



St Mark's Church, Reigate

September 2020

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

So many events and plans have had to be postponed because of Covid-19. Greenbelt, the Christian Arts Festival is no exception. This year there will be no camping, no big tents and outdoor gathering with thousands of others from around the country.

When I was younger, I attended some of these camping get-togethers and have invariably found them stimulating and rewarding experiences. The hardest job is usually to decide what to do since there was so much to choose from. Big name speakers sometimes are disappointing particularly if you have had to queue a long time to listen. On one occasion I remember queuing for what seemed like hours only to be turned away just before admission because the venue had reached its capacity. Instead I joined another talk being given by an ex-Roman Catholic priest. Funny how things work out. The one talk that I didn't plan to go to turned out to be one of the ones that made the biggest impression on me.

The speaker addressed the need in all of us to be listened to. Most conversation, he said, tended to be a series of "intersecting monologues." I thought that was a wonderfully true observation. Very often what happens is that we talk to each other about our own lives without really listening to the other person. We simply wait for them to pause in talking about themselves long enough so that we can carry on talking about ourselves. Epictetus, the Greek philosopher who wrote in the second century, was wise enough to observe: "we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." Biology, however, doesn't always triumph over the human tendency to focus on self. Yet having someone who truly listens to us is a precious gift indeed.

God too is very good at listening to our prayers. In prayer we pour out our concerns to him sometimes in a long stream of heartfelt need. But it is as important to listen to God as it is to speak to him. The latter does not always come easily to us. But to listen to God and to listen carefully to those around us can be a great blessing. A life that consists of a series of "intersecting monologues" lives only for itself and this has a tendency to diminish all. To listen to others and to listen to God requires us to raise our horizons upwards and outwards.

As we venture into the Autumn it will be more important than ever to be listening to what God might be saying to us as a Church. What does he want us to do with this

situation that we face? Returning to "normal" is not everybody's desire particularly when normal had been so busy and often damaging to people and planet. So, what is God saying and have we learned to listen carefully enough to hear?

With every blessing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mantah". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial letter.