

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning”. (Lamentations 3.22,23)

What a wonderful promise from God, to begin each day with. As I sit here and write this newsletter on a beautiful sunny morning, we are assured that whatever our circumstances, God’s love surrounds us, giving strength and comfort where needed.

We are extremely grateful for our recent visiting clergy who have preached and presided. During July, Bishop Tim also did a baptism at St. John’s; Matt Wood, assistant curate from St. John’s Ranmoor was at Holy Trinity. During August, Rev’d Canon Dr. Matthew Rhodes, vicar of St. John’s Ranmoor will be at St. John’s on 8th August and then on 22nd August, retired priest Julian Sullivan will be at St. John’s.

August is typically a month when some of our regular activities take a break, but of course this year, things have been different because many have not been running anyway. Morning Prayer on Zoom will be taking a break during August but Mike Morton-Thorpe will continue to say Morning Prayer at St. John’s each Tuesday and Wednesday in August at 9 am. The churches will continue to be open each day for private prayer – Monday to Saturday 10-4 pm at Holy Trinity and Monday to Thursday at St. John’s. The Litany of Reconciliation will be said at St. John’s at 12 noon on Thursday 19th August. The reintroduction of coffee after the service has resumed successfully at Holy Trinity and will resume as soon as possible at St. John’s. We are working on plans for midweek communion services. More information in the next newsletter.

The Diocese has given advice and guidance on the lifting of Covid restrictions but ultimately it is up to each parish to do what they feel comfortable with. The Bishops report that generally, across the Diocese, the following is happening, which is roughly in line with what our church wardens have decided, and any changes will be announced in church:

- masks are mostly being retained in church
- social distancing, or at least the option of social distancing, is being retained, sometimes with zonal seating which allows those who are least vulnerable to sit together if they prefer
- ‘one way’ systems are being retained, with ‘track and trace’ sign in and hand sanitiser available on entrance and exit and at the administration of Holy Communion
- congregational singing is being restored, but behind masks
- for the time being, the common cup has mostly not been restored

The church wardens are working hard to prepare all of the necessary documentation for the Diocese during the vacancy and they would welcome your input. So, if you have any thoughts about our vision for the parish in the future as we prepare to advertise for a priest-in-charge and oversight minister, please let the church wardens know by emailing or writing to Liz Frost liz.frost123@btinternet.com or Juanita Haigh juanita_haigh@hotmail.com or by handing in a letter at church **by Friday 20th August.**

Whatever our plans for the summer holidays, I pray that we will all be able to have the necessary rest and relaxation.

With love and best wishes, Angie

Sermon - Trinity 9 Sunday 1 August 2021

Readings: Exodus 16.2-4; 9-15; Ephesians 4.1-16; John 6.24-35

We use the Church of England 'lectionary', which sets the readings for each Sunday in the Church of England. We use 'related' readings, i.e. the set of 3 readings usually have a common theme.

In listening to today's readings, you have probably noticed that there is an obvious theme – at least if you look at the Exodus and John readings – bread.

However, there are two other words that struck me as I looked at these readings – *belief* and *work*. On thinking some more, I came to realise that these three apparently different themes – bread, belief and work, are actually connected.

One Bible commentator explains how there was a name in nineteenth-century China for persons who came to church because they were hungry for material food. In this case, the staple was rice; equivalent to our staple of bread. They converted, were baptized, joined the church, and remained active members as long as their physical needs were met through the generosity of the congregations. But once their prospects improved and they and their families no longer needed rice, they drifted away from the church. Hence, missionaries called them "rice Christians."

The Gospel reading records Jesus' words to the crowd straight after miracle, or 'sign', of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Jesus says, "... you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves". You could call these 'bread Christians'.

Jesus then urges them to 'work' for the food that will endure for eternal life. More of a spiritual, rather than a physical nourishment and sustenance; looking after their soul as well as their body.

He then refers them to a story that would be well known to them from the scriptures, in the book of Exodus. It is about the Israelites complaining because they were hungry, so God sent 'manna', bread, from heaven to eat. He makes the point that this 'bread', in both cases, comes from God and gives life to the world. So the crowd now wants this special bread. He is using it as a metaphor for the spiritual life that results from coming to Jesus. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever *believes* in me will never be thirsty."

And so, on to the theme of **belief**. I was struck by the importance of this in the Gospel reading.

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you..."

Then they said to him, What must we do to perform the works of God?" And Jesus answered,

*"... **believe** in him whom he has sent". And later, "whoever **believes** in me will never be thirsty".*

This has now introduced the theme of '**work**'.

*“Do not **work** for the food that perishes ...”*

What must we do to perform the **works** of God?

Jesus answered,

“This is the work of God – that you believe.”

So we seem to have gone round in a circle. Believing is performing the work of God, and performing the works of God is believing in him whom God sent.

What does this ‘work’ of believing entail in practice?

I suggest that the Ephesians reading has some practical ideas.

It has some suggestions for how to behave with each other:

With humility and gentleness, patience,

bearing with one another in love,

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – because there is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all.

In writing this letter to the Ephesians, Paul acknowledges that all have different gifts and callings to equip them for the **work** of ministry, so they can do different things – including being apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. We can extend that to our own context where we see people in our congregation with different gifts and callings. We use the gifts we are given in the life of this church, the body of Christ in the parish of Abbeydale and Millhouses. This is particularly pertinent at this time as we are relying on the gifts of the church wardens to manage the vacancy. It is also a time when we need to reflect on who we are as a church in this place; what it means to be the body of Christ in Abbeydale and Millhouses; what being church means for us, and therefore, what kind of parish priest will help us continue that work and calling. Ultimately, it is, as the letter to the Ephesians says, becoming a whole body, “joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly”, and so, “promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

This is the end result – to build up the body in love. To build up our parish in love.

And we see evidence of this in the acts of caring and supporting that go on within our congregation, as well as the gifts and skills that are used in the wider community and our sharing of the gospel through the means that are possible for us.

A final act of our *work of belief* is related to the bread which we share weekly in our Eucharist.

At the last supper, Jesus asked us to remember him each time we eat bread and drink wine. Breaking and sharing bread is a common daily activity in any household. It happened to me yesterday morning with my one-year old granddaughter. She was sitting on the work surface by the microwave at 6 am, having woken up early and I looked after her while her Mum went and got more sleep. I gave her a snack of bread and honey, and she just broke a bit off and handed it to me.

By doing what Jesus asked, in order to remember him, we are *believing* in him. We are doing the *work* of God. And so we shall do this as we share in the bread today. Amen