



## Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Dear all,

For those of you who don't yet know me please let me introduce myself. My name is Tom, I am the new curate at St Andrew's. I describe a curate as a vicar with training wheels. My purpose here is to learn from James and this community how to be a vicar and do vicar things, whatever that is!!! I come here with a wonderful wife Robyn and two lovely children, Anah and Jacob. My wife and I would like to thank you for the kind words of welcome we received during our first week among you all and in our two Sunday services. We have loved getting to know you and have particularly enjoyed times of tea and cake at the community café. I am looking forward to getting to know a lot more of you during my time here and hopefully with a bit more freedom once Covid restrictions end.

Part of the process of thinking about where to come to train is to look at that place firstly in a parish profile and then in person. It is a strange, sort of undercover, thing where you meet the vicar but no one else, at that point no-one is meant to know your there. This process means that I got to know quite a bit about the community of St Andrew's and Sneyd Green before we even arrived here. This experience reminded me of the notes of introduction we often find at the beginning of Paul's letters where he says hello and then casually talks about what he has heard about the church. As I reflected on this I was drawn to Colossians 1:3-5 :

"we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for God's people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the Gospel."

If there is something I would offer at the beginning of my time here with you it would be this: that your love for the Gospel and for Jesus Christ our Lord has already been told to me, as well as your care and dedication for the community of Sneyd green. Not only have I heard of this love, in my

first week here I have seen it displayed through the community café reaching out to the community; the prayer group bringing the needs of our church and the wider locality to the thoughts and prayers of the church, and your wonderful hand of welcome that you have offered my family and I on our arrival here. Like the church in Colossae we had heard of your faith and your love, and we look forward to being part of that with you as we move forward.

Tom Owen

## New Wine Online



As last year, New Wine are hosting their United Breaks Out event online, but with even more content this year. The event runs from Thursday 29th July to Tuesday 3rd August, an extended 6-day programme of teaching, worship and prayer ministry for all ages and abilities.

- Morning & evening Arena & Impact celebrations
- Sofa sessions and Q&As
- Morning Kids sessions packed with songs, stories, gunge, fun & games
- Morning and evening Luminosity (youth) devotions & chat, challenges, workshops, celebrations & after parties
- Accessible Church enabling people with additional needs to participate as much as possible, and to grow in the gifts that God has given them
- After Hours programme – The Big Quiz and more!

Confirmed speakers so far include Francis Chan, Katia Adams, Amy Orr Ewing and Jordan Seng. For more information please see [www.new-wine.org/events/united-breaks-out](http://www.new-wine.org/events/united-breaks-out)

We will be joining in with the service on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August – more details to follow.

## Covid and worship at St Andrew's

Many of us will be aware that many of the restrictions we have been living under are due to be lifted later this month. It is my understanding (at the moment of writing) that social distancing, mask wearing and singing restrictions will all be lifted on what is being dubbed 'Freedom Day', Monday 19th July. I have a number of reflections on this moment in the roadmap:

1. The Government have made a commitment to lift the legal restrictions imposed upon us in this season, however they are not removing the guidance, both formal and informal. In light of

rising infection rates across the country I believe it to be naïve to assume that there is no further need for wearing masks or limiting singing. I therefore do not believe that we should dispense with masks completely in church or return to indoor singing immediately. More details on what this looks like at our 9am service is below.

2. We are seeing a significant number of cases of Covid across Stoke-on-Trent including a number of folks known to us in Sneyd Green. One of the reasons that the government are taking the decision to lift restrictions is that the number of people with Covid who are getting seriously ill or dying is very low; however the risk is still there. Everyone over the age of 18 can now receive a Covid vaccination, I would urge and encourage you, if you have not already, to have a vaccine and ensure you receive your second dose. You can book your vaccination online at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination) or via your GP. Having two doses of a Covid vaccine significantly reduces the risks of:

- a. catching the infection (although does not eliminate it)
- b. transmitting the infection to others
- c. becoming more seriously unwell or having more debilitating symptoms
- d. ending up in hospital or ultimately dying

3. Considering these two elements, please follow the guidance if you have knowingly come into contact with somebody who has the virus or if you display symptoms yourself, or if anyone in your household (or bubble) is showing symptoms. If asked to, please isolate for 10 days from the day you had contact with the infected person – including up to 48hours before they were showing symptoms. If you develop any of the known symptoms, please immediately book a PCR test at a local testing centre and isolate. You can do that online at [www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test](http://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or by calling 119.

I understand this can be alarming and complicated, you can find out more by calling NHS 119 - for information and booking tests, otherwise, go to [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19) for lots more information. Please contact us if you have tested positive, are unwell or are isolating so we can be praying for you and can offer help and support

4. The availability of lateral flow tests is now widespread – through collection points at pharmacies and other locations across the city or through the post. It is recommended that everyone does a lateral flow test at least twice a week as 1 in 3 people with Covid show no symptoms. It is important to remember that although these tests are useful in picking up unknown cases, they are not fully reliable and should **not** be used if you are showing symptoms. To find out where your local collection point is, visit [maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk](http://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk) or call 119.

### **What will this look like at St Andrew's in the coming weeks?**

#### **9am services**

**Chairs:** The Churchwardens and I took a decision last week to reduce our social distancing in church and have adjusted the chairs from 2m to 1.5m apart. This was to facilitate increasing numbers at our 9am service over recent weeks. We have also increased some of the rows of three

up to four to allow family groups to sit together. Under the current restrictions, up to 6 adults or two households can sit together in church.

**Masks:** From the 19th July, it will no longer be mandatory to wear a mask indoors so we will no longer be requiring it for those attending church, however we will continue to strongly advise that masks are worn.

**Singing:** Although the restrictions on singing are also due to be lifted on 19<sup>th</sup> July, we do not currently plan to begin to sing in church. We will continue to gather outside to sing at the end of our service each week for now.

The Church of England have not yet issued their updated guidance so I will write again in a couple of weeks with more details on other aspects of our services, such as contact tracing and communion.

### **The Star Café:**

The Star Café will remain relatively unchanged following the 19<sup>th</sup> July roadmap step, further details will emerge in due course.

Part of our responsibility as a community is to honour and respect each other in this season. For some, this continues to be a time which causes anxiety, and it is important that we are aware of how one another are feeling and do our best to make others feel comfortable. Please observe social distancing around people not in your household or bubble and don't assume others are wanting a hug, for example. Please respect the decisions that other people make around the precautions they are choosing to take and if in doubt, just ask. It is so easy to fall into judgement. If people take the rules more seriously than you do, it can be easy to judge them for being over anxious. If people take the rules less seriously than you do, it is easy to judge them for being reckless. Let us show our community Jesus in this time by being loving and not judgemental.

Please do not be alarmed by the situation I have described above, we are a people of faith in a God who is ultimately in control and above all and in authority. If you find yourself struggling with the ongoing situation, or have any questions, please be in touch and know that we are praying for you at this time.

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