Greetings!
Sorry this is a bit later than usual, but I wanted to include details about church opening for private prayer in the Benefice.

Following approval of a detailed risk assessment by Marksbury and Farmborough PCCs, both churches plan to be open on Sundays (9am-12 midday) and Wednesdays (1-4pm). Visitors are asked to adhere to Covid regulations and follow the signage. I'll let you know when there is more information about Stanton Prior church.

We hope to hold some special Eucharist services in August - more information to follow. Even when services recommence in church, we plan to continue these virtual ones.

Monday at nine tomorrow will be a celebration of Eucharist. If you would like to participate, please contact Martin Ward before Sunday evening.

Sue Young has recently given me a copy of “Where is God in a coronavirus world? ”, an excellent booklet by John Lennox, retired Professor of Mathematics at Oxford, who has taken part in public debates with Richard Dawkins among others. I found it very clear and readable, putting Covid into context historically and theologically. He quotes a fair bit of CS Lewis (no bad thing). I plan to order a batch of copies to save on postage, so if you’d like one, please let me know before the end of the weekend – it’ll set you back a couple of quid.

Music: Strangely I couldn’t find a YouTube clip of the Victorian hymn 'The Sower went forth sowing', so I’ve gone for this hearty if a bit ponderous rendition of a harvest one:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBg4Qg-45TU

In the recent Evensong World Cup (yes, really, check the following link)

https://viralsacredmusic.blogspot.com/2020/05/twitter-world-cup-of-evensong-anthems.html

a joint anthem winner was William Harris’ 'Faire is the Heaven, where happy soules have place', a double-choir setting of words by Spencer and known to generations of choristers as the "Fish Anthem". Here it is sung by Seraphic Fire, an excellent group based in Florida. I particularly love the gentle ending on the words 'endless perfectnesse'.

https://youtu.be/C9_S8nHdWLk

I am grateful to Martin for the following worship song, 'Here I am to Worship' by Chris Tomlin, in a screen version that can be projected so the congregation can sing along.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5hN_m55uoM

Finally, to end with a spring in our step, a familiar worship song based on part of our Old Testament reading, Isaiah 55:12

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmmiFJtyuiU

Sorry this is a bit rambly; with all good wishes
Chris

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY 10a.m.
I come in the little things, saith the Lord;
Not borne on morning wings
Of majesty, but I have set my feet
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.
There so I dwell, in weakness and in power;
Not broken or divided, saith our God!
In your strait garden plot I come to flower;
About your porch my vine
Meek, fruitful, doth entwine;
Waits at the threshold, Love's appointed hour.
(Evelyn Underhill 1875-1941)

CONFESSION. Forgive us, Lord, when the cares of this world dominate our lives, when we hear your word but do not listen to it, when the shallowness of our understanding does not allow your word to take root.
When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. (Psalm 65 v3).

COLLECT. Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

READINGS. Isaiah 55.10-13, Psalm 65, Romans 8.1-11, Matthew 13.1-9,18-23.

REFLECTION. The Sower is such a well-known parable that it can become rather stale in our minds. One of the striking things about it is the way the word of God, indeed, the love of God is incredibly extravagant. It is scattered far and wide, reaching out to all people; to different 'soils'. As we seek to follow Christ, we may well recognize that, at times, our hearts and minds are not as fully open to God as they can be. This parable has a kind of dual purpose for us. It encourages us as listeners and, also, as sowers. Listeners are encouraged to do just that; to heed the word and to nurture the growth of it. This we do by making time, regularly, for God with our reading of scripture, reflection, prayer and so on. Sowers encourage others, live lives that speak of God's love in how we are and in what we do. And, remember, when we as soil find ourselves becoming 'thin' i.e. despondent, overwhelmed or troubled it is always, always possible to spiritually replenish ourselves by immersing our beings in God's great love.



PRAYERS. Lord, creation sings your praise; the hills gird themselves with joy. We praise you for the natural world, for the miracle of life, for the rhythm of the seasons. We pray for those who cultivate and harvest the land and sea; help us to treat this earth gently and responsibly.

We pray for your church in the world, that we may listen with understanding to your word, and be fertile soil for it to grow in us.

We pray for those in the arts, the self employed and others who face financial difficulties because of the COVID19 pandemic.

We remember the lonely and isolated, those in care homes unable to meet with their loved ones. Enfold them in your loving arms.

We bring before you the sick in mind or body, those with COVID19 and others whose treatment has been affected by the pandemic. We pray for those who have recently lost loved ones, or who are facing the anniversary of their loss. *Especially we pray for……*

As we start to emerge from lockdown, help us to learn from the positive aspects of it, to be sowers of your love in our communities.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (in your favoured version).
WE SHARE **THE GRACE**.

FINAL PRAYER. And now to him who is able to keep us from falling, and lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright mountain of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy, to him be praise and authority, for ever and ever.
(Martin Luther King Jr.)