

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the things I discovered between my final service at my previous church and coming to be Rector here is that when you are a vicar between posts you get to worship in churches where you have absolutely no responsibility whatsoever! You just arrive, sit down and pray — no one expects you to do anything or know where anything is kept. It was quite a novelty!

Last Sunday, I went with Father Matthew to the two churches where he serves in Kentish Town. The area is marked by extraordinary contrasts — immense wealth alongside deep deprivation, sometimes almost side by side.

As we were driving to one of the churches, I noticed some street art painted across a bridge. I had to stop and take a picture — which hopefully you can see a copy of now. The words read:

“What if the Ignored Unite?”

That question has stayed with me ever since.

What does it mean to be ignored?

Most of us know that feeling at some point — to be overlooked, unheard, unseen. Sometimes it hurts even more than open disagreement. At least when we argue, we are acknowledged. To be ignored is to feel as though we do not quite exist.

So who are “the ignored”? In every community there are those who are quieter, those whose needs are less obvious, those who slip through the gaps. And if we are honest, each of us carries places in our own lives where we have felt unseen.

This is why the Gospel is such good news.

If you look for Jesus in the Gospels, you consistently find him with those others overlook. He notices the unnoticed. He speaks to those whom others silence. He calls by name those who had stopped believing they mattered.

In the Gospel we have just heard, we have a powerful example of this.

We meet Nicodemus — a religious leader, a Pharisee — someone who should have had everything together. And yet he comes to Jesus at night. Despite his status, Nicodemus is hesitant. He is searching. He is uncertain.

Even someone respected and established can feel unsure. Even someone who is visible can feel unseen.

And what does Jesus do? He receives him. He speaks with him patiently. He opens up the mystery of new birth, of life in the Spirit.

And then we hear those extraordinary words:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Not just the successful.

Not just the confident.

Not just the insiders.

God so loved the world.

Which means the ignored.

The overlooked.

The searching.

The uncertain.

The weary.

All of it.

God does not ignore the world. God loves the world.

And this morning, we gather together around the altar because of that love.

In Holy Communion, those who may know the pain of what it means to be ignored remember that God does not ignore them. Instead, he does something extraordinary. He gathers us all together around his table — where there are no first-class and second-class seats. No one is invisible. No one is an afterthought.

Here we are made one Body in him — one Body in Christ.

And what is more, around God’s altar we recognise that God is already alive and present in those parts of ourselves — our own lives and experience — that we would rather ignore.

God is as much present in our weakness as in our strengths.

He is there as one who knows what it is to suffer, to be rejected, to experience loss. And he is there in those places *within ourselves* we sometimes ignore, loving, healing, redeeming — present to all that it means to be the people he loves without limit or condition. Freeing our hands to welcome others into the radiant splendour of God's love.

Because when people who have felt unseen discover that they belong — truly belong — Christ becomes visible in their midst.

One of the things that has already moved me deeply is seeing how much you are already living this out. The ministries of welcome, the lunch clubs, the quiet faithfulness of those who serve week by week, your ministries of prayer — these are not small things. They are signs of the Kingdom. They are places where people discover they are not forgotten.

As I begin this ministry among you, I come not with a grand masterplan, but with a desire to listen. To learn your stories. To discover what God has already been doing here — because he has been faithful to this parish long before I arrived, and he will continue to be faithful long after either of us move on.

It is such good news that we follow a Lord who never ignores anyone — who always makes room at his table — who looks at each person and says: *You matter. You belong.*

My prayer is that together we will continue to be a church in Elstree and Borehamwood where people encounter that truth. A place where those who feel overlooked discover they are seen. Where those who feel alone discover they are gathered in. Where those who feel uncertain discover they are loved.

What if the ignored unite?

Then Christ is revealed.

And the world begins to look a little more like the Kingdom of God.

I cannot wait to begin that journey with you in Elstree and Borehamwood.

Amen.