

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear St John's Parish

*"How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?"*

The President has announced a 3 week nationwide lockdown starting at midnight tonight. We don't need to repeat all the reasons and regulations here. Suffice it to say that we need to obey the rules and regulations. As South Africans we have the reputation, as one commentator tactfully put it, of being "rule averse". As followers of Jesus we need to model something different and follow "the more excellent way" of obedience out of reverence for Christ and love for one another.

What this means is that for the next three weeks at least (which includes Holy Week and Easter) we will not be able to meet together and share in our traditional special services and times of prayer and worship. We will be cut off from our families, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our community and we won't be carried and held by our corporate acts of worship and our familiar traditions – pickled fish, Easter eggs, Two Oceans ... In many ways it will be like being in exile.

Psalm 137 is a lament on the lips of people in exile. Their cry is ...

*"How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?" (Psa 137:3)*

That is the question we are asking now as we step into uncharted waters. How do we worship God and be Christ's Church in this new lockdown land in which we are living?

Well lament is a good place to start and Psalm 137 is good text to use. We need to express our grief (vs 1). We need to acknowledge the losses we are experiencing. What are the things we are going to miss most keenly? What are the "harps" we will need to hang up? (vs 2) What are the songs we would have sung? (vs 3)

But then, acknowledging and grieving our losses, we need to look at ways we can remember and live into the wonder and mystery of the cross and the joy the resurrection. That has not been taken away. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

In many ways the faith of the Israelites was shaped and formed in the Exile. It is when what really matters was held onto and that held them in God's embrace. Think of the wonderful prophetic hymns in Isaiah and the courage and faith of Daniel and Esther and how they "sang the Lord's song in a foreign land".

We will be sending resources that we hope will enable you to hold on to what is essential and lasting and discover new depths of connection with God and each other across the divides that keep us separated.

We are preparing a combined Parish Good Friday service which we will make available to you to use in your homes so we can observe those sacred three hours together.

We will be posting these and other resources and links on our Parish website. We are working on it and updating it regularly. [www.stjohnsparsh.org.za](http://www.stjohnsparsh.org.za). Please visit it and share the resources there with others.

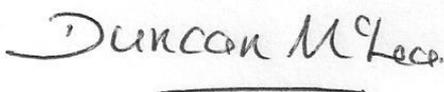
As part of the Parish's missional response, The Warehouse is supporting churches in the City, the Province and the Country in developing and coordinating their responses. This is being done through ecumenical networks such as the Western Cape Ecumenical Network (WCEN) and South African Council of Churches (SACC, which includes The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa) and coalitions of Churches, Faith-based Organisations and civil society groups such as RESPOND.

The Warehouse has also been developing resources and mechanisms for how different groups of people can show the love of Jesus in this time. They will also play a role in coordinating a Parish working group.

Here are some of the ways you and your family can contribute to the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel during the lockdown time.

- Sign up for your local CAN! (Cape Town - Community Action Networks). Find out how here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CapeTownTogether/>
- Be a voice of advocacy on your CAN! group for the most vulnerable and marginalised in your community - e.g. share resources with another CAN! in a place less materially resourced than your own suburb.
- If you would like to coordinate care and relief activities for your congregation or as part of a Parish network, please email [covid19sa@warehouse.org.za](mailto:covid19sa@warehouse.org.za) with your name, your church and your cell number and we will be in contact.
- Participate in the call made by 24/7 prayer.
- Write an email to Executive Mayor Dan Plato at [dan.plato@capetown.gov.za](mailto:dan.plato@capetown.gov.za) or The Mayco member for Water and Waste Services Xanthea Limberg at [xanthea.limberg@capetown.gov.za](mailto:xanthea.limberg@capetown.gov.za) asking them to make public their water plan for informal settlements.
- Identify who vulnerable people are in your congregation and find ways you can connect with them during this time.
- "Like" The Warehouse on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/TheWarehouseTrust/> to keep up to date with more developments.

Yours in Christ



Duncan M'Lea

**Parish Rector and Team Leader**  
(on behalf of the Parish Leadership Team)