



The Benefice of St Mary's, Chalgrove
with St Helen's, Berrick Salome

Issue 1 | 5th July 2020

Pews News

Welcome

Welcome to the updated Pews News, which we aim to publish once or twice monthly. Unlike the old Pews News, which was circulated in print form, we aim to circulate the new Pews News electronically. If, because of disability or lack of a suitable device, you are not able to access the electronic edition, you may request a paper copy, as we will do a limited print run.



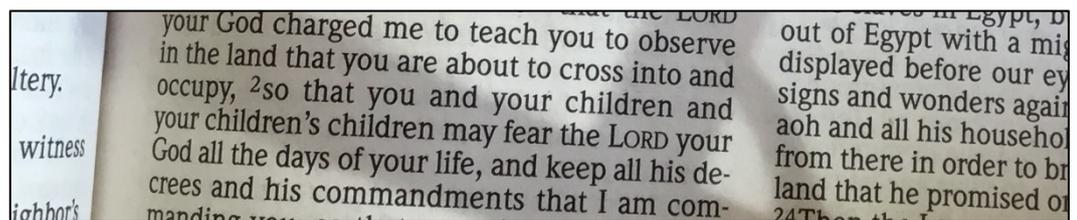
This Week's Service

This week's service is a family service, broadcast on the Benefice YouTube channel. The address of the channel is as follows:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/stmaryschalgrovewithsthelensberricksalome>

but if you have a smartphone you can also access the channel using your phone camera and the Quick Response code image in the margin to the left.

This Week's Reading: Matthew 11.25-end



*“Come to me, all of
you who are tired and
have heavy loads.
I will give you rest”*

Then Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. I praise you because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you have shown them to those who are like little children. Yes, Father, this is what you really wanted. “My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son—only the Father knows the Son. And no one knows the Father—only the Son knows the Father. And the only people who will know about the Father are those whom the Son chooses to tell. “Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads. I will give you rest. Accept my work and learn from me. I am gentle and humble in spirit. And you will find rest for your souls. The work that I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is not heavy.”

(International Children's Bible)

Last Week's Sermon, Fr Daniel Thompson

At the request of several members of the congregation, we have included Fr Daniel's sermon from last week.

"It seems very apt to have a reading about Church at a time when we are starting to reopen and many views and discussions about what Church is are floating around. Very often the debates seem to fall down tradition lines. Evangelicals (including our own Bishop and Archbishop) are praising the success of the Church 'out there', online, at home, in our kitchens, while those of a more Catholic persuasion are mourning the loss of our sacred spaces and celebrating our return. For me this pause in conventional worshipping life has allowed me to ponder at some length on what it is we're going back to, and what it is we should be going back to, in short it's a good time to reflect in ourselves what we actually mean by Church.

There are of course a range of views, but as in many respects our reading marks the inauguration of this new idea ('Church'), it's a good place to begin our thinking.

"It really isn't a continuation of an old life, culture or perspective."

The first thing to recognise is the word 'Church' itself. And although Paul uses it regularly (including in one of the earliest Christian texts; 1 Corinthians) it makes it's first chronological appearance here in Matthew, characterising the entire Gospel as the 'Gospel of the Church'. The word means 'called out', setting apart or assembly and had political implications. The key point with the choice of word is to emphasis the newness of what is going on. It really isn't a continuation of an old life, culture or perspective.

In fact for Matthew the prevailing Jewish culture has actually forfeited its position in this new community ('The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom' Matthew 21:43). Whatever Church is then, from the outset we realise it can't be a continuation of an existing lifestyle, there has to be some kind of change, rethinking or renewal. This is especially pertinent when new clergy ask people what they want from Church, and often receive the answer 'as much like my normal life as possible please' and many new Church initiatives seek to degrade the Church to please as many people as possible, and meet with secular values and I think you can see here that would be wrong.

When the Church looks and feels like the prevailing culture then something has gone astray. We are, by very definition, meant to be 'different'.

This isn't though difference for difference sake, but because something different has happened. The incarnation, the completely unique, once-and-once-only, birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we see in our reading, people try to make Jesus in the mould of past prophets (Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist) but he isn't. And again I think we have a desire to domesticate Jesus, to make him fit with our own models of who and how he should be. And again this would be wrong, we need to have the confidence and faith to allow Jesus to inhabit his own space on his own terms. Anything else is idolatry.

"How often do we try to create Jesus as an extension of ourselves, with miraculously all the same views and values we share?"

If we pause here for a moment, we can ask of ourselves the question of our Church's distinctiveness. How often do we wish the Church was more like 'everyday life' when in reality everyday life should be more like Church? How often do we try to create Jesus as an extension of ourselves, with miraculously all the same views and values we share? We're often quick to see this in other people (Christian Trump supporters

for instance) but how often do we see it in ourselves? Is this an issue we need to guard against?

In many ways these two questions need to be addressed before we move on. And while I don't wish to be too partisan we need to think carefully all the attempts to domesticate the Church and particularly the common myth

that God is 'everywhere', 'everything is Church', and we really don't need to do this or that on a Sunday morning when a cup of tea in the garden does everything you need, as I regularly hear 'you don't need to go to Church to be a Christian'. Jesus gives us this new community, with Peter as its foundation. Surely this means it is something worth considering. Before you start writing me letters of complaint, we need to unpack this as it is extremely important.

The first, most basic point is that the idea God is 'everywhere' in 'everything' is simply unbiblical, in Genesis there is clearly a distinction between God and his creation. This distinction is important. This is what it means for God to be sovereign over all things. Once we start suggesting the God is a 'leaf' or a 'beautiful mountain' or an 'angry hippopotamus' nice though it is, we are lessening the majesty of God, and doing both to him and ourselves a disservice, which has serious spiritual implications.

A lesser God isn't God but something else. And the way we see God impacts hugely on our faith, if God is simply an extension of our Garden, then he is in effect an extension of ourselves, our home, and we're back to where we were at the start. A nice, cuddly religion, but not one that is going to bring about any form of transformation or even Salvation. And let's not forget that when God decided to come into the World he did it in a human being, in a particular locality, at a particular date in history. He could, presumably have chosen to be an 'everywhere' God, but he didn't as it wouldn't achieve what he wanted. A point I'll explain now with the deeper question about Jesus, why he came and what he does. If God really is everywhere all the time, then what is the point of Jesus?

“Surely the greatest mistake in faith is not to take the Cross seriously.”

If Jesus died on the Cross to restore a relationship, broken at the 'fall', then if that relationship is already actually fine, that we can connect with God just by wandering round, then was it all unnecessary? 'Thanks Jesus for the Cross thing but you didn't really bother as I have all I need in front of me and now I'm just going to have another cup of tea'. Surely the greatest mistake in faith is not to take the Cross seriously. It is only through Jesus and what he did that we can know God.

These ideas about the 'everywhereness of God' are very common and very popular, and I like many people I probably subscribed to them myself, but then wondered why my faith felt stagnant, because I was in effect worshipping my life and even in some ways myself. And in many ways the difference, and strangeness of Church guards against this.

We often think Church is a barrier to faith, and many new Church initiatives have been about deconstructing this 'barrier', but what if it was instead a powerful and effective barrier to the faith of self-worship and an open door to worship of the one true God? A lot of current discussion about Church seems to emphasise the domestic faith outside of buildings, which I think misses the point. Our reading today takes place outside, it's not the buildings that make the faith but the relationship with Jesus. As Archbishop Justin keeps telling us, 'The building is closed but the Church is open. Conceptually he's right, but the buildings do serve a purpose, to help carve out

the distinctiveness of our faith from everyday life, and without them we can be vulnerable to the very concerns I have pointed out.

I recognise that I have dwelt quite heavily on this point, but it is key to get the basic concept of Church in place, as something distinct and transformative, before we come on to explore some of the nuts-and-bolts, which I will now do.

The first and most obvious thing is that it is a gathering around Jesus. The new community, is defined by this. And is the thing most challenging to the Jewish authorities. How can a person replace one thousand years of Temple worship? How can one person replace the 500 commandments of Torah? How can someone appear from nowhere and replace the inherited role of Priest? It's hard for us to grasp what a radical break it was, for a new faith to be defined in this way. But it is the very basis of the Church. A community gathered around Jesus.

There isn't the time today to go through the nature of the sacraments, but it should be obvious, from this and as we find on the Emmaus Road, Holy Communion, being literally a gathering around Jesus, that Holy Communion is the very heart of the Church. It is a literal and in every sense a very real embodiment of what is happening in our reading, following Jesus' own commandment ('do this in remembrance of me') and self-depiction ('this is my body') as well as the concept of a New Covenant with God. For those who are icky about hierarchies, look away now, for what we find here is a sense of layers of faith, based around this proximity to Jesus, which forms a clear hierarchy, from Jesus to Peter, to the disciples and then the 'people'. Hierarchy here though is unlike any previous hierarchy, it's not based on social standing, wealth, status or breeding, but faith.

“the Church is held together by faith, and it is those with the most faith, those who are closest to Jesus that lie at the centre”

It's important for us, not because hierarchies are important but because they emphasise that the Church is held together by faith, and it is those with the most faith, those who are closest to Jesus that lie at the centre. The hierarchy here serves to show just how unlike any secular organisation we are. If we want to think about our own Church, and I am conscious that with many issues around, especially financial, we have to remember that the very existence of the Church is based on faith and knowledge of and relationship with Jesus. It can't be anything else and call itself 'Church'.

Perhaps this is the greatest challenge for us today, when we face worries and concerns about our Churches, that we need to put these aside and focus primarily on our own faith, our own understanding of who Jesus is, our own proximity to his life-giving presence. When we think about the decline of the Church, I often think that this is the heart of the problem, that we have in some sense lost the very purpose of our existence, and growth will not happen until we capture the Church in its glory, its majesty, its distinctiveness and its relationship with the risen Christ. The challenge for you today is to reflect on our reading and think of how well we stand up to this first and most powerful expression of what we know as Church.

Are we along the right lines, or are we a long way off? It's a question we need to ask ourselves time and time again.

Please Pray

Please pray for Fr Michael, Revd John, and the PCCs as they discuss the issues attached to reopening for weddings, funerals, baptisms, and public worship. Please pray that the final arrangements will be able to keep us all safe.

Please pray for those who are using the buildings for private prayer on Wednesdays.

Please pray for our communities.

Please pray for our bishops, archdeacon, area dean, and for our neighbours Fr Patrick, Fr Daniel, and Canon Sue.

*“Stay with us, O Lord
Jesus Christ, light in
our darkness”*

Two Prayers from Charles and Lynn Baker

Stay with us, O Lord Jesus Christ, light in our darkness

In the darkness of uncertainty and bewilderment, stay with us we pray

In the darkness of loss, loneliness and isolation - be our light and companion

In the darkness of anger, frustration and helplessness - grant us your peace.

Almighty God, grant us the wisdom and grace to listen to you, and to be mindful and caring of others. There is so much, Lord, that we have experienced over the past months - loss, grief, suffering and the daily struggles just to manage - sometimes it's felt almost too much to bear and we want to escape from it. And yet there have been moments of new vision, joy in sharing, peace, rest, kindness, generosity and profound gratitude. So much, Lord. Help us as we anticipate and begin to plan for our return to worshipping together in our churches. Help us to see our return not so much as a "going back to church" as a going forward together, mindful of what we have all been through. Amen



Do you read the Bible on your electronic device? A review of the app ‘Quiet Time’, by Christine Smith



Have you ever struggled to persuade your teenage children or grandchildren to come to Church with you? So many consider going to Church as deeply uncool! Yet they are at an age when it would be most beneficial. It is a time full of angst, lack of self-esteem and uncertainty at the best of times, let alone during the present crisis. Knowing they are a child of God, that Jesus Christ accepts them exactly as they are and wants them to be the best they can be but won't nag, if they will just listen to Him would be life changing.

I believe I may have found an answer - for some at least. It is a free App called Quiet Time and is the creation of a group of non-denominational Theological scholars, PHD students and tech enthusiasts. The aim is to bring structure and habit to each user's daily Quiet Time with God. They are passionate about breaking down the barriers that may inhibit a person from setting aside time for God and missing out on the opportunity to access the Holy Spirit that can transform our lives, if only we will listen and accept God's plan for us. The minimum they ask of you is probably about 15mins but there are also any number of "add-ons" (is that the right terminology!) to enhance the experience.

Did I say that I have come to love it myself?

Do you have items for the next edition?

Please be in touch with Fr Michael by email.

Contact Details

When writing cheques for the church please make them out to "**St Mary's PCC, Chalgrove**" or "**St Helen's PCC, Berrick Salome**" – this avoids ambiguity!

Websites you might find useful:

St Mary's: www.chalgrovechurch.org

St Helen's: www.berricksalomechurch.org.uk

For all enquiries contact Fr Michael Lakey, tel: 890392,
vicar@chalgrovechurch.org