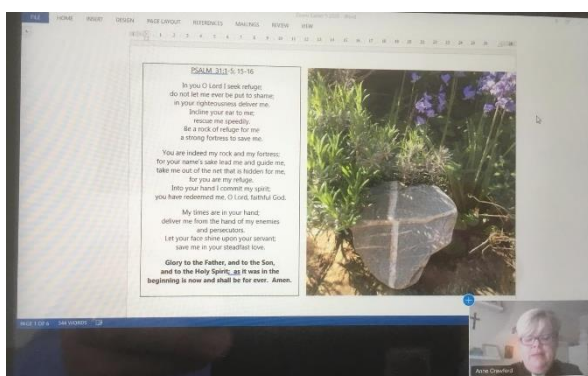


St Matthias' worship during lockdown

For the last few weeks the St Matthias family has been worshipping via Zoom on a Sunday morning. Zoom (as I only discovered two months ago!!) is an electronic video conference platform which allows groups of people to meet together in real time online. In the pre-Covid world it was used mainly in the business sector, but during the strange days of lockdown and social distancing it has provided to be an invaluable way for families and friends to meet up and 'see' one another on iPhone, tablet or computer screen. For the congregations at St Matthias it has been a life-line, keeping us connected to one another in ways we couldn't have imagined just 2 short months ago, but the real blessing has been to our worshipping life. Zoom has enabled us to worship together as a Church family during a time when life has been strange and uncertain and we have all felt anxious about the implications of being separated from loved ones and from our church community and place of worship.

The great benefit of worshipping via Zoom has been the ability to see one another and to speak with each other. Being Church is an embodied reality, it's relational, it involves building community and giving and receiving support and encouragement, and our worship reflects this when we are together in church. Discovering new ways to express our faith in worship has certainly been a challenge, but for St Matthias the invitation to Zoom in to each other's homes and be together in a way which is new to all of us, has been comforting and re-assuring rather than alien and uncomfortable. One of the greatest blessings to using Zoom for worship is the ability for congregation members to continue to share in the leading of worship - reading from scripture, leading the intercessions, playing the piano to accompany the hymns, offering a reflection on the readings. As with any act of worship, the underlying theme running through the liturgy each week creates an ideal opportunity for the host (usually the Vicar) to share her screen and so images appear alongside the wording of the service and the lyrics for the hymns. This is particularly helpful during times of confession and prayer as it protects everyone's privacy and is a great aid for quiet reflection; there is no anxiety about 'being on show'.



The words of the liturgy are 'shared' on screen so that everyone can join in

Even during this time of lockdown we are still able to worship together in ways which are deep and meaningful; we have felt truly blessed by sharing in this way of worship and keeping connected to each other and to God. Discovering new ways to express our faith has been a challenge, but the benefits are far outweighing the negatives, and building on what we are learning together will be an important aspect of our return to 'normality', whenever that may be.

Of course Zooming isn't perfect and we have been very conscious of those few people who are not connected to the internet. We have to work hard to ensure they do not feel excluded, and for some there is the ability to phone in and join the service, with a paper copy being popped through their door in advance. We have also been made aware during the lockdown that for some of our very elderly and vulnerable people lockdown is an everyday reality, they live in isolation every day of the year. How we address their needs and help them to continue to feel connected and involved, has to be a priority going forward.

As with any activity online, there needs to be a certain amount of protection from hackers and anyone who might wish to disrupt or harm worship. For this reason the host will supply a password ahead of the service to anyone wishing to join in. This means that Zoom isn't necessarily a great evangelistic tool – we are not open to viewing in the same way that live-streaming a service is. But we are stronger together, and keeping a community worshipping together, enabling every member to fully play a part in all that is offered to God, will help us to keep building on all that has gone before, and ensure that we are strong enough to face all that lies ahead.

If you would like to join any of the worship, bible study or coffee morning chats which St Matthias are currently offering via Zoom then please contact Rev'd Anne and she will gladly provide you with the necessary passwords needed to enter. You will be very warmly welcomed!

*A view of St Matthias worship on an ipad.
The larger your screen the more people
you will be able to see at any one time,
but there is the ability to scroll along and
see everyone and say hello.*

