

Pastoral Letter, November 2021. Revd Sue Cooper writes:

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that we are coming towards the end of this year, and during November we will be remembering, as a nation, the brave men and women who have died in War and conflicts in service to Queen and country. Remembrance Sunday is our opportunity to honour them and recall the sacrifices they have made for our freedoms. It is also an opportunity for us to remember all ex Service men and Women, especially those who are living today with traumatic memories and physical disabilities, and whose lives have been blighted by war and conflict. We are holding Remembrance services in all of our villages within the benefice, to which I warmly invite you.

During our Benefice service on November 21st at Evenley Church, we shall be blessing our Cribs. These will go into schools or homes for a few weeks, to then be brought back into our Churches for our Christmas Eve and Christmas day services. Last year Christmas was a much scaled back affair in our homes and Churches as we were going into another national lockdown; let's hope for a much more enjoyable celebration of the Festive season this year.

As I said, it's hard to believe that we are coming towards the end of 2021, and it's been another challenging year for us all. We are told that we must now learn to live with the Covid virus, just as we do with other viruses such as flu, and this is proving more challenging than expected. It is now a minefield of small daily decisions that we need to make for ourselves, and others, for safety and protection from Covid, and all the while trying to balance this with our very human need to gather, and to be with people for our joy and pleasure, not to mention for our mental wellbeing too! None of this is easy, and we are wearied with the constant decisions and choices we have to make. But we can find peace in it all if we remember that even in these times, we can find our comfort and hope in the Christian faith, because God doesn't change. The question of "**why** is the world suffering with Covid?", remains a mystery, however we do know "**who**" we can put our trust in in this life because God promised to never leave us or forsake us. In Jesus's time his disciples were having a hard time coming to terms with some of the difficult things he was telling them; he told them that he was going back to be with his Father, and that, for a while, they would not see him, but that they would see him again. Jesus said to his disciples "***I have told you these things, so that, in me, you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***" (John 16:33) So even life with Jesus was not without its challenges for his disciples, so we shouldn't be surprised when, at times, life is less than a bed of roses. Our journey through this life is far more of a "mystery tour" than a "pleasure Cruise". But along the way we find that no matter where the road is leading, God will be found there. This is sometimes a very powerful feeling of his presence with us, or sometimes it is seen retrospectively as we look back over events. There is a wonderful poem called "Footprints in the sand" which perfectly sums up the way God is with us in all of life's events and circumstances, and it reveals how although we don't always think that God is even aware of our problems and predicaments, on the contrary, he is holding us up through them all:

Footprints in the sand

One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord, across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. After the last scene of my life flashed before me I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints. I said to my Lord, "I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me." He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." (Margaret Fishback Powers, (1964)

This poem has blessed me countless times over the years as it expresses the way that we all feel at times and helps us to understand the truth of where God is in it all, and that we are never left alone, especially in hard times. And isn't that reassuring to know!

God bless you all, with love Rev Sue.