate in this time of pandemic. We all have to reconsider our expectations at times, I expected to be meeting you all in a physical sense and, whilst I am grateful for Zoom, it's not the same. 'Reaching out' and 'Staying in touch' has taken on a new form.

Whilst Zoom isn't ideal, I am thankful that every Tuesday some of us meet to chat and discuss our faith, and I have to say this has been life giving. It has allowed me to connect at a time when I feel totally disconnected from the community. It's strange indeed as I find myself living in St Fagans and have yet to form relationships with you in the Parish of Radyr. Trying to develop relationships, those deeper connections, has been most challenging, and now we are locked down for a second time. Whilst there is hope on the horizon, we are all tired and I know that I am finding it difficult to keep a sense of perspective and wondering how I can best serve you.

It is at difficult times like these when we gain strength from our faith. It is times like these when our faith can grow beyond all expectations. It is times like these when our faith is tested beyond our means. So this is a time for us to keep in touch as best as we can but, despite every week's newsletter offering for people to get in touch, my phone doesn't seem to ring. I wonder – are you all putting a brave face on? All of us at times have to reach out and admit it's not easy here. I am reminded off an old advert on TV for BT that used to say 'it's good to talk'.

Life is a journey of joy and sorrow but at the moment we seem to be denied opportunities to get together to share with one another, to celebrate or to grieve, weddings and funerals being stripped back to the bare basics, and no Baptisms taking place.

Today's readings remind us of our baptism with Christ and the powerful creative force of God who transforms that empty void by his spirit, bringing life, light and hope. Every day we are reminded of God our creator, the one who transforms darkness to light, as we arise from the night to the dawning of a new day. The readings speak of beginnings and endings and, I wonder, does something have to end in order for something to begin? We are all hoping for an end to the pandemic and a new beginning. We are reminded of this new beginning when we reflect on Christ's baptism which connects each and every one of us as we grow together in faith and love. As I reflect on the past and present I am reminded of the hopeful words of Brother Roger from the Taize community in France who said "we are never at the end, we are only ever at the beginning".



Love in Christ

Belinda