

Scattered but Still Present – St John’s Church, Farncombe 11th July 2021 – Sixth Sunday after Trinity



Dear friends,

As I write we have no idea how the Church will implement the Government’s planned relaxations of coronavirus restrictions from July 19th: I expect the Recovery Group chaired by Bishop Sarah of London will come up with some guidance, but a lot will be left to work out locally. Of course in some ways this is sensible as all churches are different – but equally it would help to have some principles laid out! We will see.

As many people have pointed out in other contexts than the Church, relying more on individual choice to determine behaviour is potentially very divisive. I remember pointing out last year that individuals have very different assessments of risk basically rooted in their personality, and that hasn’t changed. We may work out some protocols for St John’s but we will not be able to *make* anyone behave a particular way and all I can do is encourage you as strongly as I can to bear with one another and accept the differences between us which in many ways are fruitful and useful – even if they bring the potential for conflict.

If you need to contact the church, don’t call the Parish Office as it’s not likely the messages will be checked very often. Instead phone me on **860709** but note that I am on leave this coming week.

If there’s anything you want to share with other church members as part of this bulletin, do let me know.

Other than that – please keep looking out for each other, contacting each other, and praying for each other!

James

Some news:

- You can download or listen to the audio version of this bulletin and service at www.farncombe.org.uk/churchathome.
- I've mentioned recently that I've been working on proper role descriptions for the various, many jobs people do for the church. These have now been drafted out and I'm checking with Julia Foster, as our Safeguarding Officer, which she thinks DBS clearance applies to. Once that's done I will ask the organisers of various responsibilities to check the drafts make sense (eg Graeme Pullen in respect of the servers).
- A message from Ingrid Collins who runs the Co-Op Funeralcare branch. "To mark 'Make a Difference to Children Month', and the end of a very tricky school year, Co-Op Funeralcare in Farncombe is running a competition to design a postcard for the summer. Pick up an entry form from the branch on Farncombe Street or email farncombefnc@coop.co.uk and ask for one to be emailed to you. We'd love to have our windows full of art done by our local children."
- Thanks to Catherine Marsden, Judith Smith, Nick Manning and the virtual choir for their contributions to this week's audio worship.

This week's liturgy:

The Lord is the strength of his people and a stronghold of salvation to his anointed:
O Lord, save your people, and give your blessing to your inheritance.
(from Psalm 28)

Opening Prayer:

In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St Paul says 'Be imitators of God; love as Christ loved; do not grieve the Holy Spirit; put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice.'
So let us confess our sins to God, who forgives us in Christ.

My God, I thank you for all your mercies to me, and especially that you have given me time for repentance and amendment of life. Give me light to see my sins, and grace to be truly sorry for them. Amen.

+ Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

The Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity:

O Lord, from whom all good things come:
grant to us your humble servants,
that by your holy inspiration
we may think those things that are good,
and by your merciful guiding may perform the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First Reading: from the Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians, *read on the audio by Catherine Marsden*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading: from St Mark's Gospel, chapter 6

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

This is the Gospel of the Lord: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

There are many occasions when I am relieved I am not a member of the Cabinet. At the moment I would find it impossible to maintain in interviews that the planned relaxations in coronavirus restrictions are 'irreversible' when we all know, and the Government too must know, that they are plainly not. They are not because we don't know what's around the corner, and although it's very unlikely that a new mutation of the virus could evade our vaccine protection to the extent that it caused a problem, it's still *possible* that one might, and in those circumstances any government would be wildly irresponsible not to bring control measures back in. So all anyone could honestly say is that they *hope* the relaxations are irreversible, or that they *intend* them to be, and, as I say, I am glad I am not in the position of choosing between my job and telling untruths.

In our Gospel reading today, Herod has made a rash promise: 'I will give you anything' he says to his stepdaughter, and as a result John the Baptist dies. He isn't the only character in the Scriptures who falls foul of an unwise oath: we don't often read the story of Jephthah in the Book of Judges, who agrees to sacrifice to God the first creature who greets him on his

return home, which turns out to be his daughter. It's a Hebrew version of the Greek myth of King Idomeneus, who returns from the Trojan War having sworn to the sea-god Poseidon, in return for a safe passage, to sacrifice the first creature that meets him – and because the servants forget to set his dog loose, it's his daughter in that story too. 'Careful what you promise' seems to be the message of these episodes and tales (as well as 'don't be a king's daughter if you can help it').

Christian life is full of promises. The word *sacrament*, of course, means a vow. We make them to God, and God makes them to us, every time we gather at his altar to confess our sins and try to do better next time; but there are also rarer and more striking occasions – baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and ordinations. Ordained people make an especially dramatic series of promises which they rehearse every year at the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday, gathered as the apostolic community around their bishop before plunging into the Paschal mystery that leads to Christ's passion, death and resurrection, the core of the faith. But laypeople have their own version on Pentecost Day, when in response to the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, the congregation is invited to stand and make promises of their own:

By the Spirit's power, will you dare to walk in God's path, trusting him to be your guide?

We will.

Will you dare to share your riches in common and minister to each other in need?

We will.

Will you dare to pray for each other until your hearts beat with the love of God?

We will.

Will you dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places?

We will.

This is the holy common people of God taking up their mission as the Body of Christ in no uncertain terms.

All the promises we poor humans make are grounded in the great promise of God: that – as we know in Jesus Christ – he will not abandon us, that he will always work to draw us into his eternal life, that his forgiveness and justice stand at the heart of all things entirely independent of what we do; that (as he said to Mother Julian of Norwich) all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well – which is very much not the same as saying that everything will go right, but that it will be right in the end. This is the 'inheritance' of believers that Paul refers to. An inheritance is something that you do not already possess, but that you are assured of possessing at some point, something that awaits you in the future, something that (even if you do not have it in your hands now) cannot be taken away from you. In the same way that reckless human beings might make spending plans on the basis of their inheritance, we can also take decisions based on our inheritance from the Lord – with the difference that what he promises us is absolutely and irrevocably guaranteed by his eternal nature, not threatened in any way by inflation, fluctuation in share values, property prices, fire, theft, flood or asteroid strike, or anything like that. Nothing can affect

the promises of God, because there is nothing to which he is subject. His word made all things, continues to sustain them, and nothing can make his word untrue.

This week, after eight years of striving to fulfil in Farncombe Parish the promises we all make and particularly those ordained people make, Maggie leaves us for Devon. It's not the wilderness. It's not a mission field full of danger and threat, or at least no different dangers and threats from those of Surrey. But God's promise goes ahead of her, and she will find her new life there as embedded in it as her old life here was. Wherever we go, too, however far we wander, how much we succeed in being faithful to our undertakings or however we fail, the promise of God in which all our smaller and lesser promises have their foundation is our rock and confidence. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Intercessions led on the audio by Judith Smith

Please pray for:

- Efforts to restrain and combat the coronavirus in this country and around the world; the just and effective distribution of vaccines and treatments;
- The epidemic to pass quickly, for recovery, and for learning from the experience;
- Our government and all those faced with making decisions in this emergency; ongoing wars in the Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, and Tigray;
- Those who are at work, those who can't work, and those who are worried about their livelihoods;
- Medical staff and carers;
- In the Global Church, the Episcopal Church of the Philippines, and its Prime Bishop, Joel Pachao;

- In our Diocese, the Board of Finance, the Diocesan Secretary, and members of the Diocesan Synod and General Synod;
- In our Deanery, the parishes of Elstead, Thursley and Peper Harrow, and their incumbent Hannah Moore;
- In our Parish and locally, the Camino Café, Skillway, and the work of the Samaritans;
- Those who are sick or in need of prayer: Susan Caffyn Parsons, Thelma Hunt, Sylvia Hunt, Sophie, Lynn Holcombe, Andrew Harrington, and Yvonne Budd;
- Any who have died recently; or whose year's mind falls around this time, among them Sylvia Greenough, Peg Bowra, Christine Manning, David Cornwell, Sheila Strugnell, and Brian Read.

We join our prayers with those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St John, and all the saints, and offer them to you, Father, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn (sing (if you want to!) to Pastor Pastorum, 'Faithful shepherd feed me')

Lord, we cannot seek you
On your altar throne;
Yet we may receive you,
Weary and alone.

Far from priest and altar,
Christ, to you we cry:
Come to us in spirit,
Let us feel you nigh.

In our silent worship,
Let us share the feast;
Be your love the altar,
Be yourself the priest.

Prayer of Communion

Lord Jesus, we are created and made to be members of your Church, but for now many of us are scattered and dispersed, as the children of Israel were scattered, and cannot meet together. As you are the Head of the Body, we know that in you and by the eternal offering of your Body and Blood, once and always, we are united together. Come in spirit to our hearts + and never let us be separated from you. Amen.

Almighty God, who governs all things in heaven and earth: hear the prayers of us your servants, and grant to this parish of Farncombe all things needed for its spiritual and material good and peace. Strengthen the faithful, bless the priests, protect and guide the children, crown with joy the lives of the old. Comfort the ill, the lonely, the sad and tired. Convert the wicked, rouse the careless, recover the fallen, restore the penitent, remove all that hinders the truth, and bring us all to our true home with You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Gathering together all our prayers and praises, we use the words Jesus taught us:

Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name;
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, + the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and for ever. **Amen.**

An image – not from Maggie’s last service which hasn’t happened yet! – but from Sunday 27th June, Trinity 4.

