

15<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Friends

Every week as I prepare to write the pastoral letter, I am looking for themes and ideas to write about and this week I am spoilt for choice as there is a coincidence of three happenings, the Iranian New Year; Nowruz, the national census and the Sunday closest to the anniversary of lockdown. Never shy of a challenge I shall try and weave the threads of these three happenings together.

Nowruz, which means 'New Day' is celebrated in Iran and neighbouring countries including Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and others that are further away such as Albania. It is celebrated at the spring equinox, when the night and day are of the same length which makes a lot of sense because it acts as a gateway to spring and the promise of renewal and new life. It is a time when houses are cleaned and filled with flowers, people visit each-other, making gifts and may also share in traditional celebrations with poetry, dance and song. Some of our Iranian friends have shared pictures of these celebrations and I hope we can share these in our Sunday worship. In particular I hope we shall see a traditional table is set with seven things beginning with s, which include apples, dried fruit, flowers, coins, spices, a sweet pudding and sprouting grass.

I am struck that Nowruz happens on the threshold of spring and this reminds me that as lockdown began a year ago there was a glorious spring. Indeed, there was a moment when it seemed as if you could tell when there would be more severe restrictions by the weather. If the sun was shining, it would mean the lockdown would become still more severe. None of us imagined we would be in lockdown a year later but we are still here and when we emerge into the 'new normal' we shall feel like survivors. There will be a time for rejoicing and a time for remembering, a time for celebrating new freedoms and a time for recognising there was a cost, a time for breathing again and a time to remember the people who passed during the pandemic.

One event that may help us do this is the national day of reflection on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March which is being organised by Marie Curie Cancer. This is a link to their website where you can discover more about this. There are many good events that you can choose to share in online and I commend this really excellent programme to you.

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/get-involved/day-of-reflection>

In particular I commend the moment of reflection at 11.30 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> which you can book to share in by clicking on the programme tab of the website. There are other good resources here which may be helpful especially if you are struggling.

This is a really good video about the minutes silence at midday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the day of reflection by a young woman reflecting on her own experience of loss.

<https://youtu.be/9JQn4J7mI9Q>

In years to come we shall have many stories to tell and every story is worth sharing. They will become part of the oral history of our nation and shape the way we remember this season of our lives. It's a strange coincidence that the census is happening during the pandemic. The census is like a snapshot of our nation at a moment in time and that time is the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. It's important not only for the historians of the future but also because it offers policy makers and people who govern our boroughs and our nation a picture of the way our neighbourhoods are changing. Of course, your personal information remains confidential but it is used to build up this picture and an accurate picture is critically important if Kirklees is to receive the resources required to serve the people here well. I do encourage you to take ten minutes to complete and return the form. If you would rather not do this online you can call their free help line and request a paper form. 0800 141 2021.

There are other events in the news I would love to reflect on and there will be news of our own about reopening the church soon too. As well as that we are preparing to celebrate Easter. I'm looking forward to writing next week's letter already.

God bless

Your friend and pastor

Mark

