

Dear St John's Church family

I wonder which restrictions you were most looking forward to being relaxed? Playing golf, buying a coffee, having a haircut, seeing grandchildren/parents... Sometimes it's only when you lose something that you realise how precious it is.

Free to gather again...

From this weekend churches round the country will be free to meet in line with government guidelines. We will be able to see each other, listen to God's word together and publicly proclaim the greatness of our God.

However, we must remember that persecuted Christians never have that freedom. In many countries Christians have to gather in secret: in houses, caves, even hidden corners of prison camps. For them to meet is to risk social disadvantage, imprisonment or even execution. We might ask, why do they bother? Because *the love that Jesus has given us is stronger than fear*.

So on **Saturday 4th July, 8-9pm we will have a special prayer meeting**, to praise God for the freedom we have, to pray for his protection as we begin to meet, and to pray for those who are persecuted for Jesus' name. **Join us in the church building, or online through zoom** (meeting id: 9997861102, Password: 123).

...but not yet fully reunited

But our **first service in the building on Sunday 5th July 10:30am** will not be a full reunion. For those who are shielding, lockdown will continue. Although they will be **able to join the services online or via telephone**, we won't for this reason celebrate communion until we are able to all eat together.

Even for those of us in the building it will be a difficult reunion. We won't be able to sing out-loud, or spend time chatting, or have the usual children's groups. We will have to bring our own bibles, sit far apart from other households, and parents of young children will need to bring their own toys, and use a room with the video feed, or a room playing the latest Captain's Cave video.

We will have to go out of our way to be considerate: making sure that we maintain social distancing, sitting in seats that won't block others, arriving before 10:30am, and waiting so that everyone can leave safely.

If being COVID-secure will make meeting much harder, we will all have to ask, is it worth it? As for me, I cannot wait. Whether it is this Sunday, or in a few months' time, I long to see you all.

With love in Christ

Matt