

Scattered but Still Present – St John’s Church, Farncombe 18th July 2021 – Seventh Sunday after Trinity



Dear friends,

This bulletin accompanies the service for July 18th – the first week of our post-Maggie era. People often ask me whether we will get a new curate and the answer is no: any parish has to wait a year before being reconsidered, except in unusual circumstances, and here in Farncombe a stipendiary curate who needed housing would pose us the challenge of making up the income lost from the rent of 73 Binscombe Crescent, and the additional contribution to Parish Share we would have to make: I reckon we'd need to find an extra £20,000 or so at a time when our income is squeezed as it is. However, I have also been telling people that the Lord is clearly as dismayed as I am at the prospect of the good folk of St John's being subjected to an undiluted diet of me for the next few years and so he has nudged a variety of useful persons in our direction. I am very encouraged!

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, even though hours are gradually being increased again. Instead phone me on **860709**.

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.
- After only a handful of takers we decided to cancel the planned **Messy Church** gathering on the 10th. Instead Messy Church will, all being well, resume in the autumn along with many other activities.
- We are forging ahead with arrangements for the **Village Show** on August 21st. As with everything currently this assumes that nothing dreadful happens but if the Government's modelling is correct the current increase in covid infections should be past by then and people will have carried on growing their marrows, apples and flowers anyway!
- This **weekly bulletin** and service, and the accompanying audio recording, will come to an end next week. We all have varying opinions about the Government's decision to release covid restrictions, but with the conclusion of the 'roadmap' the time has come to concentrate on worship in church and what happens next rather than the remote resources which have kept us going since the pandemic started. We'll revert to our traditional pattern of preparing recorded worship at specific times of the year, amounting to six seasonal services per annum. I'll say more about this next week.
- Thanks to Judith Smith, Penny Rivers, Nick Manning and John Preston for their contributions to this week's audio worship.

This week's liturgy:

O clap your hands together, all you people; O sing to God with the voice of melody.
(Psalm 47)

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 Seventh Sunday after Trinity:

Lord of all power and might,
the author and giver of all good things:
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us with all goodness,
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
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 Judith Smith*

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is

joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

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

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

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

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

Sermon

As someone who very, very rarely sees any television, I am often caught out when I discover what someone whose voice I am familiar with from the radio actually looks like. They can be very much at odds with what I imagine. The old joke is that 'the pictures are better on the radio' and in many cases it has to be said that the faces are as well, but it's not so much that the individuals concerned turn out to be spectacularly unappealing but simply that they are *different* from what I have imagined.

In the ancient world you only knew what people looked like if you had met them. Kings and emperors distributed images of themselves in the forms of coins and statues but these were intended as propaganda, not artistic representation: what you saw was not a real person, but an idealised version making a point about authority and power. Anyone who might have met the Emperor Tiberius or King Herod the Great strolling in the street – not that they did, or that King Herod did put his face on coins, being a would-be Jewish king – anyone who met them without any of the panoply of royalty about them wouldn't have recognised them at all.

But the residents of Gennesaret recognise Jesus – or at least someone does, and tells everyone else. Certainly Gennesaret isn't very far along the shore of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, where lots of people would have known who Jesus was. But it's still a bit of a surprise that, in a world where you only know what someone looks like if you've seen them face to face, someone in Gennesaret can tell him apart from any other fellow with a beard. Is it that there is something about him that can be perceived, some sense of the presence of God in him, completely apart from his physical appearance, that can somehow lead to him being picked out from everyone else? The scriptures never give us a single clue as to what he looked like, so we will never know.

As we heard in the readings a couple of weeks ago, when Jesus visits Nazareth where he grew up the people there know him so well that they are disinclined to listen what he has to tell them: in Luke's version of the story where he reads from Isaiah in the synagogue their reaction is so extreme that they actually end up trying to kill him. These divergent reactions show how small communities can work, especially small communities in traditional societies. Most of the time they are tolerant and overlook people's foibles, habits and opinions provided they do not get too intrusive; but when something goes wrong, when there is a sense of threat or fear, they can turn on individuals who don't fit in, those who step out of line and who seem to pose a danger either in themselves or because they might attract unwelcome attention. Jesus in Nazareth is both, even if in Gennesaret he is welcomed for what he can do.

In several of his writings, St Paul is struggling to get across to his readers the radical nature of what God has done by extending the covenant of salvation beyond the Jews potentially to everyone, and we can see that in this extract from Ephesians. He's trying to express what a dramatic thing has happened: those without hope – that is, who have had limited, basically earth-bound relationships with the pagan gods rather than any connection to an eternal source of life – have been drawn into the covenant. The language (from strangers and aliens, to citizens and members of the household) has significant echoes in the debates about nationality and citizenship that we are familiar with from our own time, but which have also reverberated down the whole of human history ever since such ideas as nationhood and social organisation developed. It also links into how we understand one another – not just strangers or newcomers to our community, wherever it happens to be, but everyone.

The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus's message precisely because they knew him so well, and could not accept what he was saying *coming from him*. In the same way, we may find that our closest relationships may have the potential for the most wounding conflict because we know the other person, are familiar with how they function and how they might react in any given circumstances. Longstanding communities, even when they seem to be tolerant, can carry within them whole oceans of unspoken resentments and assumptions that can be atrociously damaging given the right spark to set them off. We may think we know others, when in fact we know them just enough to react in advance to how we

imagine they think or behave, and not enough to develop any deep understanding. I reflect on this as we enter a new stage of our experience of the pandemic, in which we are called on by the State to 'exercise our own judgement' – when the trouble is that people inevitably judge things differently!

Paul reminds the Ephesians, and therefore us, that in Jesus God has brought a radical new element to our relationships. We can see ourselves and everyone around us as standing in precisely the same relationship to God – a relationship of need, requiring forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. However familiar we think we are with the people around us, in Christ all those experiences, assumptions, and speculations are of secondary importance compared to how he sees us all. Greek and Jew, Nazarene and Gennesaretite, risk-averse and risk-taker, we are all his sheep first and everything else second – sometimes a long way second. 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 Penny Rivers*

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 Rwanda, and its Archbishop, Laurent Mbanda;
- In our Diocese, the Cathedral vergers, administrators and volunteer guides, and all vergers across the diocese including Ray, our verger at St John's;
- In our Deanery, the parish of Compton, and Julian Hubbard the priest-in-charge;
- In our Parish, cafes, pubs and restaurants and those who work in them;
- 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, including Norman Edwards; or whose year's mind falls around this time, among them Alan Westmore.

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.

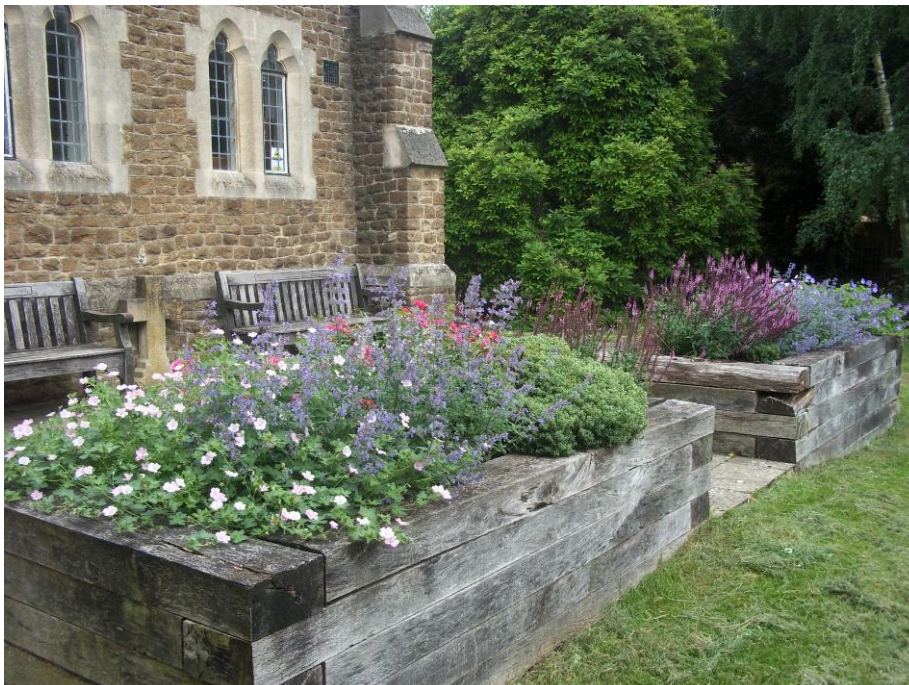
Gathering together all our prayers and praises, we use the words Jesus taught us:

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 photograph of the raised beds in the Quiet Garden which are very colourful at the moment, full of blooming flowers – and bees when the weather permits.