

Scattered but Still Present – St John’s Church, Farncombe 4th July 2021 – Fifth Sunday after Trinity



Dear friends,

I have not the faintest interest in football and when I was small my dad's attempts to get me to do normal outdoorsy boy's things like kicking a ball around the garden were, I have to admit, met with somewhat half-hearted compliance on my part. But I know that people do, and if I didn't before sitting in Natter on the day of the England-Germany match and hearing a young mum talking with the waitresses and barista Ruby about nothing else, I did afterwards. Oddly enough our local cycle of prayer that day instructed us to pray for 'the Leisure Centre, local sports facilities and those who support sports groups and clubs in this area', reminding us that sport isn't just about elite international celebrities but kids running round a damp field in the drizzle while their parents shout encouragement from the touchline. Part of our work as the Body of Christ in Farncombe is to bring before the Lord the things that our community finds meaningful, and it is a privilege to do so, whatever our personal degree of interest in them may or may not be!

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** or Maggie on **428733**.

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.
- If you would like to attend Maggie's last service with us **next Sunday**, please book in either via the Eventbrite page (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/st-johns-church-farncombe-31813080559>) or by dropping me a line. Also go there to book a place at the Messy Church gathering the day before on Saturday 10th.
- We now know a bit more about the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Guildford Diocese in the autumn. There will be an initial event intended especially for church members at the Lakeside Centre in Frimley on Friday 24th September, followed by a series of local events where Archbishop Justin will talk about his experience of faith and answer questions – these will be especially focused on people who may be thinking about faith rather than existing church members (though they can go). Our local one will be at Priorsfield School at 1.30pm on Sunday 26th.
- 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 Carrie Armitage, Jill Sandham, Nick Manning and John Preston for their contributions to this week's audio worship.

This week's liturgy:

Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I cry to you; be my succour, O cast me not away, nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. (from Psalm 27)

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 Fifth Sunday after Trinity:

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth
to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour 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 book of the Prophet Ezekiel, *read on the audio by Carrie Armitage*

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

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

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

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

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

Sermon

The Gospel-writers very rarely give us any hint of what Jesus's interior feelings may be, so it strikes me quite forcibly when Mark describes him being 'amazed' at the lack of belief he finds among the good folk of Capernaum. The Greek word Mark uses is ambiguous because usually it means something like 'filled with wonder' or 'admiration', but that's clearly not how it's being employed here. Here, Jesus is - in a very human way - caught out by how his message falls largely on deaf ears precisely because the people in his home town know him so well. And yet all he is offering is *good news*, the news that the Kingdom of God is coming, a pronouncement backed up with all sorts of beneficial and dramatic works in the shape of healings and exorcisms. But because it's coming from him, from this uneducated fellow from a humble background whose family is nothing special, nobody takes it seriously, and so he finds himself baffled.

There's an echo in God's warning to Ezekiel centuries before Jesus that the Israelites of his day will probably pay little attention to what he says, too. There are many reasons for this. Most of us, most of the time, are focused on our immediate concerns, on what's in front of

us, and it takes a great effort of will to tear our gaze away from them and look at a bigger picture instead. This is the bane of all reformers and campaigners down the ages, not just prophets of God: that people can often see a problem, and grumble about it, but find it much harder to discern the structures and systems that produce the problem, and which are the things that really need to change. For Ezekiel, the *structure* the Israelites need to change is their relationship with God, but God is abstract and invisible and so this will always be something they find it harder to think about than, say, getting in a new dynasty of kings who they fondly imagine will make a difference.

The issue that confronts Jesus in Capernaum is a bit different. Yes, the Kingdom of God is quite an abstract concept but the Jewish people have by this time had hundreds of years of preparation to expect it, so it shouldn't present too much of a barrier. The barrier is, rather, first that the message is being presented to them by someone they find unlikely, but also precisely that it is *such* good news that they reject it. The idea that there is a God; that he cares about us; that he offers us forgiveness; that he invites us into his glory; that he is at work to reverse the pain and suffering of creation by acts of redemptive power; to people brought up, perhaps, to be cynical and distrusting (as to an extent we all learn to be), these statements add up to a picture which seems so colossally implausible that they are in no place to listen. Even if they believe in God (which all good Jews would) it isn't a God like *this*. After all, that's not what the world *looks* like. That's not what they see around them. So they turn aside from the message without thinking much about it. Their rejection is, if you like, a symptom of an inner demoralization, of long training in disappointment and stoical acceptance of the proposition that nothing can ever be better than it is.

Even if you count up all the people who regularly (at least in normal times!) find their way into St John's to worship, to receive the sacraments of the Kingdom and to celebrate God's saving works, we are perhaps a couple of hundred souls out of twelve thousand in our parish. We know that for each and every last one of them God wants the very best: fulfilment, and fullness of life. He yearns to put a crown of glory on their heads but cannot do so unless they realise, for themselves, what that glory means: a life patterned after that of Jesus Christ. The majority of them, perhaps, have been separated from meaningful contact with God for generations. Jesus was astonished by the unbelief of his hometownspeople, but the difficulties we encounter today aren't surprising. Those we try to reach out to will have all sorts of obstacles in coming to belief: the other, lower-level but more immediate and therefore obvious demands and pressures they have on their lives, that draw attention away from what's really happening to them and to everyone; or the sheer *unlikeliness* of the message we have to give them. Most of the time, overcoming those barriers is long, slow, painstaking, and hard work.

Which is why I rejoice, and we should all rejoice, for the occasions we have to make connections between God and the souls that he longs to embrace: for the events and groups that bring us into contact with people we would not normally meet; for the opportunities to serve and make the love of God known in practical ways. Let us be as

welcoming as we can manage. There are all sorts of reasons why people remain in unbelief: we must make sure we're not one of them! 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 Jill Sandham*

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 Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea, and its acting Archbishop, Nathan Ingen;
- In our Diocese, choirs, organists, musical directors and church musicians; and also all those being ordained deacon or priest this weekend;
- In our Deanery, the parish of Chiddingfold, and its incumbent Rachel Greene;
- In our Parish, uniformed organisations – 1254 Sqn Air Cadets, the Scouts, Guides, Cubs, Brownies and Rainbows – both the young people who take in them and the adults who volunteer to run them;

- Those who are sick or in need of prayer: Susan Caffyn Parsons, Thelma Hunt, Sylvia Hunt, Sophie, Eve Miller, Lynn Holcombe, Andrew Harrington, and Yvonne Budd;
- Those who have died recently, including Doll Newland; or whose year's mind falls around this time, among them Steve Hall.

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.

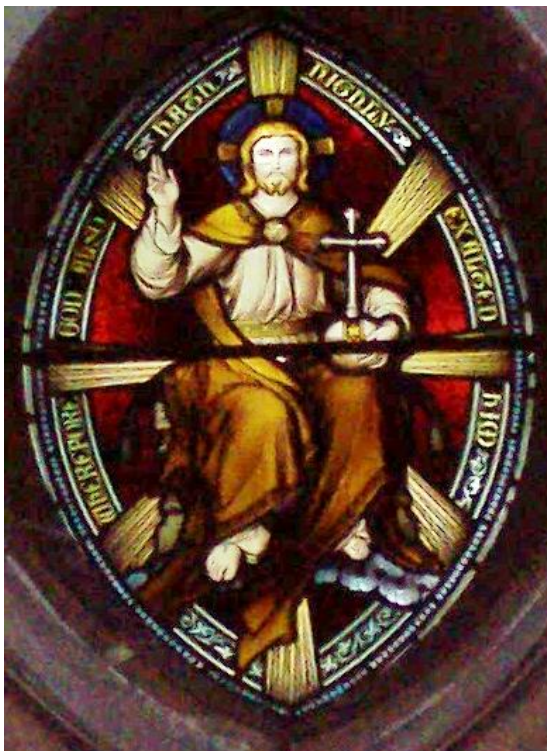
Gathering together all our prayers and praises, we use the words Jesus taught us:

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.**



John Preston contributes this fine photograph of the window of Christ in Majesty from the east end of the church – something we can't normally see close up! The east windows are virtually a complete exposition of the Christian faith in a few images, the crucifixion below and John the Baptist as the last prophet of the 'old dispensation' pointing towards it, and then this image of the exalted Christ above, a harbinger of the New Creation to come. It's all there!