

Dear Friends,

On 26 April new Covid-19 regulations came into effect which ease things considerably. We have been put into Level 3. Wider travel is permitted for a daily visit, going beyond Scotland. This gives us the possibility of meeting up (outside) with more family members and friends from a wider area. Another easing is that the limit of persons attending funerals and weddings is now increased to 50 – with 50 allowed to attend receptions afterwards as well.

It is expected that further easing will take place after 17 May – with a move into Level 2. The Kirk Session will be assessing these changes to consider whether we can now reopen the Church for worship.

The wider freedom of travel could mean that other people from further afield may wish to visit the Church to view the Ruthwell Cross. This would bring extra cleaning and stewarding to meet the regulations – including Track & Trace. The implications of this will be fully considered. For the moment Historic Environment Scotland are only allowing planned visits to parts of their facilities – for which potential visitors have to book tickets. We are in consultation with them about their guidance and timing on re-opening Keyed Sites such as ours. Unlike HES, we don't have access to paid staff who could deliver the required cleaning and stewarding.

Looking at another of the pictures on the Ruthwell Cross, I'm drawn to the one of John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei. That is latin for The Lamb of God. John was a relative of Jesus' who worked for God in preparing the Jews for the coming of Jesus. Most of his time was spent preaching in the wilderness – where people went out to hear him. He was the "Voice crying in the Wilderness" prophesied by Isaiah. He called on people to repent of their selfish behaviour and serve God. He baptised them in the River Jordan as a physical sign of their repentance and return to God.

The illustration of him carrying the Agnus Dei was to be prophetic of Jesus' dying on the Cross. Jesus was a sacrifice to God for all the people in their wrongdoing. The use of lambs in sacrifice in the Temple was common and would be well known to the Jewish people. Applying it to Jesus was a continuation of John's work for God. We don't use lambs in this way – but we're very conscious of them as an important part of our rural economy as they frolic in our fields at this time. We count them as cuddly and innocent – but Agnus Dei reminds us of the stark reality of the Cross and the wonderful deliverance it means for us.

As a rural Church our idea of "neighbourliness" stretches for many miles – not just to those who live next door. We have a large circle within which we have a care for those living there. Our parish area and our elders' districts are places of support and care for those who need it. Our Locum, Rev Gerald Moule is continuing his pastoral work by telephone. If you wish to contact him, his number is 01683 220667 and his email is: [gmoule@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gmoule@hotmail.co.uk).

The website has contact details for Fiona Sloan and myself if you cannot contact anyone else. With the decline in the incidence of infections, the easing of restrictions, the longer evenings and, hopefully, some better weather, we look forward to a return to better living conditions and a chance to renew wider and longer meetings with friends and family.

Stay safe,

God bless,

Bill Holland  
(Interim Moderator)