

Dear Friends

Peace be with you.

You who know me well enough will know that I would look forward to *any* opportunity to be to preside at worship and share fellowship in the parishes and worshipping communities, knowing in that moment our unity with Jesus Christ and all others in my care as bishop. So it was a special blessing to be planning to come to Up Hatherley on Palm Sunday – the one occasion in the Church’s year when the passion is read and the Eucharist is celebrated in full.

Sadly I shall not be able to do as we planned because of the current limitations on our life as citizens. But I hope that you will know that you and Fr Mark will have my special prayers that morning.

As you may imagine, the rules that we are all learning to live by have had a major impact on the travelling ministry of all bishops in the their dioceses, especially in London, but perhaps even more obviously for the provincial episcopal visitors like me as the distances are so great and the places so varied. So I feel even more than usual my distance from you, and have reason to pay attention to *my own words* from my introduction to last Sunday’s liturgy (the recording of which is on <http://www.sgilesreading.org.uk/>)

We are distant from one other while this sickness is among us. But there is *no distance* with God. ‘God is closer to us’, says St Augustine, ‘than our most inward parts.’ And since we have been baptized into God in Christ, nor is the Church ‘distant’ from us.

That is our faith; even in an emergency it is a *very* sound basis for hope. May God increase that hope in you. And here is a perfect prayer, from the *Book of Common Prayer*, to learn off by heart, and to say often

**Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities,
and in all our dangers and necessities
stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

in the Lord:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Jonathan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Revd JONATHAN GOODALL | *Bishop of Ebbsfleet*

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