

## Newsletter 31

*"We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand"* say the words of that well-known harvest hymn. At this time of year, with Harvest Festivals coming up at Holy Trinity on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and St. John's on 10<sup>th</sup> October, we remember with thanks that ultimately, we are dependent on God for the growth of our daily food. *"All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above; then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love."* We also look forward to our Parish Harvest Lunch starting at 12 noon in St. John's church hall on 10<sup>th</sup> October – £5 per head. Please sign at the back of either church if you would like to attend, or contact the church wardens. Rev'd Helen Blackburn will preach and preside at St. John's on 10<sup>th</sup> October and we look forward to her returning to the parish. Later that day, there will also be Harvest Evensong at 6.30 pm at St. John's. The charities we are supporting this year in our Harvest appeal are the Cathedral Archer project and Medecins Sans Frontieres. Unless we hear otherwise from you, we will split all donations equally between these two charities.

This coming Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> September, it is CCN Sunday – an annual reminder of our membership of the Community of the Cross of Nails. Mike Morton-Thorpe will be preaching at St. John's, and there is also an International CCN service available to watch online at any time from Sunday onwards. This year, it has been put together by the USA board of the CCN. The link to this 23-minute service will be available on our website from Sunday onwards and I highly recommend it as a way of connecting with our international partners and as a window into some of the peace and reconciliation work going on in the USA.

Looking ahead, we shall have our annual service of Commemoration of the Faithful Departed on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November at 3.30 pm at St. John's. Nearer the time, we shall have lists available for you to add names of those you would like to be remembered. *Blessed are those who mourn*, said Jesus in Matthew's gospel. Let us hold in our prayers all in our parish who are bereaved at this time.

We have been busy in the parish recently with weddings, two of which have taken place and we look forward this Saturday to the wedding of Jenny and Matthew who live in our parish, and in October of Sunita (formerly living in this parish) and David. Let us pray for these couples as they prepare for their weddings. Also let us pray for baptisms of three children coming up in the next few weeks.

Sadly, the Resurrection Choir from St. Petersburg are unable to come this November after all, due to Covid travel restrictions, but we hope to welcome them next year. However, on 21<sup>st</sup> November, I am pleased to say that Jane Foster, Relationships Manager from the Children's Society, will speak at our 10am service. This is timely, as we shall be having our Christingle service on 5<sup>th</sup> December and as always, our Christmas collections will go to the Children's Society.

We have lots to look forward to, and we ask for your prayers for all of our upcoming services, for the ministry team and the wardens and every member of our churches as we continue through the vacancy and serve the parish as the body of Christ in this place.

With warm wishes,  
Angie

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### Sermon Trinity 13 Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021 10 am at St. John's

Deuteronomy 4.1-6; James 1:17-27; Mark 7.1-8;14-15;21-23

*"This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me". Mark 7:6*

I was worried when I first dug up my potatoes – which I had never grown before – that although the leaves on top were big and healthy, I may find potatoes the size of marbles below. I shouldn't have worried – one of the first I dug up weighed 1lb 5 ozs! You can make a lot of chips with that!

Today's readings focus on the possible contrast between outward appearance and inner reality. James challenges those who can 'talk the talk' but not 'walk the walk'.

In the Gospel passage which Mike read, Mark tells the account of Jesus challenging the Pharisees who criticised the disciples for eating food with 'defiled hands'. He called them hypocrites – meaning literally 'acting out a theatrical role' from the Greek root *hypokrisis*.

The Pharisees had rules about ritual cleansing of hands before eating – an act of sanctifying hands that would have touched unclean things, according to their Jewish laws.

Of course, we are used to laws in these Covid times that are about actual hygiene. Hand-washing, social distancing, mask wearing were all practical ways to stop the spread of the virus and to keep us all safe and save lives, as we saw on the lecterns of Downing Street briefings.

Here, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' provocative and judgemental criticism of the disciples by calling out their hypocrisy. He challenges the fact that even though they appear outwardly to doing all the right things, their inner thoughts and intentions do not honour God.

*"This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me". (v.6)*

If we look at the Deuteronomy reading, this urges Israel to "give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I am charging you." (vv.1-2)

Jesus points out to the Pharisees that they have taken and amended their understanding of the original ten commandments to be self-serving, "teaching human precepts as doctrines" (v.7) ... abandoning the commandment of God and holding to human tradition.

In contrast, James urges us to "welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls .... be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves". (vv.21-22). Again, it is about inner behaviour and intentions rather than outer appearances or statements. Actions resulting from a heart which has the word of God implanted in it, rather than human, self-serving intentions. As the summary of the Law states,

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“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

This sums up the 10 commandments – loving God and loving others. Not self-serving.

The heart is mentioned twice in the passage from Mark that Mike read. As one commentator puts it, the heart was thought to be important for religious faith and practice - the centre of one’s will and decision-making abilities. So, to turn one’s heart away from God or to have it filled with evil intentions was a grievous sin. Also, hardness of heart reveals a lack of compassion toward others.

So, we are urged to examine our own hearts.

To make sure that we have not inadvertently drifted away from putting God at the centre – and if we have, to return.

Our first hymn - Fight the good fight – recognises that life is a constant battle with things which may draw us away from God. But Christ is our guide, strength, pattern ... And where we need God’s grace to help us, because we can’t do it in our own strength, it is there if we ask in prayer.

Blest are the pure in heart ... so goes the hymn that will be sung during communion ... again speaks of Jesus as our pattern, who will dwell in our heart.

Soren Kierkegaard said that “purity of heart is to will one thing”. And this thing is the Good. To will as God wills, to decide to make a choice for God. To choose right relations with God, each other and our community.

This sounds quite like our parish mission statement, included in our parish profile. We say that our mission is to Love God, Value People, Care for His world. All of these things are signs of being pure in heart, loving God and loving others.

Finally, our parish prayer echoes these sentiments, asking God to guide us that we may share his love and serve God in this parish now and in the future. So let us pray it now together.

Heavenly Father,  
We thank you for our parish;  
for all that has been,  
for all that is now,  
and for all that is to come.  
Bless and guide all that we do  
now and in the future  
as we seek to serve you  
as the body of Christ in this place  
and share your love for all.  
Amen