



Sunday, 10th May, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Easter

After my Ordination Service in June 2014, my friend Jenny reprimanded me. “All along the row”, she said, “you saw serious, serious – you, the grinning hyena – serious, serious ...”

I did – and do – take my Ordination very seriously but I’ve never been one to hide my feelings and that day was an extremely happy one!

Today I’d be irritating Jenny again because again, I can’t stop grinning. It’s Wednesday 6th May and this morning we received a message from the bishop, highlights of which are given below.

As you may have heard, following a meeting yesterday, the House of Bishops has asked diocesan bishops to issue guidance on the gradual easing of restrictions on our buildings and activities whilst our church buildings need to remain closed. I am therefore able to issue some new permissive guidance:

Incumbents, or rural deans where there is no incumbent, can, in consultation with their churchwardens and bearing in mind their specific location, appoint one person for each church in their benefice to enter that church building. The appointed person should be the incumbent or a licensed or authorised minister, minister with permission to officiate, churchwarden, or, where there is no churchwarden, one member of the PCC.

The appointed person should be entering the church building for any or all of the following

- i. pray the daily office and/or celebrate the Eucharist on behalf of the community they serve,*
- ii. live stream or pre-record worship,*
- iii. ring one bell to mark prayers being said or mark events (e.g. Clap for Carers, VE day anniversary),*
- iv. check the fabric of the building.*

This afternoon I will, therefore, be reading Evening Prayer in St Clement's Church and will be reading one of the Daily Offices in either St Clement's or St David's each day. Meanwhile, thanks to the dedication and enthusiasm of our ALMs, some form of service will again be read in each church within the group every Sunday. I must stress that these will be **private** services – only the minister leading and any who live in the same house may attend – but it is a start and one which I welcome with great joy!

“I rejoiced with those who said to me,
let us go to the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 122, V1)

I pray that it won't be too long before you are all there with me.

Sarah

Collect and Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God,
who through your only – begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us
the gate everlasting life;
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good affect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

First Reading (Acts 7: 55 - end)

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Second Reading (1 Peter 2: 2 - 10)

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”[[]

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”[[]

and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Gospel Reading (John 14:1-14)

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Sarah Cottrill

When I was preparing this reflection, I came across the following story from Alan Carr's Biblical Facts About A Place Called Heaven:

A woman was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. As she was getting her things in order, she contacted her pastor and asked him to come to her house to discuss some of her final wishes.

She told him which songs she wanted sung at her funeral service, what Scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. She requested to be buried with her favourite Bible.

As the pastor prepared to leave, the woman suddenly remembered something else. "There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" said the pastor.

"This is important," the woman said. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say. The woman explained. "In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favourite part of the meal because I knew something better was coming-like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie.

"So, when people see me in that casket with a fork in my hand and they ask, 'What's with the fork?' I want you to tell them: 'Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!'"

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus assures his disciples that he is going on ahead of them to prepare their place in heaven. He is going to a far better place.

This passage is often read at funeral services as it offers great comfort to the bereaved; Jesus has gone ahead of their loved one to prepare their place with him and all they have to do is follow him. Comforting as it is, though, that opening command is not so easy to follow: *Do not let your hearts be troubled*. In times of bereavement it is natural that our hearts will be troubled and Jesus understands this. After all, he also wept at the death of his friend Lazarus.

At other times, though, troubled hearts are less understandable. In the Western world we are, to a large extent, shielded from the most extreme hardships of human existence: stark deprivations of food, shelter and health care are not the common lot. And yet we are troubled when we don't have everything we want. Think of how we've all lamented the shortage of items such as flour on supermarket shelves in recent weeks. And yet have we really suffered for lack of it? Perhaps this is the ideal time for us all to take stock of what is really important – both materially, spiritually and emotionally and discipline ourselves to get priorities right so that we are less inclined to have troubled – or vaguely discontented – hearts.

Having spoken his words of comfort, Jesus tells his disciples that anybody with faith in him will “Do what I have been doing.” We know that many of the first disciples went on to perform miracles in the name of Jesus. We also “know” that miracles don't happen these days. Or do they? Perhaps we don't often see sick people made well without obvious medical intervention; dead people raised to life or huge numbers fed with improbably small amounts of food. But that doesn't mean miracles don't happen. Is the doctor or paramedic first on the scene of an accident and able to save a life not a miracle? Is the timely donation of money to a charitable cause or individual in dire need or the safe delivery of a baby not a miracle? Miracles happen every day. And even if this is not the case, what else did Jesus do? He taught and demonstrated acceptance, tolerance and forgiveness for all. He showed love and kindness. He was

concerned for the less fortunate. Who's to say that this isn't what he meant when he said those with faith would do as he'd done? Perhaps the best Biblical example we have of following Christ's example is Stephen, whose death we read about in our first reading. In an almost exact echo of the words of Christ on the cross, Stephen prays for those killing him and commends his spirit to God. So Stephen followed Christ's commands both of forgiveness and of not allowing his heart to be troubled – he forgave, prayed and looked beyond the present suffering to what was to come. He knew he was following his Lord to a better place – to the best of all possible places. And no doubt he had his fork in his hand!

Notices

Finance and Assistance

As the lockdown continues and we face uncertainty about when and how it will end, this is a very difficult time for many people. For whatever reason, there will be those struggling to make ends meet, pay bills or buy necessities at this time. While we do not have huge resources, there are various funds the churches have to help people with small sums towards covering costs in times of need. We are also able to refer people to other agencies for additional assistance. If anyone needs help, please do contact the clergy. If you are aware of anyone else who might benefit from assistance at this time, please encourage them to contact the clergy too. We aim to help the community, irrespective of whether or not they are church members, so do make this known.

I would like to thank all those who have continued to support the churches financially during this difficult period, by standing order or direct debit. It is much appreciated; although the churches may be

closed, many of the costs (utility bills, insurance, parish share, etc.) have to be paid as normal. If you normally give by envelope or directly onto the collection plate, could I ask you to consider a standing order or perhaps sending a cheque? Not everyone is in a position to maintain their regular giving, but if those who are able to do so could help out, it obviously allows us to continue our work and be in a stronger position when this all ends. Our treasurers, Chris Rees (St John's), Philip Evans (St Michael's) and Sheila Brice (St Clement's) would be happy to answer any queries.

To contact our treasurers:

- Email Philip stmichaelstreasurer@wcv.church,
- Phone Sheila
- Email Chris on stjohnstreasurer@wcv.church

Above all, continue to pray for all those in need at this time.

Important Numbers

Childline	0800 1111
Samaritans	116 123
Domestic Violence Hotline	0808 2000 247
The Survivors Trust	0808 801 0181
Mind	0300 123 3393
Age UK	0800 169 6565

Care Homes

With care homes in lockdown, their residents are particularly isolated at this time. Juniper House have told us that they would especially appreciate it if anyone were able to write letters, or children were able to draw bright

pictures, to cheer people up and give them some contact with others during a difficult period. There are further details on the St Michael's website and Facebook page (see below), or please do contact Philip Evans (number on the back page) if you would be able to help.

Resources

A reminder of our online presence.

St John's Website www.stjohninbedwardine.co.uk

St Michael's Website www.stmichaels.westworcesterchurches.org.uk

St John's Facebook www.facebook.com/stjohninbedwardine

St Michael's Facebook www.facebook.com/stmichaelsdinesgreen

St John's Magazine

At this time, we are continuing to issue the magazine to all subscribers. Where possible, we are doing this electronically, although we are continuing to deliver to those for whom we have no e-mail address and live within the Group boundaries.

The logistics of printing and delivering are quite complicated at this time, so we are only printing enough copies to meet the subscription numbers. For the time being, we will not be printing additional copies for non-subscribers.

Those who are not subscribers who would like a copy will need to subscribe by e-mailing magazine@stjohninbedwardine.co.uk or telephoning Graham and Sue Evans.

Prayer

Various prayer resources and information are also available on the Church of England website. For those without internet access, the archbishop of Canterbury has launched a 24-hour freephone number for a service called Daily Hope, which offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services: **0800 804 8044**.

Please continue to pray for those whose weddings have had to be postponed due to the present crisis. Also for the sick, especially Bernard Dixon, and for the bereaved, remembering especially the families of Jessica Bird and Edith Glover.