

Letter from the Authorised Worship Assistant, Dr Alain J.E. Wolf

Dear All,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to those of you whom I have not had a chance to meet, yet. I am a lecturer in linguistics and second language acquisition at the University of East Anglia, researching into various aspects of communication across languages and cultures. As some of you know already, on 12th January 2020, I was authorised by the Bishop of Lynn and the PCCs to conduct and assist in services in the benefice of Matlaske. As I write this, I realise what an honour it was to be chosen to preach amongst this very special community. I had time enough for one 'authorised' address in which I talked about the need to live in unconcerned hope rather than abject fear. Little did I know then that fear was about to strike all of us, and that we would need more than ever to feel the presence of our Lord, no longer in the upturned naves of our churches, but in the very midst of our seriously disrupted lives. Presence and absence were themes that were to run through the very fabric of our existence henceforth, and I had another chance to address you, this time online, when I talked about how we, as Christians, are used to defeating absence and loneliness in the everlasting certainty of Christ's invisible presence in the Eucharistic feast. It is, indeed, this invisibility with which I myself have been vying, talking incessantly, it seems, to my ageing mother and to my students, hiding behind screens that failed to reveal their smiling faces, their amazed reactions to my many, doubtless, incongruous, digressions. This month, we celebrate the feast of St Thomas, the apostle who did not believe unless he saw, and was gently rebuked by Jesus, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'. We also celebrate the feast of Mary Magdalene, that much maligned woman in the New Testament. Far from being the sinner that many have represented her to be, Mary's faith in Jesus was one of the most unshakeable. Believed to have been exorcised of seven demons, she surrendered herself completely to the healing love of our Lord. Now more than ever, shouldn't we surrender ourselves to the 'Lord that healeth the broken in heart and boundeth up their wounds'? But we may well ask, like Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37): 'Is there any word from the Lord?' Of course, for many of us, the Lord's silence may shake our faith to the core, but a word from the Lord is not like an oracle telling us what to do. Then, what is it? A word from the Lord is a small disempowered voice which, coming from the depth of our broken situation, transforms our concrete problems into an ultimate and divine reality. I believe none of us are without such experiences when suddenly in our temporal existence, the touch of a loving child, a partner, a beloved animal make the beauty and greatness of the eternal known to us. May we keep ourselves in silence, and open our ears for a 'word from the Lord'.

And so I end this letter with my thanks to all who have already supported me through my incipient and somewhat arrested assistantship, and I look forward, when all of this is over, to meeting more of you and sharing with you the joys of new beginnings and the fulfilment of our lives, because where there is joy, there is indeed fulfilment.

