

St Mary and All Saints, Dunsfold,
Sunday, February 7, 2021

ePEWS NEWS



2nd Sunday before Lent

10am Service of The Word (Joint live Zoom service with St Peter's Hascombe)

Click on the link below to join the 10am service on Sunday. The link will go live at around 9.45 am.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3839253168?pwd=QlVhYnRDRWs5aUJ6Vm53TUUVuNVRGZz09>

11 am Live Holy Communion service via video link from St Nicolas Church, Cranleigh.
To access please go to our church website:
www.achurchnearyou/dunsfold

Readings and collect for the 2nd Sunday before Lent.

OT: Proverbs 8: 1, 22-31
NT: Colossians 1: 15-20
GOSPEL: John 1: 1-14

Collect for the 2nd Sunday before Lent: Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth and made us in your own image: teach us to discern your hand in all your works and your likeness in all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things, now and for ever.

COUNTDOWN TO LENT FOR OUR PARISH AND THE BISHOP'S FUND

Reverend Ian Maslin will be leading a Lent course via Zoom this year.

Ash Wednesday falls on February 17 and Reverend Ian's course will run for seven sessions up to March 31, the Wednesday of Holy Week.

The course will be an exploration of Lent through everyday objects that you can find in your home. This is an original way of approaching Lent and will encourage us to consider our own faith journeys in the light of the Easter story.

Sometimes it can be hard to find God in the mundane, humdrum way of daily life. This Lent course may help us all transform our approach to daily living and draw us closer to God.

Ian will be generating a special zoom log-in for these meetings that we will send out nearer the time.

In recent years our Lent lunches have been an outstanding success in raising funds for the Bishop of Guildford's Lent Appeal. As well as enjoying a simple lunch of soup, cheese and bread at a number of welcoming homes in the parish some impressive sums have been raised.

The Bishop of Guildford's Fund splits the money between an overseas charity and work with disadvantaged groups in our diocese. The Bishop's local Communities Fund makes donations of around £40,000 a-year to charities and parishes who are working with the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

The range of funds includes support for people with disabilities, mental ill-health, the isolated and marginalised, young families and older people. The Fund also supports training schemes to help young people into work. As well as Lent donations it benefits from collections at licensing and confirmation services throughout the year.

The coronavirus pandemic ensures many of those sources of income have been undermined so we are giving thought to how we can be creative and help the Bishop of Guildford's Lent Appeal this year. If you have any ideas please let us know.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE PARISH DONATIONS DURING THE LOCKDOWN

It has been wonderful to be joined by so many people via zoom for our services in recent weeks. One question that has been raised is how worshippers can make a donation to church funds while our church is closed and they can only join our services online from home.

The solution is to go to our church website:
www.achurchnearyou/dunsfold

On the opening page you will see Dunsfold Church online. Just click on this link and it will take you to our donations page. Given the current challenging climate all donations will be gratefully received.



'TRULY, THIS IS THEOLOGY IN LOCKDOWN' ..THE BISHOP OF GUILDFORD, ANDREW WATSON, ON TODAY'S EPIC EPISTLE

It was the spring of 56 AD, and two men were making a 5-day journey inland from the city of Ephesus. They were an unlikely pairing. One was a respectable citizen of Ephesus itself, the other a runaway slave, who - astonishingly - was about to return to his master quite voluntarily. And in their possession was a remarkable postbag they were due to deliver on reaching their destination. It included a letter to the church in Colossae, and a letter to the church in Laodicea, which has since been lost. It probably included a circular letter too, written to all the churches in the area - what we now call 'Ephesians'. And to round it off, there was a short personal letter, written to the owner of the returning slave, urging him not to punish the slave for his desertion, but rather to welcome him back as a 'beloved brother' - the so-called letter to Philemon.

I myself have made that journey inland from Ephesus, though by coach, not on foot. And as I did so, how moving to reflect on that historic postal run nearly two thousand years' before, in which Paul's companion Tychicus joined the runaway slave Onesimus in delivering letters from the great man himself. The Book of Acts doesn't tell us this, but a bit of detective work among Paul's writings reveals that the Apostle was almost certainly imprisoned in Ephesus, and that that was the somewhat dismal setting in which he took up his pen to write. And while Ephesus was clearly a magnificent place, and remains so today, boasting some of the most impressive Roman ruins anywhere in the world, Colossae and Laodicea were much more modest affairs, with Christian congregations of maybe 12 or 15 people each, meeting in the homes of wealthy Philemon and a woman called Nympha. Even today, Laodicea is a rather scruffy little village, and Colossae lies under a hill which no-one has yet bothered to excavate.

So a man incarcerated in a Roman prison (following riots in which his teaching has been implicated), reflects on that little house church in Colossae - a church founded by his convert and fellow prisoner Epaphras - and begins to write; and after some warm words of greeting and an encouragement to his readers to 'lead lives worthy of the Lord', he pauses a little, and then proceeds to compose one of the most astonishing of all Christian hymns, comparable in every way to his other great hymn in Philippians chapter 2, and to the stirring Prologue to John's Gospel.

Just one of these inspiring writings would be enough to nourish us for weeks. But in our lectionary today, we are presented with not one but two of these great passages, along with a powerful hymn to wisdom from the Book of Proverbs. And while I firmly believe that the Prologue to John's Gospel is 'for life and not just for Christmas', it's the reading from Colossians that has really caught my eye this week, and perhaps for this reason: that this is truly 'Theology in Lockdown', and a fabulous example of why - for all the undoubted benefits of mindfulness and other therapies - it is Christian Theology, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is most fundamental to our truest and deepest wellbeing.

Paul had been in prison before, of course - and he would be in prison again. But there was something about his imprisonment in Ephesus that was particularly dark and oppressive, as the Apostle himself reflected at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, where he wrote this:

'We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia: for we were so

utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.'

'Utterly, unbearably crushed': it could hardly be a more devastating choice of words, not least from the pen of a man whose courage was legendary. So what caused that sense of utter abandonment? What were the fears and doubts and trials with which the Apostle was wrestling during this darkest of all his lockdown experiences? A little detective work again comes up with four of them, which we might summarise like this: 'Is everything out of control? Am I going to die? What's going to happen to the church? Does God care? And this magnificent Christian hymn in our epistle reading today sets out to counter just those doubts and fears.

Is everything out of control? I guess that's been one of the big questions during our experience of lockdown: a sense that the landscape is constantly shifting, that we don't know what the pandemic is going to do next, that every twist and turn of this Coronacoaster ride seems to present new and ever greater challenges, that the very idea that we are in control of our lives has been holed beneath the waterline. And how much more would the Apostle have felt that, sitting in his Ephesian prison cell with no idea of what would happen next, no talk of vaccines or a roadmap out of his current predicament.

And here's where that life-giving Christian theology first kicks in, as - against all outward appearances - St. Paul shares with us an extraordinary vision: the vision of a Christ in whom *'all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers'*: a Christ who is *'before all things, and in him all things hold together'*; a Christ who is completely in control.

Some of these ideas are found in our Old Testament reading from Proverbs 8, whose author used the metaphor of Lady Wisdom to describe the process that lay behind the story of Creation. But now Lady Wisdom is revealed as Christ himself, as Paul composes this set of variations around the theme of his sovereignty. He is the 'first', the 'firstborn', the 'beginning', the 'head': the synonyms come thick and fast as the variations progress. And while that doesn't mean that everything in the Creation Garden is lovely - while we don't quite have a 'Perfect Planet' - it does mean, ultimately, that we may not be in control of our lives, but that *He is*.

Am I going to die? Again that's been a big question over the past ten months, as mortality rates have risen inexorably, with one grim milestone succeeding another. For those of us who are relatively young and healthy, it may not have been so personal or pressing a concern. But for the older and more vulnerable, and for those who care for them, the question has never quite gone away. And the same was true of the Apostle in his prison cell: *'we were so utterly, unbearably crushed'*, as he put it, *'that we despaired of life itself'*.

And here's where Paul comes up with an astonishing pairing: that Christ is both the *'firstborn of all creation'* and the *'firstborn from the dead'* - or, as he might have put it, the 'firstborn of the old creation and the firstborn of the new'. Again the metaphors of Proverbs chapter 8 are part of the background here, and we don't need to get too hung up on the theological debates surrounding a Christ who was 'begotten not created'. But here's the thing - that if Christ through his Resurrection was the 'firstborn from the dead' - and if we as Christians are his little brothers and sisters - then it follows that his Resurrection will be ours: that as he put it in another of his prison letters, *'for me to live is Christ, to die is gain'* (Philippians 1:21).

What's going to happen to the Church? For those of us involved in church leadership, whether lay or ordained, that's been a real concern over lockdown. True, we old

dogs have learnt new tricks: even the simple process of recording this sermon would have been beyond my capabilities a year ago. But so much has changed, so much is uncertain, so many worries still remain. How will people return to church in the post-Covid era? How will our finances look? Will this prove to have been a time of growth or a time of significant decline? They're questions the Apostle asked too from his Ephesian prison cell, later reflecting that more troubling than all his imprisonments and floggings and hunger put together, was his *'anxiety for all the churches'* (2 Corinthians 11:23); and I know how he feels, and perhaps you do too.

And here's where Paul reminds us that Christ is *'the head of the Body, the Church'*. Not the Pope, not the Archbishop of Canterbury, not the Bishop (thankfully), not the Vicar, not the leadership team, but Christ. And again, what sheer relief, what balm to the soul to hear it! Of course, that doesn't absolve us of our responsibility, as those whom Paul elsewhere describes as *'fellow workers with God'* (1 Corinthians 3:9). Of course, we are called to continue in our prayer and work for the coming of God's Kingdom, charting as wise and fruitful a path we can find through the days that lie ahead. But ultimately Christ loves His Church far more than we do, and the *ultimate* responsibility for its wellbeing lies with Him.

And so to the final, and most foundational of all the questions: **Does God care?**: a question which many will have been asking during this time of lockdown, especially those who've spent months and months alone, those who've lost loved ones, and those whose family circumstances are such that 'Home, sour Home' describes the situation far more accurately than its sweeter alternative. And again, doesn't Paul's sense of having been *'utterly, unbearably crushed'* suggest that even the mighty Apostle himself lost sight of the goodness and love of his Saviour?

And here's his response: that this Christ is the *'image [the Greek word is 'icon'] of the invisible God,'* one in whom *'all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell; and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross'.*

The God whom Jesus embodies, in other words, is not some distant deity oblivious to all the sufferings of this sad little planet right now. He is rather a God who in Christ lived and died and rose again, so as to reconcile us to Himself. It's a rather overused quotation, which was stuck on the wall of many a Christian's room during my student days, but I still find it moving: 'I asked him how much he loved me. He said, 'This much', and died'.

So back to Tychichus and Onesimus, carrying their precious postbag to the churches of Asia Minor: two of Paul's converts, true, but otherwise with very little obviously in common. Yet in that very pairing - a proud and upright citizen of Ephesus and a runaway slave - the Christian revolution was beautifully portrayed, a revolution that continues to make waves across the world of today. For if we believe that *'Jesus Christ is Lord'*, that *'Death has lost its sting'*, that Christ will build his church *'and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'*, and that *'God shows his love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'*; then even the toughest of lockdown experiences - those that leave us *'so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despair of life itself'* - will not ultimately defeat us. To leave the last word to the great Apostle himself, *'If God is for us, who can stand against us?'*

Amen

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

CHURCH: The people working for the Diocese of Guildford who face redundancies as the financial realities of the coronavirus begin to bite.

WORLD: The nations where human rights are abused and the people's appeals for democracy are overlooked or trampled on.

THE SICK: Amanda and Hugh, Tim Bailey, Michael Burt, Sarah Godwin and John Davies, Jan and Mark Knott, William and James Mason, Sally Rivett, Sue Simper, Jacky Williams, Alli, Judy Bolt, Sue and Dennis Evans, Sami Bennewith, Lizzy Laverty.

THE DEPARTED: Reverend Norman Edsall, Paddy Laverty.

SAFEGUARDING IN YOUR CHURCH

We take safeguarding seriously in Dunsfold Church. If you have any concerns or information you wish to pass on please contact our safeguarding officer, Hazel Wiltshire on 01403 753847 or email her at hazel.wiltshire@talktalk.net

MISSING CHURCH MUSIC? TRY THIS

Many people have mentioned how much they miss the joy of singing hymns and the musical parts of services since the Coronavirus rules kicked in.

So, for all of you please copy and paste the following link into your browser for a short clip recorded by four members of the choir at St James' Church, Piccadilly, London. Enjoy.

<https://youtu.be/PotedrxMY-A>

THE LAST WORD...

JUSTIN WELBY

The Archbishop of Canterbury's tribute to Captain Sir Tom Moore



"Where he walked, the nation followed."



