

Newsletter 25

Pentecost is a time when we remember the exciting events which energised the disciples and brought new opportunities and challenges into their lives. This is a significant time for our parish and for Peter with all the changes and challenges coming up as he retires in a few days' time. We are thankful for over 15 years of journeying together in this parish and we pray that the new phase ahead will bring new opportunities as we look forward. In the words of our Parish Prayer:

*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*

Last Sunday was a busy day for the parish as we had the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in the afternoon and here are a few 'highlights':

- Katie Collins has now taken over from Janet Young as PCC secretary. We are grateful to Janet for her many years in this role.
- Thankfully, all of the current church wardens and deputy wardens were re-elected, and we are delighted to welcome one new deputy at Holy Trinity – Val Smith.
- The PCC members due to finish this year have all agreed to stay on for another year.

Peter's 'Vicar's report' is given in full at the end of this newsletter.

As you know, Trinity Sunday is Peter's last Sunday. Unfortunately, because we are still restricted on numbers, church is full to capacity so we now have a waiting list. If you would like to go on the waiting please contact Bev. If you are already attending and you find you are unable to come please let Bev know as soon as possible so she can offer your place to someone on the waiting list. For the final part of the service we will all gather safely in the car park to sing a hymn together, weather forecast looks ok but bring a brolly just in case! Therefore, the only parking spaces in use on that day will be the disabled ones. Otherwise, we ask that you will park considerately on the adjacent streets.

From June onwards, Morning Prayer will continue on Zoom on Mondays and Thursdays at 9.30am and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 9.00am, Mike Morton-Thorpe will lead Morning Prayer at St. John's.

NB as Monday 31st May is a Bank Holiday, we shall not be saying Morning Prayer that day.

Newsletters will continue and we will give details of the visitors who will preside and preach when Angie is not available. On 6th June we shall welcome Rev'd Ian Parkinson to lead the 10.00am service at Holy Trinity.

Please remember Peter and Joan in your prayers this week especially, and we look forward to a special celebration on Trinity Sunday of Peter's ministry.

With our best wishes,
Peter and Angie

RECENT SERMONS

EASTER 7 Sunday 16th May 10 am at Holy Trinity

Readings: Acts 1.15-17; 21-end; 1 John 5.9-13; John 17.6-19

The context of today's gospel reading is the 'farewell discourses' recorded in Chapters 13-17 of the gospel of John. Jesus' 'goodbye speech', his conversation with the disciples and his prayers for them before his life dramatically changed – his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension as we have just celebrated.

Jesus is sitting with the disciples after the 'last supper', the meal before the Passover festival, and washing the disciples' feet.

It includes 'in the moment' elements – human, bodily and tangible things – eating, footwashing, talking about immediate concerns; then the conversation switches to eternal things and preparing the disciples for what is to come, and how to live in the future.

During that conversation following the meal, Jesus has said these things, all leading up to today's reading:

"I am with you only a little longer" (John 13.33)

Assuring the disciples, he says "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me". (John 14.1)

"I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever". (John 14.11)

In our liturgical calendar, this covers Holy Week, Eastertide, Ascension and Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday.

And continuing his farewell discourse, this is how Jesus asked the disciples to live:

"Abide in me" (John 15.4)

"Love one another as I have loved you. "(John 15.12)

And preparing them for the future, he said:

"The world may hate you, as it did me" (paraphrase of 15.18)

"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16.13)

"A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me."(John 16.16)

"You have pain now, but I will see you again." (John 16.22)

"I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (John 16.28)

This brings us to Chapter 17 and today's gospel reading:

Having said all of this, Jesus prays for his disciples – and in doing so, shows his love for them. In this reading, three things struck me:

- Overall, there is a sense of 'handing over'
- Jesus is interceding for them, identifying with them in their humanity and aware of the dangers of the world
- Hence, Jesus prays for their protection

Handing over

All that he did in the world is now up to them to continue!

“I am no longer in the world but they are in the world” (v.11)

What a responsibility, and I wonder if they realised the true magnitude of it at the time.

The work of showing who God is, sharing his love and teaching people about Jesus and why he came is up to them!

Jesus says to his Father, “I am coming to you” (v.11)

The disciples are now the ones staying ‘in the world’.

Interceding and identifying with their humanity

Jesus knows how difficult it is to be ‘in the world’ and he also knows and understands human nature; its potential to be distracted and drawn away from the unity of being ‘God-centred’ and led by the Holy Spirit and living in the love and truth of God, to being self-centred with all of the difficulties that can bring.

Prayer for protection

So, he asks for protection -

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (v.11)

Protect them from the evil one (v.15)

Sanctify them in the truth (v.17)

Implications for us now?

This is a time of great change for the population as we hopefully enter a ‘post-covid’ era.

So, change for us personally and for the life of churches in general.

Also, change for our parish.

As Peter will be leaving his role three weeks from now, it feels like we are approaching a time of loss and ‘handing over’ and looking ahead.

For a time, we will be without a full-time parish priest.

It is a good time to ponder some questions, and perhaps the answers will be different for each of us:

What will we be losing?

What will we continue in terms of our personal life of faith?

What do we think Peter would want to ‘hand over’ to us at this time?

What would we hope for in the person who will follow him?

St John's Sunday 23rd May 2021 Pentecost Sunday

The late Russian Orthodox Archbishop Anthony Bloom recalled the time when he was discussing Christianity with a learned Japanese writer. The writer told Bloom: "I think I understand about the Father and the Son, but I can never understand the significance of the honourable bird." Many people might sympathise with the Japanese writer, for the Holy Spirit has traditionally eluded the attention of scholars and preachers like a bird in flight resists capture. We cannot capture the Spirit or cage it, allowing it to limp out only on special occasions like baptism and confirmation. The honourable bird is still in flight. Like the wind you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes. But you do know when it's been around.

Our own language tells us that it's difficult to contain or even describe spirit, but usually spirit-talk suggests life and movement and energy. We rarely hear people talk about a high-spirited turtle or an inspired tortoise. A high-spirited horse, yes, which is rearing to go. We talk of the creative energy in inspiration, an energy which has the power to break through barriers, break records, go beyond the expected and the mediocre, break through the locked doors of convention and not be bound by restrictions. However, very little of that language describes what was going on behind locked doors somewhere in Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

A group of dispirited followers of Jesus had gathered and locked themselves in an upper room, probably the same room where the Last Supper was held. There was more perspiration than inspiration in the room. There was fear and suspicion. The room was occupied by a group of followers who were afraid that they would suffer the same fate as their master. So they listened to every step on the stair; they waited for the knock of the executioner; they prayed that no one would discover their hiding place and that the world would leave them safe in their sacred enclosure.

In contrast there is the powerful image of the Holy Spirit as one who is not shy of the boundaries and the barriers that people erect. He is not halted by locked doors or locked hearts; he doesn't exclude himself from the restrictive areas people settle in. When the Spirit comes, it is not like a spring breeze that whispers unnoticed through a room; it is more like a hurricane that lays flat all the precious protections against its force. And the Spirit takes this group of dispirited followers and fires them with a new energy and a new enthusiasm and a new authority.

The presence of the Spirit makes the disciples open their lives to others: they don't just decorate their sacred enclosure, they leave it and pass over into the lives of other people with the gifts of Gospel and peace and forgiveness.

The disciples go outdoors. They go to the marketplace where people gather and there they proclaim to all how they have been changed by the power of the Spirit. They tell a Magnificat and proclaim how God has worked wonders in them. At first the crowds think that the apostles are drunk – no doubt because they're sure it takes some kind of spirit to transform these men. Whatever it is, everyone acknowledges that something happened to dramatically change the outlook and behaviour of the followers of Jesus. The name of that experience is Spirit.

The crowd's second reaction is a joyous one when they realise that the apostles are speaking their language. Perhaps we've all heard people say to us in a mixture of relief and enthusiasm: "Now you're speaking my language!" When that happens there is communion, where before there had only been misunderstanding and division. The apostles got through to people, they spoke the deep language that is in all of us and which rarely gets spoken. It is the language in search of understanding; it is music in search of a melody. St Paul spoke of it as inarticulate groaning, the cry of the spirit within us. The apostles reach people in this profound language. It is the language of the Spirit.

The Spirit which fired the apostles and which enthused Paul is the same Spirit which fires and enthuses us. The Spirit does that in our own mundane attempts to work at forgiveness and love and understanding. That is the language of the Spirit. Forgiveness, love and understanding form a language which everyone understands and needs to hear. That is the language we are invited to speak and the promise is that when we speak it people will recognise it as their own language. They can truly say that we are speaking their language because it is the language which has no boundaries, and no special dictionaries are needed to understand it. It is the language of the Spirit. It is the call of the honourable bird.

My prayer for the future is that all of you who share together in the life of the parish can be filled with that joy and enthusiasm of the Holy Spirit, joy and enthusiasm and energy that those first disciples felt on the Day of Pentecost and that others will be able to feel that same power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Vicar's report APCM 23rd May 2021

It seems very strange to be standing here knowing that this is the last time I will be doing so, strange but liberating. Also slightly odd as it is only six months since our last APCM, (which was delayed from April because of Covid but was for 2019.) So today we look back to 2020. It has certainly not been the year we would have hoped for or envisaged, and certainly not the way I would have hoped to end my time as an incumbent.

I am really pleased to have this opportunity to say a massive thank you to our churchwardens, Liz, Vanessa, Juanita, Val and the deputies Nigel, Juliet and Lynda. They have been a constant support, through these challenging times.

It goes without saying that the rhythm of parish life, the pattern of the churches year and our worship has been severely disrupted. This has raised many issues. We had to close the church halls, the nursery in the parish centre closed, then reopened so that key workers' children could be cared for. The closure of the halls obviously affected our income stream. It was sad to see the halls stood empty, although it did give us the opportunity to decorate St John's Hall!

With our churches closed we had to re-think the way we worshipped, that meant many of us were introduced to the delights of Zoom! I celebrated the Eucharist from my study, we had Services of the Word. Morning Prayer was said daily with the ministry team taking turns to lead. When allowed we moved back into church for our Sunday morning service, alternating between Holy Trinity and St John's. It was certainly different leading a service in a church without a congregation. Of course with the churches closed it affected our occasional offices, no baptisms, my heart went out to the wedding couples who had to cancel their special day, and it was desperately difficult for those who had lost loved ones. I am indebted to those who have enabled us to embrace the technology. To Ian who set up and guided us through the early days, to Liz who explored the world of camera's and the equipment needed to allow the live streaming from our churches and those who have joined her to form a team of 'operators' Vanessa, Juanita, Juliet, Paul and Bev. There has been the occasional technical problems, we know that, all volunteers, no one is a trained camera operator or professional sound engineer!

For those without Wi-Fi and internet we have tried to keep in touch with the regular newsletter. Thank you to Angie for co-ordinating this.

There has been many unseen acts of help and kindness, regular telephone calls, help with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc. Of course there has been regular challenge of an Alan Eost quiz! Thank you Alan.

There has been changes to the ministry team, Gerrie, moved to London in October to be nearer her family. Unfortunately we never had a chance to thank Gerrie for her ministry by way of a party. Ian has had a stroke, and is making a good steady recovery. Ian, like Gerrie, has given his time and energy to the parish, and support to me. I give my heartfelt thanks to them both.

Thank you also to Philippa for her ministry among us, we wish her every success and happiness for the future as she moves to her new post. Among many other things, during this past year, Philippa kept the Café Church going, via Zoom of course.

Jenny Paddock, after over 25 years as Church Hall treasurer has stood down, as we say thank you to Jenny, we welcome Andrew Horsfield as the new treasurer. I would also like to note and say thank you to Maurice Justice, who again, after many years of service has stood down as Chair of the Holy Trinity Hall Committee.

I would like to recognise the work that Bev Ramsey does as our Parish Administrator. Obviously, a lot of her work is unseen but her role enables the parish to run smoothly and without her support my job would have been a lot harder.

I would like to say a special thank you to Angie, for all she contributes in so many ways, and once again for her support. Remember that Angie is a Self-Supporting Associate Priest, (not paid,) it is not her role to run the parish in the absence of a vicar.

So we come to where we are now, and the opportunity to look ahead. We hope and pray that the road map to recovery stays on course, we need to be able to worship freely, to not have to book a place or distance, to sing hymns, to receive the Sacrament in both kinds and importantly to drink coffee and socialise. Having stalled during this past year the momentum is picking up for the re-ordering of St John's.

Of course things are going to be different, you have the challenge of the interregnum, the excitement of a new Priest to be appointed. Your new Priest (Priest in Charge/Oversight Minister) will come to the marvellous benefice of the Parish of Abbeydale and Millhouses, with all its wonderful potential. A fantastic opportunity.

It has been a privilege to be your Parish Priest, I leave with so many memories, Fifteen years' worth! Thank you to all of you that have supported me and allowed me to share in your lives.

On this day of Pentecost when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, my prayer is that this parish can be filled with that joy and enthusiasm of the Holy Spirit that those first disciples felt.