



Parish of St. Mary's Swynnerton & St. James' Cotes Heath
 Sunday March 7th 2021 (3rd Sunday of Lent)



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Join us on Zoom at 10.00. this Sunday for our benefice worship. Use the link below and log in from 9.50.

Last week we reached a record 50 in the "congregation".

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82172796502?pwd=dm9PandVL1I6YTgzOFFTQzQ1L0NqQT09>



FAIRTRADE has been promoting a festival of online entertainments and activities over the last two weeks to educate and inspire us in our shopping choices. Go to their website <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/choose-the-world-you-want/>

and learn how farmers and workers are involved in the Fairtrade movement. Find out where to buy their bananas, chocolate, flowers, wine, clothes and even gold. Did you know that 1 in 3 bananas bought in the UK is Fairtrade? And consumers and companies choosing Fairtrade sugar

sent more than £5m in Fairtrade premium back to sugar cane smallholders last year. (Whilst you're there, click on the "Foodie Tent" for the most scrumptious recipes.)

The C of E's fourth "Mark of Mission" is "to seek to transform unjust structures of society" so buying Fairtrade could be one way we can make a difference.

- *Lynne Williams sends more world news from Tearfund:*

Idah had long dreamed of starting a small bakery in her local community in Zimbabwe. She had started to pursue her goal with five other women, and they had even chosen the name of the bakery, "Kushinga", which means bravery or perseverance.

When Zimbabwe went into a national lockdown, the women found an unexpected opportunity.

The usual traders stopped coming to the community and there was a widespread shortage of bread. So the women approached their local self-help group, (set up by Tearfund and a local church partner) for a small loan to buy the equipment to get the bakery up and running. They soon came up against new challenges, but they were determined not to give up.

'First the stove could not fire but we did not despair, we approached a member of the community who came up with a new design and from there we did not look back,' says Idah.

'We have been supplying bread to the community since the coronavirus lockdown.'

Not only were the bakers able to feed people during a time of need, they were also able to earn extra income to sustain their families during the lockdown.

'The dream is to pass on the bakery from one generation to the next, and be known as families of bakers,' says Idah. 'We want our names to be synonymous with quality bread and confectionery.'



- *And from Uganda, our parish link William Pashi has received the Christmas gift of £165 sent from St. Mary's. Extracts from his letter below:*

"Dear David, Thank you for your gift. Our Church is laying bricks for our Church building at Idrimari. Pray for us. Thank you so much for all that your church in Swynnerton is doing for my ministry in Uganda. My sincere appreciation and love to all of them ...

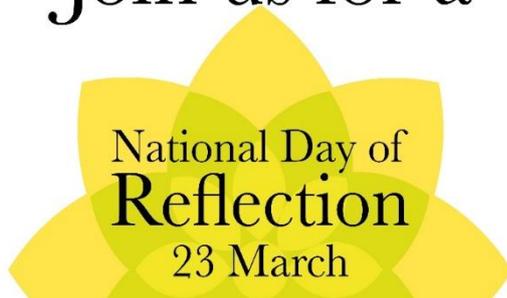
Here in Uganda, we have normal Sunday services and even people have forgotten about face masks and other safety measures. The climate is rather hot here and the Covid cases are few and not so severe ...

The post-election period is now calming down, although the European parliament has voted to impose a travel ban on some Ugandan government officials for the electoral violence where over 50 people died ...

Today we laid to rest my uncle Solomon who passed on at the age of 96 years due to ulcers, malaria and cough... God bless you so much and our love to all our friends over there. William."

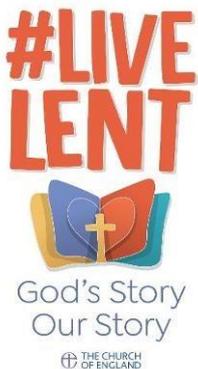
- “It was the very best birthday I’ve ever had” says Pat Lawrence, as she sends thanks for the surprises and for the cards, gifts and flowers received. She enjoyed a wonderful 90th birthday and was “overwhelmed” by people’s thoughtfulness.
- Are you thinking about what God is calling you to do? “Pathways” is a one-year course for people in Lichfield diocese who are exploring their Christian faith and discipleship and reflecting on their own particular gifts and calling. The course covers several key areas including God at work in the Church, your community as well as in your own life and includes bible study and prayer. There will be local groups as well an online option via Zoom. year. Click [here](#) for more details, or contact [Helen Scheven](#).”

Join us for a



The Marie Curie charity is planning a day of reflection on March 23rd. Here’s what they say:
*“Since the first lockdown began in 2020, hundreds of thousands of people have died. Too many lives have been cut short and millions have been bereaved. Behind the statistics and whatever the cause, every death has been devastating for the people left behind. Join us on 23 March, the first anniversary of the first UK lockdown, for a **National Day of Reflection** to reflect on our collective loss”.*

<http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/dayofreflection>



The Lent Course continues at 3pm on Sunday afternoon. This week Nesta Williams will lead a session entitled “Jesus was in the Transformation Business”. Do join in by using the Zoom log in on page 1, or you can sign up for emails and get the app at www.churchofengland.org/livelent

Please pray for Doreen Green and her family, Richard Wenger, Fr. Paul Chavasse, Wendy Jackson and Paul Bell, Dot Sergeant, Elaine Dulson, Pat Lawrence, Carol and Martyn Turner, Pat Barley, Geoff and Linda Foster, Margaret Farr, Nick & Jonquil Goacher, Margaret Mc.Knight, Maddie, Jessica, Margaret Reid and Karen Glasgow.

Also Chris’s mum, Valerie Stokes who is unwell and for Arthur Kinson recently taken ill, and his wife Chris. We give thanks for the falling rate of infections, the success of the vaccine roll-out and the skills and application of the scientists who have made it possible.



WORSHIP FOR THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Welcome and introduction:

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We have come together as the family of God in our Father's presence to offer him praise and thanksgiving, to hear and receive his holy word, to bring before him the needs of the world, to ask his forgiveness of our sins, and to seek his grace, that through his Son Jesus Christ we may give ourselves to his service.

Confession: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand." So, let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image, to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Statement of Faith: **I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. From there he shall come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**



This week's prayers have been prepared by Denise Snowball

Collect: **Almighty God,**

who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:

give your people grace

so to love what you command

and to desire what you promise,

that, among the many changes of this world,

our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are

to be found; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Let us pray: Our gracious and Heavenly Father, thank you for the beautiful and sunny days of last week. The lovely spring flowers, this reminds us of new birth physical and spiritual. May we continue to please you Lord in all we do, forgive us when we are neglectful or forget the plight of others.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In our prayers this week we give thanks for the many people who have received their vaccinations and pray that those who are afraid to have this vaccine will be reassured that it is safe to do so. We do ask Lord that you will give us patience as we await easing of restrictions and look forward to seeing and meeting with our family and friends. Lord be with those who are living alone and haven't seen any family for such a long time, protect their mental health.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father God be with the teachers and children as they go back to school in the coming week, keep them all safe and protect them against the virus. The same Lord for all our wonderful NHS workers small and great and all those who provide our groceries and other needs.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift up to you Lord those farmers who belong to the Fairtrade Group as this is the last week of Fairtrade Fortnight, we think of all the farmers in those countries who are suffering from drought, especially in Africa. Send help Lord to enable these people to dig new wells. For people to have the most basic of needs, clean water.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we take a quiet moment to think of those on our prayer list that are sick, in hospital, needing treatment and other physical or spiritual needs:

Let us say together the Lord's Prayer....

OUR FATHER

THE GRACE

THE LOCKDOWN COMMANDMENTS Dr Lindsey Hall's Sermon for 7 March 2021
Third Sunday of Lent - Exodus 20:1-17, John 2:13-22

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Do you ever try and see how many of the ten commandments you can remember?

Maybe you had all ten drilled into you at an early age. Or maybe you find the last six or seven easy to recall and the first two or three a bit more confusing.

"You shall have no gods before me and you shall not make for yourselves idols" - I can never remember whether that's 1 commandment or 2 separate ones.

Perhaps because, unlike the later commandments about murder, adultery and stealing, these seem to come from a different world.

In the ancient world, there were gods to choose from and different peoples named and honoured gods in different ways. The Jews were unusual for their belief in one God:

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut 6:4)

One God, who claims, in today's passage, to be a jealous God. A God who commands us not to put other gods first, or to make idols for ourselves.

Well so far so good with keeping the commandments! I don't believe in any other gods and I have never bowed to a golden calf, or worshipped the form of anything on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. So two out of two so far!

Our other reading today is John's account of Jesus overturning the tables in the Temple. This passage seems, instinctively, to have something in common with Moses receiving the ten commandments. Perhaps they are both moments in the life of a community when something was revealed to the people, when even those who already worshipped the one God were shown some of the ways in which they had lost sight of God. The ways in which they gradually put other gods first and focussed their attention on idols.

No doubt the cattle and sheep sellers, the dove sellers and the money changers in the Temple would have assessed themselves as two out of two for the first couple of commandments. They were in the Temple and so were almost certain to be law observing Jews. But to the onlooker it might seem that they had lost their way a bit. Certainly, Jesus seemed to think so.

This incident is often referred to as Jesus cleansing the temple – purifying it from those who were making it something it was not meant to be. Those who were putting profit ahead of worship, those who had lost sight of what the temple was really for.

They hadn't built a golden calf or an idol for people to bow before. But they do seem to have developed a system through which you could buy favour with God; through which you could be made righteous. Through which you were being invited to put your hope in something other than the One God.

It's much easier to spot the ways in which people have wandered from faithfulness to God when those people are in a different place and culture and time. Much harder to notice all those things that we put our hope in that aren't God.

We have been through, and are in, an extraordinary time in this country and in the world. We have had challenges of restrictions, illness, loss, isolation, separation - and for many of us believing in the promises of God, the Good News of Jesus and the resurrection hope has been essential to keep going.

But how do we notice when we have also hedged our bets on other gods? When we have constructed idols and then worshipped them?

How many times have you heard the word normal in the last year?

"I can't wait to get back to normal". "When things are back to normal we'll be able to..." "I want my normal life back". And then of course our questions about the new normal: "what will the new normal be like? Is this the new normal now, or is it going to change into something else? Will things ever seem normal again?"

As though normality - being normal - is the goal of our existence. As though the ideas of normal we have constructed should be pursued above everything else.

As though this bit of life is merely a disruption to be endured.

As though life is suspended until normality returns. As though God's kingdom is out of sight until we can see it again in more normal times.

I do not think any of the first disciples recognised in Jesus someone normal, and so chose to follow him. Quite the opposite.

And I do not think seeking normality is the same as seeking the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is not just for the good times, when the kids are in school and the shops and the pubs are open. It is for all times. And even in the midst of a pandemic, the kingdom of God is amongst us, it is in our midst.

But even in the places where it is named and celebrated, it is surprisingly easy to lose sight of the kingdom of God.

I wonder what you have learnt during lockdown? Maybe it's something you already knew that has become really clear, or maybe you have seen your community differently, learnt something new about what people are like, what matters to you, what's important.

One of the things we have noticed together as Christians we probably did already know but now see even more clearly: that our church is not the building but the people gathered around Jesus.

In your church community, like in mine, you have no doubt seen new gifts emerge this year. New ways of praying, connecting and serving that have been born out of the challenges we face.

These are testing times. And perhaps one of the greatest tests we face is how we seek the kingdom with the new revelations of this time. How we respond to things that before we saw dimly, but now can see clearly. What are we going to make of the choice we are presented with? Will we struggle to go back to something that no longer exists anyway, with all its flaws and familiarity; Or will we, together, seek a renewed church. Humbler, simpler, bolder.

Focused on seeking the Kingdom of God and joining with others to offer signs of the kingdom to a broken world. Familiarity can get in the way of focussing on the kingdom. Do you think other people who went to worship in the Temple were offended by the traders and money changers in the Temple? Or had the sight of them and their practice had become so familiar, that it felt normal and there seemed no reason to question it?

What in our Christian life together have we stopped noticing, that Jesus might overturn? What in the familiarity of our patterns of worship, our use of buildings and the culture of our communities are we so keen to get back to that we are not stopping to ask is it because they are normal, or because they are truly a sign of the kingdom of God?

If we read Exodus, we can see why God instructed the people to have no other gods before the Lord their God, and not to make idols. They seem like good commandments for people in a society where many gods were worshipped and who were known to build golden calves.

But they are good commandments for us too. Even in a time of crisis, even in a global pandemic they remind us not to seek our salvation in anything other than the Lord our God. Not in normality. Not in rushing back to the patterns of church we remember. Not in our desperate longing for the familiar. These things may well be good things, but they are not ultimately, our hope and our salvation. We find that only in the God made known to us in Jesus and in the kingdom which is already in our midst. Amen.

Dr Lindsey Hall.

