



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Second Sunday of Easter ~ 11th April 2021

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

We have Church services with social distancing, both our regular Sunday Services, and the special ones for this Holy Week. This week we offer two Meditations; one for Palm Sunday, and one on the Passion which may choose to save for later in the week.

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

Prayers, Collects, for this week

God of life, source of all faith, through the waters of baptism you have raised us up in Jesus and given us life that endures. Day by day refine our faith, that we who have not seen the Christ may truly confess him as our Lord and God, and share the blessedness of those who believe. Grant this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life, who lives and reigns with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. **Amen**

Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end, you break through the locks of gated communities and hardening hearts: accept our doubts, heal our desire for certainty and, by your Spirit's gentle touch, make us people forgiven and forgiving; through Jesus Christ, the Giver of Peace. **Amen**

Acts of the Apostles 4 v32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Gospel of John 20 v19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Meditation

From the reading in the Acts of the Apostles set for today, ***"no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common."*** and ***"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."***

An experiment? An ideal? A dream? An embarrassment?

A truth for the early church, but maybe not for later?

For the church, not for society?

Something for the select few, not the ordinary many?

Only to be applied to believers?

Only for some situations, and to be re-interpreted and adapted?

Should the Emphasis be developed from private possessions, to the creation of wealth, and the exercise of power as human society developed?

Well the church has applied it literally to the few, *"the Rule of St Benedict does forbid private ownership of any kind. A Benedictine monk does not take a vow of poverty, but he lives under a rule of no personal possessions."*

It has been appropriated as a slogan for revolution, *"from each according to their ability, to each according to their need"* (Karl Marx).

It has been developed away from private possessions to being an economic strategy. *"To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service."* (Labour party Clause 4c before 1995).

But let's also allow for some criticism.

At various points in history, Benedictine monasteries have become very wealthy and powerful; at various points there has been a perception that lay Christians are second rate compared to monks.

When Marxists gained power, there was almost invariably a denial of human rights, totalitarianism and economic collapse.

For many the adherence to Clause 4 made Labour unelectable.

So, for the moment, let's just stay more than a bit uncomfortable with this part of the Acts of the Apostles! and the questions I asked earlier. Let's get uncomfortable about something else; "Forgive us our trespasses (or sins) as we forgive those who trespass (sin) against us. This petition has become scandalous to some who are victims of violence if it has been used to urge them to forgive their perpetrators, as it seems to shift the guilt to the victims who are unable, or yet unable, to forgive, rather than keeping the responsibility on perpetrators whether penitent or not. Here our gospel today seems to offer so relief, ***"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*** Jesus really delegates the ability to forgive, or not to forgive, to the disciples and so to us and (I would say) to the rest of humanity. But this does not necessarily mean that God has forgiven or not and we should be cautious about making God's forgiveness dependent on our own. For Jesus also says immediately before, "Receive the Holy Spirit"; we receive the gift of the Spirit, but we do not control the Spirit, rather we are invited to accept the Spirit, which here is linked to believing the Resurrection of Christ, and a blessing is given to those who have come to believe.

Whilst we are all uncomfortable, I want to turn to a third area of discomfort. We have had in the last months prominent campaigns and demonstrations, following violence, about the worth of all human people; Black Lives Matter; Me Too! and the murders of several young women. There are questions about institutional prejudice and discrimination, privilege and power; and there is a desire to do something about it and to change the world for a better place. It is out of discomfort that we get the energy to make a difference, and not to accept the present situation, values, or conduct.

I have another related discomfort, which arises out of being an office holder in the Church of England. On racism, we have codes of conduct to drive racism out, but we have much further to go; we have removed some slavery memorials, we do not yet have equal opportunities, but a Theological justification of racism or eugenics is no longer credible or given a voice within the church. On sexism, we do have codes of conduct, but we have allowed an institutionalised system which does allow those who wish to discriminate over women in leadership and gives a voice to theologies based on ideas of complementarity which seem to leave women in second place. Now the CofE is launching a discussion on gender, sexuality and marriage “Living in Love and Faith”, which seems to offer a level playing field for views which cause great offence and threat to some. Racism was an acceptable theology in the 19th century, sexism for most of the 20th; what will be allowed in the 21st, but in time be seen as equally unacceptable?

However, I do want to offer something other than discomfort, perhaps not comfort, but rather real suggestions for handling discomfort. You will hear more about this in coming times, the “Living in Faith and Love” offers the naming of six pervading evils in our relationships and church community,

- * **acknowledge prejudice**
- * **admit hypocrisy**
- * **speak unto silence**
- * **address ignorance**
- * **pay attention to power**
- * **cast out fear**

So I am led back to our first discomfort today, the Acts reading, which does talk of the levelling of all people, of all people being treated equally according to need, and all giving of their abilities. If only we could say, there is not a needy person amongst us!

God bless, Andrew

Eastertide Prayers

Living Christ, you are raised from the dead! Love reigns!
You are life stronger than death; you have brought with the dawn a new beginning and an empty tomb; grant us the strength and humility to enter into life. **Amen**

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As once you ransomed your people from Egypt
and led them to freedom in the promised land,
so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son,
May we the first fruits of your new creation,
rejoice in this new day that you have made,
and praise you for your mighty acts.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

Christ you are risen with the sun; you are a light in our darkness, warmth in our cold. You are peace and hope and joy, for you went willingly to death. You turned defeat and failure to victory for all. You live eternally, and with you live the millions, living and dead, who trust in you. **Amen**

Yesterday I was crucified with Christ; today I am glorified with him.
Yesterday I was dead with Christ; today I am sharing in his resurrection.
Yesterday I was buried with him; today I am waking with him from the sleep of death.