



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

Sunday 18th April 2021 – Third Sunday of Easter

TODAY'S SERVICES

9:15am	Holy Communion at St. George's Church	Revd Carol Pharaoh
11:00am	Holy Communion at St. Bartholomew's Church	Revd Carol Pharaoh

We pray for:

Those who are ill: Cassie Buono, Brian Cato, Christopher Davies, Christine Greenhalgh, Jenny Harris, Keith Haworth, Mario Heaton, Edith Ibbotson, Joan James, Patricia James, Mike Johnson, Eileen Marsh, Jean Partington, Norman Sidlow.

Those who have died recently:

And on their anniversaries this week we remember: Ernest Beckett, Ashton Bullough, Colin Caldwell, Elizabeth Fox, Michelle Hamilton, Stanley Heaton, Richard Hodgkiss, Maude Mathews, Joseph Riley, Mary Simpson, Jintana Smith, Robert Walmsley, Jean Whittle, Mark Williams.

This week:

Sunday services at St. George's and St. Bartholomew's will continue at 9:15am and 11:00am. With some lockdown restrictions easing, you'll hardly recognise some of us after our first haircuts of 2021!

Next Sunday's services will be a Service of the Word led by Elaine Simkin at St. George's, marking St. George's Day, and a Holy Communion service at St. Bartholomew's led by Revd Carol Pharaoh.

Following the easing of some restrictions, choir practices have resumed each Wednesday and we plan to be singing regularly in our services in the weeks ahead. Congregational singing, however, is still not permitted.

Annual Meeting: There are nomination forms available for anyone who would like to stand as churchwardens, assistant wardens, sidespeople, PCC or committee members and Deanery Synod reps. Please sign up to help the Annual Meeting run smoothly.

Please note that with the restrictions on church meetings we have had to postpone the AGM until **Monday 24th May 7:30pm** hopefully in person at St. Bartholomew's church. On the planned date, Monday 26th April the PCC will meet by Zoom / e-mail primarily to accept the annual reports and accounts for 2020.

Daily readings continue this week from the Acts of the Apostles with the usual bit of explanation so we can try and understand what's going on.

St. George's Day falls this week and it's a special one this year as it's the 25th anniversary of the Dedication of St. George's church on 23rd April 1996. There would be lots of celebrations if such things were allowed but there will be lots in next Sunday's pewsheets and we'll be marking it in the service at St. George's that Sunday.

There are also notices at the end particularly about registering for the Confirmation course before the Confirmation service, planned for later in the year.

Informal Zoom Chat: We are holding a team meeting on zoom for coffee and chat every Sunday morning from 11.30 am to 12.30 pm. Please contact one of the clergy for the link if you would like to join. It's very informal so come and go as you wish.

While services and attendance at church is limited, these pewsheets and on-line services will continue. Do keep any news, views and feedback coming. Please also check our Team YouTube channel for online services:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDx266HLh9ShYeBJnON8ODg>

Ed



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The Collect:

Risen Christ, you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope: strengthen us to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

First Reading: Acts 3. 12 - 19

¹²Peter addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. ¹⁷'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.'

Second Reading: 1 John 3. 1 - 7

¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Gospel Reading: Luke 24. 36b - 48

³⁶While the eleven and their companions were talking about what they had heard, Jesus himself

stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you - that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.'



The Post Communion Prayer:

Living God, your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: open the eyes of our faith, that we may see him in all his redeeming work; who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**



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Homily: Carol McCabe

Have you ever been a witness? Maybe to an accident or a crime even. Maybe you have witnessed a signature at a wedding or maybe another kind of legal document. There are many ways you can become a witness, but what does it mean to be a witness to Christ?

Being a witness of Christ in the most basic sense is to have and share our own personal stories, ones that reflect how He is the divine Son of God, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. That is the way the ancient Apostles did it, they knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and they spoke from personal experience. However, that the disciples are witnesses, does not mean they now have all the answers. It means they now have the life Jesus wants to give them. They are witnesses based not on what they know, but on who they are, how they live, and how their relationship with the risen Christ, affects that new way of life.

We celebrate today the third Sunday of Easter, which means we continue reflecting, as the Church, upon the astonishing Good News at the heart of our faith. A human being, Jesus, after being tortured and executed, was raised to new life by God. Through this action, God showed Jesus to be more than just a man. Jesus is the Author of Life, and the channel of God's healing and forgiving love.

Of course, this is good news, its great news, but it is difficult news. People do not rise from the dead. Common sense tells us that, and every 'right-thinking person' must surely agree that these stories are but fantasy, pure wishful thinking. How can we possibly believe in them?

I wish I could make this good news less difficult. I wish I could explain to you exactly how God has brought this about and make your faith strong with solid scientific arguments. But I can't. All I have, all we have, are the stories told in the gospels, and in Paul's letters. We have the eye-witness accounts of Peter and Paul, John, and the other apostles.

'You are witnesses to this,' says Jesus, in today's gospel reading from Luke.

The 'witness' who wrote the third gospel has traditionally been named as Luke; he also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, as a two-part history. Luke is writing perhaps fifty years after the events he is telling us about, and during this time, the significance of Jesus being raised from the dead has become clearer. Jesus was raised to life by the same God who blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But this is different; Jesus is not one of the patriarchs, or prophets, no. Jesus is the 'Author of Life', 'the Prince of Life', or the 'Leader towards Life'. By the name of Jesus, the disciples healed the sick. Something that Luke especially, would have been drawn to as he was a doctor.

In the gospel reading, the disciples 'disbelieved for joy.' It is almost as if their love for Jesus got in the way of them realising what had really happened. It takes time for the resurrection faith to take root. But over the next 30, 40, 50 years, these witnesses enter the depths of this good but difficult news. And they wrote down what they had witnessed, so that we too might believe.

The heart of the Gospel message, which we are called to be witnesses to, is the cross - but fortunately it does not stop there. Through the cross Jesus defeated death and won pardon for our sins. His cross is the door to heaven and the key to paradise. The way to glory is through the cross. Fortunately, we have a time of grace too; not of 50 years, but of 50 days, during which our grasp of what has happened will take root. It will re-shape us, as we see possibilities of change for the better. We will become an 'Easter people' in the proper sense.

Death does not have the final say. Neither does sickness, or disability; and neither does our ignorance, or weakness or sinfulness. If we allow this message to really sink into our hearts, these 50 days will be for us a 'time of refreshing experience'. And in due course that will become our story.

Jesus will show us the way and give us the power to overcome all that stands in the way of his love and truth reaching our ears and hearts. Just as the first disciples were commissioned to witness, to bring the good news of salvation to all the nations, so, we, too, are called to be



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witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who live on the face of the earth. But it's not enough to proclaim that Christ is risen, it's not enough to believe in the resurrection. At some point we will have to move from the events to experiencing them for ourselves. The Christ amongst us.

God's ways are not human ways. Let us pray that we may never allow God's capabilities to be diminished by our own limitations. For if we are not careful, we will bind ourselves through our fears, our sorrows and losses, our runaway thoughts and distractions, our attachments and addictions to things, people and dare I say our beliefs. Sometimes it's our own unwillingness to allow or trust God to grow and change us. And without that we cannot experience God in our lives and in those around us. Without that we cannot have a personal relationship with God through Christ, and without that we will have nothing to witness to.

I don't know how this happens. I can't give you a set of instructions. This new life, and the one we then can witness to, cannot be acquired, it is received. I think it happens when we truly open up. That's what happened to the disciples with Jesus' hands and feet, with his flesh and bones, with the food. They saw and recognised something about Jesus and in doing so they saw something in themselves: holiness. That's what can happen to us too.

"You are witnesses of these things." He says to us. Tell it. Live it. Become it. The good news is ours. We are witnesses.

Amen.

Intercessions –

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us a little child
one of us,
flesh and blood to share in our humanity
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as carpenter
and yet in whose creative hands a world was
fashioned
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as fisherman
and yet pointed to a harvest that was yet to come
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as teacher
and opened eyes to truths that only the poor could
understand
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as healer
and opened hearts to the reality of wholeness
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as prophet,
priest and king
and yet humbled himself to take our place upon the
cross
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as servant
and revealed to us the extent of his Father's love for
human kind
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

Blest are you, Lord Jesus, who rose from the ignominy
of a sinner's death
to the triumph of a Saviour's resurrection
For God so loved the world
ALL: That all might have eternal life

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
for the sake of me
and you
and other sinners too
God so loved the world
Blest are you Lord Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer



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1. Alleluia, alleluia!

Hearts to heav'n and voices raise:
Sing to God a hymn of gladness,
Sing to God a hymn of praise.
He, who on the cross a victim
For the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ, the King of glory,
Now is risen from the dead.

2. Christ is risen, Christ, the first-fruits
Of the holy harvest field,
Which will all its full abundance
At His second coming yield.
Then the golden ears of harvest
Will their heads before Him wave,
Ripened by His glorious sunshine
From the furrows of the grave.

3. Christ is risen, we are risen!

Shed upon us heav'nly grace,
Rain, and dew and gleams of glory
From the brightness of Thy face,
That we, with our hearts in heaven,
Here on earth may fruitful be,
And by angel hands be gathered,
And be ever, Lord, with Thee.

4. Alleluia, alleluia!

Glory be to God on high!
Alleluia! to the Saviour
Who has gained the victory!
Alleluia! to the Spirit,
Fount of love and sanctity!
Alleluia, alleluia
To the Triune Majesty.

Words: Christopher Wordsworth [1807-85] at one time, Headmaster of Harrow School, Dean of Westminster and latterly Bishop of Lincoln. This comes from his "Holy Year – Hymns for Sundays, Holidays and Other Occasions" and is based on I Corinthians 15.20 "Now is Christ risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept." It continues that we who have risen with Christ may be nurtured by his grace and bear much fruit [John 12.24].

Tune: **Lux Eoi** by Sir Arthur Sullivan [1842 – 1900] of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. He knew how to write a good hymn tune ['Onward Christian Soldiers' is one of his] and that fact we still sing this hymn today is most probably due to the cracking tune.

**God of our lives,
we give thanks for the life of Prince Philip,
for the love he shared among us, and for his devotion to duty.
We entrust him now to your love and mercy,
through our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Merciful God, be close to all who mourn,
especially The Queen and all members of the Royal Family.
May they know the hope of your promises
and the comfort of your love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



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Acts: Chapter 7 *[the bit that gets missed out]*

This is the bit that the lectionary misses out between Monday and Tuesday. You don't need to read any of this to follow the daily readings but it explains what Stephen says and why those in authority take against him.

Stephen's Speech

⁷ The high priest said to Stephen, "Is all this true?" ² Stephen answered, "My Jewish fathers and brothers, listen to me. Our great and glorious God appeared to Abraham, our ancestor, when he was in Mesopotamia. This was before he lived in Haran. ³ God said to him, 'Leave your country and your people, and go to the country I will show you.'

⁴ "So Abraham left the country of Chaldea. He went to live in Haran. After his father died, God sent him to this place, where you live now. ⁵ But God did not give Abraham any of this land, not even a foot of it. But God promised that in the future he would give Abraham this land for himself and for his children. This was before Abraham had any children.

⁶ "This is what God said to him: 'Your descendants will live in another country. They will be strangers. The people there will make them slaves and mistreat them for 400 years. ⁷ But I will punish the nation that made them slaves.' And God also said, 'After those things happen, your people will come out of that country. Then they will worship me here in this place.'

⁸ "God made an agreement with Abraham; the sign for this agreement was circumcision. And so when Abraham had a son, he circumcised him when he was eight days old. His son's name was Isaac. Isaac also circumcised his son Jacob. And Jacob did the same for his sons, who became the twelve great ancestors of our people.

⁹ "These ancestors of ours became jealous of their brother Joseph and sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and saved him from all his troubles. Pharaoh was the king of Egypt then. He liked Joseph and respected him because of the wisdom God gave him. Pharaoh gave Joseph the job of being a governor of Egypt. He even let him rule over all the people in Pharaoh's house. ¹¹ But all the land of Egypt and of Canaan became dry. It became so dry that food could not grow, and the people suffered very much. Our people could not find anything to eat.

¹² "But Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt. So he sent our people there. This was their first trip to Egypt. ¹³ Then they went there a second time. This time Joseph told his brothers who he was. And Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. ¹⁴ Then Joseph sent some men to tell Jacob, his father, to come to Egypt. He also invited all his relatives, a total of 75 people. ¹⁵ So Jacob went down to Egypt. He and our other ancestors lived there until they died. ¹⁶ Later, their bodies were moved to Shechem, where they were put in a tomb. It was the same tomb that Abraham had bought in Shechem from the sons of Hamor. He paid them with silver.

¹⁷ "The number of our people in Egypt grew. There were more and more of our people there. The promise that God made to Abraham was soon to come true. ¹⁸ Then a different king began to rule Egypt, one who knew nothing about Joseph. ¹⁹ This king tricked our people. He treated them badly, making them leave their children outside to die.

²⁰ "This was the time when Moses was born. He was a very beautiful child, and for three months his parents took care of him at home. ²¹ When they put him outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him. She raised him as her own son. ²² The Egyptians taught Moses everything they knew. He was powerful in all he said and did.

²³ "When Moses was about 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the people of Israel. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he defended him. Moses hit the Egyptian to pay him back for hurting the man. He hit him so hard that it killed him. ²⁵ Moses thought that his people would understand that God was using him to save them. But they did not understand.

²⁶ "The next day, Moses saw two of his own people fighting. He tried to make peace between them. He said, 'Men, you are brothers! Why are you trying to hurt each other?' ²⁷ The man who was hurting the other one pushed Moses away and said to him, 'Did anyone say you could be our ruler and judge? ²⁸ Will you kill me just as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹ When Moses heard him say this, he left Egypt. He went to live in the land of Midian, where he was a stranger. During the time he lived there, he had two sons.

³⁰ "Forty years later Moses was in the desert near Mount Sinai. An angel appeared to him in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹ When Moses saw this, he was amazed. He went near to look closer at it. He heard a voice; it was the Lord's. ³² The Lord said, 'I am the same God your ancestors had—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Moses began to shake with fear. He was afraid to look at the bush.



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³³ “The Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, because the place where you are now standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have seen my people suffer much in Egypt. I have heard my people crying and have come down to save them. Come now, Moses, I am sending you back to Egypt.’

³⁵ “This Moses was the one his people said they did not want. They said, ‘Did anyone say you could be our ruler and judge?’^[1] But he is the one God sent to be a ruler and saviour. God sent him with the help of an angel, the one Moses saw in the burning bush. ³⁶ So Moses led the people out of Egypt. He worked wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and then in the desert for 40 years.

³⁷ “This is the same Moses who said these words to the people of Israel: ‘God will give you a prophet. That prophet will come from among your own people. He will be like me.’ ³⁸ This same Moses was with the gathering of God’s people in the desert. He was with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and he was with our ancestors. He received life-giving words from God to give to us.

³⁹ “But our ancestors did not want to obey Moses. They rejected him. They wanted to go back to Egypt again. ⁴⁰ They said to Aaron, ‘Moses led us out of the country of Egypt. But we don’t know what has happened to him. So make some gods to go before us and lead us.’ ⁴¹ So the people made an idol that looked like a calf. Then they brought sacrifices to it. They were very happy with what they had made with their own hands. ⁴² But God turned against them and let them continue worshiping the army of false gods in the sky. This is what God says in the book that contains what the prophets wrote:

‘People of Israel, you did not bring me blood offerings and sacrifices
in the desert for 40 years;

⁴³ You carried with you the tent for worshiping Moloch
and the image of the star of your god Rephan.

These were the idols you made to worship.
So I will send you away beyond Babylon.’

⁴⁴ “The Holy Tent was with our ancestors in the desert. God told Moses how to make this tent. He made it like the plan that God showed him. ⁴⁵ Later, Joshua led our ancestors to capture the lands of the other nations. Our people went in and God made the other people go out. When our people went into this new land, they took with them this same tent. Our people received this tent from their fathers, and our people kept it until the time of David. ⁴⁶ God was very pleased with David. He asked God to let him build a Temple for the people of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon was the one who built the Temple.

⁴⁸ “But the Most High God does not live in houses built by human hands. This is what the prophet writes:

⁴⁹ ‘The Lord says, Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is where I rest my feet.

So do you think you can build a house for me?
Do I need a place to rest?

⁵⁰ Remember, I made all these things!’”

Stephen has been accused of speaking against the temple and the law [6. 13 – 14] so here gives a whistlestop tour of the whole of Bible history from Abraham to Joshua addressed to the Jewish leaders who shared that past. Stephen is undercutting the charge of abandoning the law and the temple by appealing to a higher authority, the most high God.



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Monday 19th April

Today, we remember St. Alphege, Archbishop and martyr

Archbishop and "the First Martyr of Canterbury." He was born in 953 and became a monk in the Deerhurst Monastery in Gloucester, England, asking after a few years to become a hermit. He received permission for this vocation and retired to a small hut near Somerset, England. In 984 Alphege assumed the role of abbot of the abbey of Bath where many of his followers from Somerset joined him. In that same year, he became bishop of Winchester. He served there for two decades, famed for his care of the poor and for his own austere life.

King Aethelred the Unready used his abilities in 994, sending him to mediate with invading vikings. The viking chieftain Anlaf converted to Christianity as a result of his meetings with Alphege, although they demanded tribute from the Anglo-Saxons of the region. Anlaf vowed never to lead his troops against Britain again.

In 1005 Alphege became the successor to Aleric as the archbishop of Canterbury. He returned to England when the Danes besieged Canterbury and took Alphege captive. The ransom for his release was about three thousand pounds and went unpaid. Alphege refused to give the vikings that much, an act which infuriated them. He was hit with an axe and then beaten to death.



Acts 6. 8 - 15

Some Jews Against Stephen

⁸ Stephen received a great blessing. God gave him power to do great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹ But some of the Jews there were from the synagogue of Free Men, as it was called. The group included Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. They started arguing with Stephen. ¹⁰ But the Spirit was helping him speak with wisdom. His words were so strong that these Jews could not argue with him. ¹¹ So they told some men to say, "We heard Stephen say bad things against Moses and against God!" ¹² By doing this, these Jews upset the people, the older Jewish leaders, and the teachers of the law. They became so angry that they came and grabbed Stephen and took him to a meeting of the high council. ¹³ The Jews brought some men into the meeting to tell lies about Stephen. These men said, "This man is always saying things against this holy place and against the Law of Moses. ¹⁴ We heard him say that Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and change what Moses told us to do." ¹⁵ Everyone there in the council meeting was staring at Stephen. They saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

So, who was Stephen? He was one of the Greek speaking Jews [from v.1 last week] with a Greek name meaning "crown." He has a group with him in Jerusalem in the Greek-speaking synagogues from all the great cities and areas of the Roman Empire. Cilicia is the same place as Tarsus [the birthplace of Saul / St. Paul and we'll see how their paths meet tomorrow] and Asia is referring to Ephesus where Paul founded another branch of the church. These places were all known to have large Jewish communities.

This group have a strong commitment to the law of Moses [v.11] which made the Jewish people stand out in the pagan countries in which they lived.

In Luke's writing, the most important thing about Stephen was that he was full of the Holy Spirit [v.5 last week and v.10 today]. It is likely that Stephen had never met or heard Jesus in person but he has Jesus as a living reality in his life.

Like Jesus himself and the rest of the apostles, Stephen finds that the call to follow Jesus leads to violent confrontation, arrest and the need to defend himself before the high council. It's another dramatic courtroom drama and that follows tomorrow...



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Lord God,
You loved this world so much,
That you gave your one and only Son,
That we might be called your children too.
Lord, help us to live in the gladness and grace
Of Easter Sunday, everyday.
Let us have hearts of thankfulness
For your sacrifice.
Let us have eyes that look upon
Your grace and rejoice in our salvation.
Help us to walk in that mighty grace
And tell your good news to the world.
All for your glory do we pray, Lord,
Amen.

Tuesday 20th April

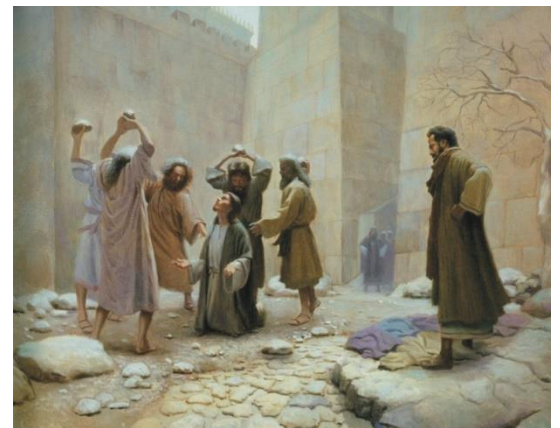
Acts 7. 51 – 8. 1a

⁵¹ Then Stephen said, “You stubborn Jewish leaders! You refuse to give your hearts to God or even listen to him. You are always against what the Holy Spirit wants you to do. That’s how your ancestors were, and you are just like them! ⁵² They persecuted every prophet who ever lived. They even killed those who long ago said that the Righteous One would come. And now you have turned against that Righteous One and killed him. ⁵³ You are the people who received God’s law, which he gave you through his angels. But you don’t obey it!”

Stephen Is Killed

⁵⁴ When those in the council meeting heard this, they became very angry. They were so mad they were grinding their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God. And he saw Jesus standing at God’s right side. ⁵⁶ Stephen said, “Look! I see heaven open. And I see the Son of Man standing at God’s right side.”

⁵⁷ Everyone there started shouting loudly, covering their ears with their hands. Together they all ran at Stephen. ⁵⁸ They took him out of the city and began throwing stones at him. The men who told lies against Stephen gave their coats to a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ As they were throwing the stones at him, Stephen was praying. He said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ He fell on his knees and shouted, “Lord, don’t blame them for this sin!” These were his last words before he died.



8 Saul agreed that the killing of Stephen was a good thing. Some godly men buried Stephen and cried loudly for him.

Stephen’s speech in chapter 7 is the longest in the book of Acts and introduces several new themes. The lectionary that we’re following misses most of this out and just gives us the “and finally...” at the end.

Basically Stephen has just outlined the whole of Old Testament history in his speech and is not condemning the law of Moses, merely those who claim to follow it but don’t and ignore the message of the prophets who told them that Jesus would come.

The council were really annoyed by this message. In the face of the hostile crowd, it would be easy just to see the hatred



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in their faces but Stephen, still full of the Spirit has his eyes fixed on heaven and sees the glory beyond the pain in his vision of heaven. It has echoes of the transfiguration and is further than anyone in this story has seen so far. At the Ascension [Acts 1.9] the apostles see only Jesus disappearing and a cloud but Stephen here sees right into the heart of heaven.

Stephen's death mirrors that of Jesus. Just as Jesus had commended his spirit to his Father [Luke 23.46] so Stephen entrusts his spirit to Jesus. His last words ask for forgiveness for his persecutors just as Jesus did from the cross [Luke 23.34]. It's clear that not everyone agreed with this as [8.1] some of the religious men gave him a proper burial.

This marks the movement from part 1 to part 2 of Luke's story as we finish the first phase in Jerusalem and move into the second phase of "Judah and Samaria." The early church in Jerusalem is asking the questions "Who is God speaking to," and "Who is the Gospel for?" But as we'll read the initial expansion is anything but organised and planned even though it is directed by the Spirit.

It starts with verse 1 of chapter 8; those present at the killing of Stephen laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul who approved of his death. He didn't take part, it would appear, but then became active in the persecution of the church. Stephen's death must have had some effect on him, however, as this young radical fundamentalist changes completely and as St Paul will dominate the second half of the book of Acts.

Love overcame

Emerging from a cold tomb

All the truth, majesty and creativity of a living God

Transforming a broken heart

Making a quiet return, in a still and sorrowful garden

The grave stone rolled away, to release redemptive love

Jesus resurrected and restored

Comforts a weeping woman

Speaks with travellers on a journey

Meets with his faithful friends

And they bow down before Christ alive

And acknowledged that the Saviour has arrived

That the word of God has come alive

And that the extraordinary transformation of heaven and earth is complete.

Wednesday 21st April

HM The Queen's Birthday

Today, we remember St. Anselm [1033/4 – 1109] who was born in Italy and became a monk in France. After the Norman Invasion in 1066 followed King William I from Normandy to England and became Archbishop of Canterbury. He was happier in the monastery than the royal court and following disagreements with King William I and King Henry I, he was sent into exile twice. His books of religious writing exist still and are studied with those of other great early Christian writers such as St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas.



Acts 8. 1b - 8

Trouble for the Believers

On that day the Jews began to persecute the church in Jerusalem, making them suffer very much. Saul was also trying to destroy the group. He went into their houses, dragged out men and women, and put them in jail. All the believers left Jerusalem. Only the apostles stayed. The believers went to different places in Judea and Samaria. ⁴They were scattered everywhere, and in every place they went, they told people the Good News.



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

Philip Tells the Good News in Samaria

⁵ Philip went to the city of Samaria and told people about the Messiah. ⁶ The people there heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he was doing. They all listened carefully to what he said. ⁷ Many of these people had evil spirits inside them, but Philip made the evil spirits leave them. The spirits made a lot of noise as they came out. There were also many weak and crippled people there. Philip made these people well too. ⁸ What a happy day this was for that city!

Luke's picture of Paul as a young radical determined to make everyone follow his beliefs or else fits very well with Paul's own descriptions of himself in his letters [[Galatians 1](#) / [Philippians 3](#) / [1 Corinthians 15](#)].

The rapid growth of the followers of Jesus is shown here [[v.3](#)] to include both men and women. Stephen's confrontation with the Jewish leaders had stirred up so much anger at bitterness, however, that Jerusalem is no longer seen as a safe place and the believers move out to Samaria and Judea. The fact that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, however, suggests that it was the Greek-speaking incomers who were driven out.

But those who leave see it as an opportunity as well as a threat and begin preaching the good news of Jesus throughout the wider countryside, fulfilling the mission given in [Acts 1.8](#). As Luke tells us the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, these people would have been the new believers, who may not have seen or heard Jesus in person, but who are now carrying out the work of mission, with no clear plan from the apostles.

Luke re-introduces us to Philip now, who was one of the 7 chosen with Stephen to help with the sharing out of food and resources [[Acts 6. 2-5](#) from last week]. Like Stephen, he has a Greek name so was probably one of the Greek-speaking Jewish community who left Jerusalem.

History and geography lesson needed here. Samaria is only a short distance outside Jerusalem but when the tribes of Israel split in the Old Testament, Jerusalem was in the southern kingdom and Samaria in the north. Philip's mission here reunites those old Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel into the new kingdom for all people ushered in by God's Messiah, predicted many times in OT scriptures. It's difficult to know exactly where Philip's mission was as Samaria in those days was an area rather than a single city.

As well as this message of restoration of the kingdom and unity of the people, there is the message of preaching and healing. An encounter with Jesus is described as an outpouring of wholeness and joy [[v.8](#)].

Heavenly Father,
as we celebrate the ninety fifth birthday of Her Majesty the Queen,
receive our heartfelt thanks
for all that you have given her in these ninety five years
and for all that she has given to her people.
Continue, we pray, your loving purposes in her,
and as you gather us together in celebration,
unite us also in love and service to one another;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ exchanged the glory of a heavenly throne for the form of a servant,
we thank you that you have given Elizabeth our Queen a heart to serve her people,
and have kept her devoted in this service beyond all who were before her:
encourage us by her example to serve one another, and to seek the common good,
until you call us all to reign with Christ in your eternal kingdom. Amen.



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

Thursday 22nd April

Acts 8. 26 - end

Philip Teaches a Man From Ethiopia

²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. The angel said, “Get ready and go south on the road that leads down to Gaza from Jerusalem—the road that goes through the desert.”

²⁷ So Philip got ready and went. On the road he saw a man from Ethiopia. He was a eunuch and an important official in the service of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He was responsible for taking care of all her money. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. ²⁸ Now he was on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet.

²⁹ The Spirit said to Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” ³⁰ So he went toward the chariot, and he heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ The man answered, “How can I understand? I need someone to explain it to me.” Then he invited Philip to climb in and sit with him. ³² The part of the Scriptures that he was reading was this:

“He was like a sheep being led to the butcher.

He was like a lamb that makes no sound as its wool is being cut off.

He said nothing.

³³ He was shamed, and all his rights were taken away.

His life on earth has ended.

So there will be no story about his descendants.”

³⁴ The official said to Philip, “Please, tell me, who is the prophet talking about? Is he talking about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Philip began to speak. He started with this same Scripture and told the man the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶ While they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The official said, “Look, here is water! What is stopping me from being baptized?” ³⁸ Then the official ordered the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the official went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away; the official never saw him again. The official continued on his way home. He was very happy. ⁴⁰ But Philip appeared in a city called Azotus. He was going to the city of Caesarea. He told people the Good News in all the towns on the way from Azotus to Caesarea.



Luke likes these chance encounters in Acts – remember back to Peter coming across the crippled man in the temple last week and healing him in the name of the Lord and all that followed from that. Here’s another apparently random [but carefully planned by God] meeting.

Luke doesn’t tell us all that Philip has been doing since we were first introduced to him but he’s now clearly an evangelist, listening for the word of God and ready to drop everything and take off, even into the middle of a desert, if it means meeting someone and passing on the message.



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

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As he arrives in this desert spot, he meets possibly the last person you'd expect to see there – an African pilgrim from the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia who also happens to be the “Chancellor of the Exchequer” responsible for all the finances of the Queen of Ethiopia. Interesting fact to bore people with – “Candace” in v.27 is not the name of the Ethiopian queen but a royal title a bit like “Her Majesty.”

Geographically, on the map centred upon Jerusalem and the Mediterranean, Ethiopia would have been classed as one of the “ends of the Earth” but with an ancient Jewish community.

This man is learned enough to read the book of the prophet Isaiah in Hebrew. God, who has been preparing this “chance” meeting tells Philip to get closer to hear what's being read [v.28-29]. Philip isn't surprised that such a high ranking official should be literate and able to read them, but he wonders if he understands the meaning behind the words. The Isaiah text comes from chapter 53, which portray God's servant as the very opposite of the victorious Messiah that the Jews were expecting.

For Philip, reading these words with the Spirit-inspired guidance, this passage can only mean Jesus so he preaches the Good News to the official who is baptised immediately.

So what happens next? Well, we don't know! The Ethiopian returns home [in Ethiopian tradition, he founds the Christian church] and Philip is taken away by the Spirit until he crops up again in chapter 21. For Luke, the important part is this meeting, an intersection of paths with the before and after known only to God.



Resurrection Light

Risen Christ, when darkness overwhelms us

may your dawn beckon.

When fear paralyses us

may your touch release us.

When grief torments us

may your peace enfold us.

When memories haunt us

may your presence heal us.

When justice fails us

may your anger ignite us.

When apathy stagnates us

may your challenge renew us.

When courage leaves us

may your spirit inspire us.

When despair grips us

may your hope restore us.

And when death threatens us

may your resurrection light lead us.

Amen.



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

Friday 23rd April

St George [*Martyr and Patron Saint of England c.304*]

St George's Church – 25th Anniversary of its Dedication

Today, we remember St. George who died on this day in 303. Very little is known about his life and he is thought to be a Roman officer of Greek descent who was martyred for his beliefs. There is a Greek and a Latin account of his life from the fourth century which tell differing stories; the tale of him killing the dragon is a much later addition in the 11th century. He became Patron Saint of England in the 14th century although he was overshadowed by the traditional Patron Saint, Edward the Confessor, until 1552 when King Edward VI ordered the removal of all Saints' images and banners except those of St. George during the English Reformation.



Revelation 12. 7 – 12

Michael Defeats the Dragon

⁷ And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,

“Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Messiah,
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown
down,
who accuses them day and night before our
God.

¹¹ But they have conquered him by the blood of
the Lamb

and by the word of their testimony,
for they did not cling to life even in the face of
death.

¹² Rejoice then, you heavens
and those who dwell in them!

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

But woe to the earth and the sea,
for the devil has come down to you
with great wrath,
because he knows that his time is short!”

2 Timothy 2. 3 - 13

³ Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ
Jesus. ⁴ No one serving in the army gets entangled
in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please
the enlisting officer. ⁵ And in the case of an
athlete, no one is crowned without competing
according to the rules. ⁶ It is the farmer who does
the work who ought to have the first share of the
crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will
give you understanding in all things.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a
descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹ for
which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being
chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not
chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the
sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the
salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal
glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with
him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;



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St Thomas

St George

John 15. 18 - 21

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

We pray for our country and everyone whose lives are being affected by the Coronavirus pandemic; for all churches dedicated to St. George; for St. George’s church in our own parish, its congregation, school and the people it serves.

*God of hosts,
who so kindled the flame of love in the heart of your servant, St. George
that he bore witness to the risen Lord by his life and by his death;
give us the same power of faith and love
that we who rejoice in his triumphs
may come to share with him in the fullness of the resurrection;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Saturday 24th April

Today, we remember St. Mellitus who died on this day in 624 and was the first Bishop of London and third Archbishop of Canterbury. He was the recipient of a famous letter from Pope Gregory I who urged that the conversion of England to Christianity be done gradually integrating local customs and festivals. This letter was preserved by the chronicler of the period, the Venerable Bede. He tells us little else of Mellitus other than that he was of noble birth, miraculously saved the cathedral and town of Canterbury from a fire and had gout.

His name is preserved through the five St. Mellitus colleges across the country which have over 700 students studying theological courses including 300 preparing for ordination.





PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

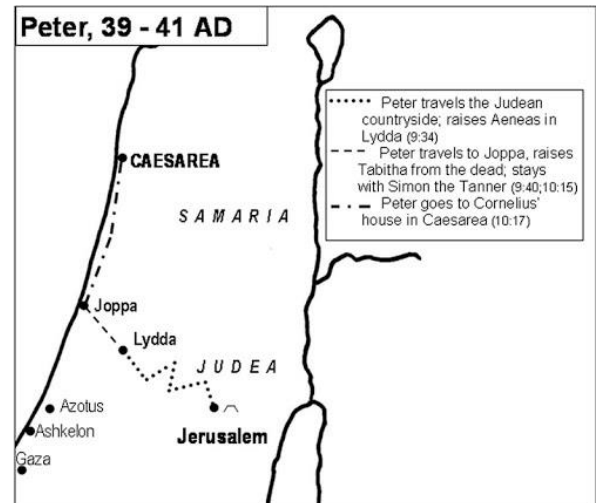
St George

Acts 9. 31 – 42

³¹ The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, these groups of believers became stronger in faith and showed their respect for the Lord by the way they lived. So the church everywhere grew in numbers.

Peter in Lydda and Joppa

³² Peter was traveling through all the areas around Jerusalem, and he stopped to visit the believers who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he met a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for the past eight years. ³⁴ Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed!” He stood up immediately. ³⁵ All the people living in Lydda and on the plain of Sharon saw him, and they decided to follow the Lord.



³⁶ In the city of Joppa there was a follower of Jesus named Tabitha. Her Greek name, Dorcas, means “a deer.” She was always doing good things for people and giving money to those in need. ³⁷ While Peter was in Lydda, Tabitha became sick and died. They washed her body and put it in an upstairs room. ³⁸ The followers in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, which was not far away. So they sent two men, who begged him, “Hurry, please come quickly!”

³⁹ Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. All the widows stood around him. They were crying and showing him the coats and other clothes that Tabitha had made during her time with them. ⁴⁰ Peter sent all the people out of the room. He knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to Tabitha's body and said, “Tabitha, stand up!” She opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. Then he called the believers and the widows into the room. He showed them Tabitha; she was alive!

⁴² People everywhere in Joppa learned about this, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for many days at the home of a man named Simon, who was a leatherworker.



Although Luke's storyline may look a bit random here, what's he's doing is leading us into chapter 10 where Peter meets the Gentile [non-Jew] Cornelius. But first Luke has to move Peter out of Jerusalem so he can see what's going on in the rest of the world.

Verse 31 is “the story so far” summing up showing that everything here is part of the second act, witness in Judea and Samaria. Here the church seems to be growing peacefully without persecution or controversy.

As in chapter 6, where the apostles chose Stephen, Philip and five others to help with the work of charity and administration, here they find that others are full of the Spirit and can be trusted to preach the message and baptise new believers. The apostles start to move into an overseeing role, founding new churches and integrating them into the wider community. This is what Peter is doing here- moving out from Jerusalem to Lydda and Joppa. He is following the example



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of Jesus who spent much time on the road and heals Aeneas in the name of Jesus. Lydda is on the edge of the hill country of Judea, is coastal and faces into the Mediterranean Sea, open much more to the influences of the Roman and Greek worlds [many of its inhabitants were Greek].

It's another of Luke's God-planned chance encounters next. Peter had no plans to go to Joppa but when the followers there have a death in their community and realise how close Peter is in Lydda, they send two men to beg him to come [v.38]. They tell him to come quickly realising that Peter may have hesitated – as a fisherman from Galilee, this was a long way from where he had started. As with Barnabas earlier, Luke here paints a fine thumbnail portrait of Tabitha who in just a few sentences comes across as a generous, hard-working, much-loved integral member of their community. Peter prays and raises Tabitha to life, bringing the power of Jesus into a seemingly hopeless situation and finding life renewed and faith restored [40-42].

So, it's time for a rest and Peter stays with Simon the "tanner" or leatherworker. There is a lot of nuance in verse 43. Luke uses the Greek word "Xenos" to describe Peter which means both a 'guest' and a 'stranger' and we've seen already that Peter was a stranger to this area. Staying with a tanner was also a risk; the process was essential in those times but the process stank [really, really stank] so tanneries were on the edges of towns and usually downwind! It's also interesting to note that when describing the Sea of Galilee where Peter grew up and worked as a fisherman, Luke calls it a lake [Greek: limne] but the Mediterranean here is called a sea [Greek: Thalassa] – a place where you could sail out into the rest of the known world, which we'll travel later with St. Paul.

So Luke now has Peter in the right time and the right place for the next God-planned chance meeting, one so important that Luke tells it three times, once as it happens in chapter 10 and twice as Peter reflects on it in chapters 11 and 15. We first have to be introduced to a new character, Cornelius, who gets a whole scene to introduce himself but that's all for next week.

*Lord, the resurrection of Your Son has given us new life and renewed hope.
Help us to live as new people in pursuit of the Christian ideal.
Grant us wisdom to know what we must do,
the will to want to do it,
the courage to undertake it,
the perseverance to continue to do it,
and the strength to complete it. Amen.*



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

NOTICES:

Church Attendance for School Places:

To register attendance, please e-mail:

bdhww.churchattendance@gmail.com

giving both your name / your child or children's names and the church you would usually attend. You will need to do this even if you attend a service and sign in. Only one e-mail per week will be counted [even if you would have attended more than once in any week]. Please do NOT use any other e-mail address to register church attendance as these will not be included. Thank You

Annual Parochial Church Meeting: has a new date **Monday 24th May** at 7:30pm in St. Bartholomew's church. The usual Sunday regulations will be in place [signing in, face coverings, socially distanced seating etc.]

If you are planning on coming, can you e-mail me here westhoughtonparish@outlook.com so we know how many to expect and I can send the annual reports and accounts out to you when the PCC have approved them.

The PCC will meet on Monday 26th April by Zoom / e-mail primarily to finalise the Annual Reports and Accounts for 2020.

Christian Aid Week runs from Sunday 9th May. As last year, with Covid restrictions, there won't be any door-to-door collections but we will have details at the time of how you can donate electronically and we will have Christian Aid envelopes available in church in May so that you can donate that way.

Mayoral Service will be at St. Bartholomew's Church on Sunday 16th May at 11:00am. Again due to the Covid restrictions, this will be very different from previous years.

Confirmation 2021

We hope that Confirmation Services will be held later this year. If you are a young person in Year 6 and above and would like to consider this, please ask an adult to get in touch and we will forward you a registration form to complete. If you are an adult who would like to consider confirmation, again please get in touch. Registration forms are available in our church buildings from this Sunday. The deadline for completing the form is the 9th May 2021. Please note, if we already have your details from last year when Confirmation Services had to be cancelled, you don't need to apply again. We still have your details and will be in touch soon. Thank you.

Next Sunday: Fourth Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 4. 5 – 12 / John 10. 11 - 18

9:15 am Service of the Word at St. George's Church

Elaine Simkin

11:00am Service of Holy Communion at St. Bartholomew's Church

Revd Carol Pharaoh

Do contact us if we can offer any help or support at this time.

Team Rector: Revd Carol Pharaoh 01942 859251 carol.pharaoh@gmail.com www.westhoughtonchurches.org.uk

Team Vicar: Revd Angela Wynne 01204 468150 – revawynne@gmail.com

FACEBOOK – locate us by searching Westhoughton parish

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Material for the news sheet should be sent to Joan Warner by Wednesday morning 01942 818821 joan.warner35@outlook.com

To receive these pewsheets, newsletters or special events leaflets electronically, please e-mail

westhoughtonparish@outlook.com