I’m not going to preach a sermon you will be glad to hear, but I will just offer a few words to guide our thoughts and prayers this afternoon.

Just one thought about buildings: It’s really interesting, as we ease out of lockdown and begin to feel confident in our worship space again, with all the weirdness and anxiety that comes with it, to have two readings that really speak directly to our situation.

In the reading from the first book of the Kings we hear of Solomon’s seven-year project to build the temple of God. We hear of the care the concern and detail that went into that offering of a prayer in stone to the God of Israel. Buildings matter. They always have done, they always will. These are the holy spaces where we sink into prayer most easily. These are the spaces that bear the marks of our ancestors, the alterations of our liturgical and civic journey. These stones are pregnant with the prayers of those who have gone before us, to which we join our prayers for those who will follow after.

But then in our reading from the Acts we hear of the way in which God, by his angels, can open the sorts of doors that imprison us. In Peter we can find ourselves: that when we are imprisoned by whatever it is that hems us in and traps us: be that the past or the present; be that circumstance, or our own choices, or that which has been visited on us from outside, we too can find that the chains fall off our wrists and even gates of iron open on their own accord.

And we find ways to pray in all these circumstances. I’m hugely grateful to Ute for working with me on this service. We will sing again; we will sing again. But there are more ways to worship God in music than singing, and there are more ways by which God can speak to us than we can possibly imagine. And through the organ music tonight, as through the Scripture, the familiar and hallowed prayers of our Anglican history, the quiet permanence of our church building, and silence of our hearts, we might find that God is ready to surprise us with words and works that we may not have been able to predict.

So we open our hearts to the God who can swing wide the gates of even the darkest prison, who dwells on his throne in heaven, in this building, and in our hearts and minds, and pray that our hearts and minds, like the harmonies and cadences of music, might ascend like prayer before his face.

In place of a choral anthem tonight we will now hear "Adagio" by contemporary composer Richard Shephard, who was a chorister at Gloucester, a lay clerk here in Salisbury and was written especially for David Power when he did a cathedral tour to play the organ in every cathedral of the land.