

Scattered but Still Present – St John’s Church, Farncombe 20th June 2021 – Third Sunday after Trinity



Dear friends,

Another month (at least) before the final lifting of restrictions – and even then we are not completely sure what that would mean for our worship life, given that social distancing measures are part of a separate review. I have spoken to colleagues who all experience really the same sense that we are marking time at the moment, waiting until things can begin again in earnest. For my part frustrating though this time of waiting is I am (unusually perhaps!) quite optimistic about what may be ahead of us as I think it could well be a time of great renewal and change in this church community. I hope that everyone will feel confident enough to return to worship physically, if they are able to, restoring that vital part of what it means to be the Body of Christ, and that we will all take part in the process of shaping our future as a church. There are some very encouraging signs and it will be exciting to be able to build on them.

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.

- The standard worship pattern at St John's is now:

Sunday 8am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 9am	Roman Catholic Mass
Sunday 10.30am	Parish Eucharist
Tuesday 10.30am	Midweek Eucharist

In time we will be restoring some worship on Sunday evenings but that's a little way ahead yet.

- You will be aware that Maggie our curate is leaving us over the summer as her husband John retires from Charterhouse and the family move to Devon. Maggie's last Sunday with us will be July 11th, so do make a note of this. We will not now be able to hold a big leaving party and I expect people may want to be present for her last service so I will almost certainly ask you to book in. We are seeing what else we can do to send Maggie appropriately on her way!
- Sadly our friend and former congregation member Doll Newland died last week at St Catherine's Manor in Artington where she had been living for the last year. Her funeral service will be at Guildford Crematorium at 12.45pm on July 5th.
- Thanks to Michael Hornbrook, Judith Smith, Nick Manning and John Preston for their contributions to this week's audio worship.

This week's liturgy:

Turn unto me, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: for I am desolate and in misery;
look upon my affliction and my travail, and forgive my iniquities, O Lord.
(from Psalm 25)

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 Third Sunday after Trinity:

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
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 Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, *read on the audio by Michael Hornbrook*

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great

endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

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

Gospel Reading: from St Mark's Gospel, chapter 4

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

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

Sermon

Anyone who finds themselves in any public role runs the risk that how their community thinks of them may be very different from the way they experience themselves. Sometimes, for instance, politicians carefully construct a public image (think of our Prime Minister carefully ruffling his hair to make sure it looks charmingly untidy!), but try as they might they can't control entirely how they are viewed: people will make their own judgements. I say this happens to those in a public role, but of course human beings talk about one another and reach judgements about each other all the time, some of which may be accurate and some of which may not be. Paul finds himself in the middle of just such a situation, he tells the Corinthians: he experiences 'honour and dishonour, ill repute and good repute'. It's hardly a surprise that a figure such as Paul, with his ministry of organization, encouragement and what we might in a neutral way call *advice* to the

churches of the ancient world, might divide opinion perhaps according to whether you felt the sharp edge of his tongue or not. After all, it was a ministry he basically took upon himself, even if he was eventually endorsed by such structures of authority as the early Church had. Who did he think he was!

'Open wide your hearts', Paul tells the Corinthians: be honest with me as I have been honest with you. Whereas the context of Paul's *first* letter to the church in Corinth is quite clear, this second text is more confusing: what we have today may well have been put together from two or more shorter letters which is why it doesn't follow quite logically, so it isn't entirely obvious why he feels they're withholding something from him: but there is no mistaking the pain and earnestness in his words. Perhaps, sophisticated residents of one of the Empire's most cosmopolitan cities, they felt he was a bit of a bumpkin even if his home of Tarsus was the capital of a province.

If the Corinthians did 'open their hearts', what would they find? What would we find if we did the same? Paul is quite clear, here and in many other places, about the turbulence and storminess of his experiences and feelings, even if much of it is caused, of course, by the work he has chosen to do. It may be that we lead much more sedate lives in which nothing unusual normally happens from day to day, a far cry from travelling to and fro, barely knowing where you will be from one week to the next, in the cause of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the more activity we have, the more interaction with others and with the world we have, the more we will find the state of our souls resembles that stormy sea around the boat carrying Jesus and the disciples. This is why even people living in religious communities have to make their confession no matter how placid their lives look like from the outside: what's going on inside when you try to live in close community with others is quite another matter!

The first words we have in this reading from 2 Corinthians today are 'we work together with him', and that is what we do. We are, or should be, all too aware of the storms and turbulence we carry inside ourselves and the business of the Holy Spirit is to bring peace, in so far as peace can depend on us. In Jesus we find all truth – the truth about ourselves, about others, and about God. By constantly, carefully and determinedly bringing him to bear on our inner lives, by 'opening our hearts' and asking Jesus to speak into them the words of command and eternal peace, we find ourselves drawing close to the truth. He will show us which of our perceptions are correct and which are not; reassure us of his presence; and remove from us the anxiety at the things (real or imagined) which threaten our wellbeing. Of course this does not mean that turbulence and violence cease completely and we will not experience storms at all. There are real terrors, real injustices and real difficulties to contend with and no reading of either Paul's words or the Gospels will reveal anything else. This world is not as it should be and as God wills it. But our own fears and insecurities lend its dark powers a strength that they do not deserve and, armed with the grace of Christ, working together with him, we can do a lot to reduce their hold on us.

Paul, of all people a man of turbulence and passion, learned to carry within him a sea of calm and peace. It was his trust in Jesus Christ that made the difference. And knowing that Christ's God-filled word stills the storm is what makes the difference to us as well. 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 Church of North India and its Moderator, Prem Chand Singh;
- In our Diocese, church treasurers and administrators (remembering David our own treasurer and Sharon & Claire in the office);
- In our Deanery, the parish of Witley, and the incumbent James McKeran;
- In our Parish, shops and businesses, especially those who are finding current conditions hard;
- Those who are sick or in need of prayer: Steve Ferrin, Susan Caffyn Parsons, Thelma Hunt, Sylvia Hunt, Sophie, Eve Miller, Lynn Holcombe, Andrew Harrington, and Yvonne Budd;

- Those who have died recently, including Ann McCann and Doll Newland; or whose year's mind falls around this time, including Sarah Hammond.

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.

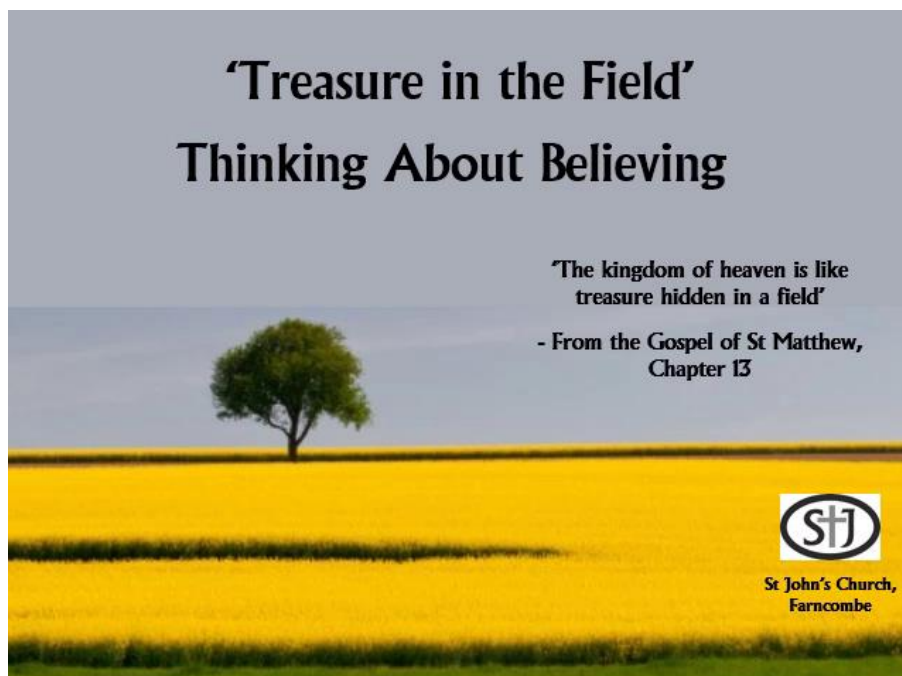
Gathering together all our prayers and praises, we use the words Jesus taught us:

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.**



Some years ago now we ran a short enquirers' course in which I, Maggie and Lois discussed different aspects of what it's like being a Christian. We've been turning these five talks into video presentations and although there is still some work to do I hope to have them completed in a little while. They could then be used as part of a new course – perhaps remotely so it's convenient for people to follow at home.