



WEEKLY UPDATE

Last after Trinity - Sunday, 25th October 2020

From the clergy...

Dear all,

By the time you read this, I hope you will all have enjoyed a very welcome extra hour in bed, after the clocks went back last night. Perhaps some of you are looking forward to lengthening evenings spent snuggled up near the fire; perhaps some are feeling nervous about facing what may well feel like a long winter. However you feel about this shift in season, we have already weathered lots of changes this year, and we will all get through this winter together as well.



At the end of this week, the church remembers Martin Luther, the young German monk who began the Reformation. He criticised the power of the Roman Catholic Church and disputed the authority of the medieval popes, and in so doing threw all of Europe into turmoil. Families were divided, countries torn apart, and wars raged. Coupled with the plagues which regularly swept through the continent, it must have felt to many like the world was falling apart. And yet, from this brokenness, new signs of hope, of community, and of faith began to emerge – including our very own Church of England! As we move towards the end of this strange year, it is perhaps no bad thing to remember that we belong to this long history of Christians finding transformation in the midst of strange and broken circumstances. Down the ages, our church has seen countless long evenings give way to bright and unexpected mornings, and whatever uncertainty lies ahead in the next

few months, there is also much to hope for – and our hope is not in vain.

In the meantime, there is plenty going on at St John's this week. On Wednesday, it is our turn to lead a day of prayer for Covid-19, part of a deanery-wide initiative to make October a month of prayer. This will form the focus at our 10.30 Eucharist, as well as the afternoon, when prayers will be said each hour whilst the church is open for prayer. Do join us if you are able, in church or at home. This week we will also be preparing for the APCM, which is being held on Thursday evening at long last – some six months later than expected! The meeting may not look quite like normal, but it will be good to reflect on all that St John's has been and done over the last 18 months, to give thanks for those stepping down after serving on PCC for three years, and to celebrate the people stepping forward to replace them. More information below.

Hopefully, then, we will see many of you in the course of the week. If not, then take care, stay well, and remember we are here if you need anything at all.

With love and prayers,
Revd Lyndon and Revd Helen

THIS SUNDAY'S READING: Matthew 24.30-35

THE COLLECT

Merciful God,
teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty,
that trusting in your word and obeying your will
we may enter the unfailing joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A prayer from Broadstone URC on behalf of Broadstone Churches Together:

This coming week is half term week; we pray for the children, teachers, and others who work in schools. May we all think of people travelling to visit friends and family, and also those who can't because of the current restrictions.

Special prayers for the sick: June, Philp, Robert, Bill, Dorothy, David, Joan, Joy, Marjorie, Jim, Roger and Russell.

News

- + A reminder that our **Housegroup** will meet this Wednesday at 7.30pm via Zoom.
- + Our postponed **APCM** will be taking place at 7.30pm on Thursday 29th October in the Parish Hall. You will need to have booked a place in advance as numbers are limited in order to maintain social distancing.
- + **Wed 28th October Prayer Day for our situation with Covid-19.** To mark this, the church will be open for prayer from 12 - 4.30pm, with 5 minutes of prayer led by Revd Helen or Revd Lyndon on the hour every hour during the afternoon.
- + **Evening Prayer on Fridays at 4.30pm.** We are offering a virtual Evening Prayer online. It is a lovely way to 'end the day' and the week together and we will guide you through this simple service of prayer. All are welcome, and you will find the Zoom link and readings in the weekly email.
- + **Remembrance Service** Unfortunately, this year the British Legion has decided that there can be no separate service and event for Remembrance Day due to the Covid-19 situation. At our 9.30am Eucharist service on Remembrance Sunday (8th November) we shall have a representative from the RBL, who will lay the two wreaths during our service at our two war memorials. We know that you will find your own ways to mark Remembrance Sunday this extraordinary year.

✦ **Memorial Services and All Souls** This year the Covid-19 situation means we have to offer space differently to remember our loved ones. Normally we have held an open memorial service for All Souls. This year we are offering two different events. On **Sunday 1st November**, we shall open the church up between **3 and 5pm**. We invite you to pop in during this time to say a prayer and light a candle, and have a moment of peace and opportunity to reflect and remember. We are not having an official reading of names this year or other service that day, due to the problems of restricted numbers. We hope this way everyone will have chance to pop in if they wish to do so. Both Revd Lyndon and Revd Helen will be present throughout the time.

✦ On **Sunday 15th November** we shall be holding a memorial Service in the afternoon but again, due to number restrictions, we are initially only inviting families of those who have lost a loved one in the last 12 months and for whom Revd Lyndon or Revd Helen took the funeral service. There is rather a long list of funerals this year. We hope you understand that this year's funeral families must be given priority - bereavement is always hard, but this year has been a very difficult one to lose someone, with many not able to attend funerals at all. If closer to the time we find there is space available, we hope to open it up to others to attend on a first-come first-served booking system. We shall let you know if this becomes possible. Thanks for bearing with our arrangements this year.

✦ **Inventory – Pyxes** We are about to do our annual inventory. Please could you let the office know if you currently have a pyx at home. We need to know exactly how many we have for the record.

✦ **Choosing Charities To Support For 2021** It is that time of the year, when we ask you to nominate a charity for St John's to support throughout 2021. I am thrilled that this church continues to understand that God honours generous givers and that as we donate a tenth of our income to charities - more than ever in need this year - so we shall grow in spirit and in heart. This year we have changed how we are doing this. We are asking each person to nominate **ONE CHARITY ONLY**. This can be international, national or local. We would like as many people as possible to nominate a charity to be considered, and ask you would send Revd Helen Bailey an email or postcard with the name of your nominated charity, 3 or 4 sentences about what work that charity does, and if possible, the name of the Head Office so we can contact them. The PCC will then consider all nominations in its November meeting and vote: the top 6 will each get a share of the income we give away. As part of being an Eco Church this year, we are also committing to one charity being an environmental concern. We look forward to hearing from you! The closing date for your nomination to reach me is Thursday 5th November. Revd Helen

Puzzle Corner

The solution to the 'Sounds the same' puzzle:

1.	Lock/loch
2.	Sole
3.	Alter/altar

4.	Reign/rain
5.	Principal/principle
6.	Magazine
7.	Mere
8.	Bear/bare
9.	Hart/heart
10.	Sure/shore
11.	Genes/jeans
12.	Thrown/throne
13.	Cowered/coward
14.	Fate/fete
15.	Byte/bite
16.	Roll/role
17.	Liar/liar
18.	Gall/Gaul
19.	Mayor/mare
20.	Stayed/staid

Some songs from the shows this week:

Which shows do all these songs come from?

1.	Bring him home
2.	I could have danced all night
3.	Send in the clowns
4.	Sit down, you're rocking the boat
5.	You'll never walk alone
6.	Happy talk
7.	Tomorrow
8.	Any dream will do
9.	Old man river
10.	Lambeth Walk
11.	I feel pretty
12.	Flash, bang, wallop
13.	Sixteen, going on seventeen
14.	Getting to know you
15.	As long as he needs me
16.	Bless your beautiful hide
17.	The music of the night
18.	Feed the birds
19.	Memory
20.	Matchmaker, matchmaker

Our lives at home

First, a real 'Good Samaritan' story sent in from one of our parishioners.

A wonderfully kind experience!

For the first six months I had someone do my food shopping for me and for the last two months I have had my food delivered by a supermarket. I have been isolating but very rarely pop into M&S for one or two items. A few days ago at 6 pm I did this and went to the desk to pay. Unfortunately, my contactless action did not work so she suggested I put in my PIN number. Having hardly used the card for 6 months, I could not remember it. I said I would pop home for the cash. Then the next lady in the queue came up to me and said that she would like to pay the bill (£32) for me. With a tear in my eye, I said how very kind it was of her to offer to do this but that I lived quite near and would pop home for the cash. Wasn't that wonderfully kind?

Chris sent in these photos, entitled *Our Lundy Experience 2020*.



There are two methods of crossing the Bristol Channel to Lundy. This year we got one of each. Phyl can't stand the Helicopter (7 minutes), and Chris dislikes the boat intensely (when its rough, 2 hours) .

But you can't choose, you have to travel by what's available on the day. An added bonus of arriving by helicopter is that it avoids a steep 400 foot climb to get to the top of the Island.



Please send any contributions for future updates to Geraldine in the Parish Office at the email address given below.

Contacts

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WEEKLY SERMON

25th October 2020, Last Sunday After Trinity
Rev Lyndon Webb

On Wednesday I attended an online conference for young priests. And the main speaker, who is not a Christian, told us that from his perspective, the best strategy for mission is to really emphasise the weirdness of Christianity. As one person put it, we should try to put the odd back into God, because this strangeness might just intrigue people enough to make them want to find out more. Well, today's passage would certainly put this theory to the test: because it is very strange! In these 5 verses, Matthew jumbles up images of a heavenly battle, a leafy fig tree, and heaven and earth themselves passing away without any explanation whatsoever. What on earth is going on? What is this word that endures? Should we really expect Jesus to appear overhead at any moment with an army of angels?

Well, whenever I'm faced with a weird passage like this one, I often find it helps to start by putting it in context. That is, unless that context is even weirder; and I'm afraid this is one of those days.

This passage about the Son of Man coming in glory and the tender fig tree appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke; and all three of them place it just before Jesus arrives at Jerusalem. But in Matthew, it plays a very particular role.

Matthew's Gospel basically describes Jesus' journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. And along the way, he stops 5 times to teach. These lessons are known as the 5 discourses of Matthew. In each discourse, Matthew gathers together sayings and stories from Jesus around a particular theme. So the first is the Sermon on the Mount, where Matthew writes down Jesus' teachings about ethics.

Today's passage stands at the very centre of Matthew's fifth and final discourse, which is known dramatically as the apocalyptic discourse. It's the final teaching Jesus gives before the Last Supper, and compared to the Sermon on the Mount, it seems terribly violent.

Jesus kicks off by attacking the scribes and the pharisees for being unjust hypocrites, and lamenting for all of the prophets who have been ignored and unjustly killed in Jerusalem's history. Then he talks about tearing down the Temple in three days, before warning his followers that they will need to flee from wars, famines and natural disasters in the future. The whole thing is full of angst and in all honesty I find it very hard to read.

But then comes today's short passage, where Jesus tells us to look up to heaven where we will see not destruction or suffering, but the glory of God pressing in above the little fig tree, tenderly opening its leaves to the sun, blissfully unaware of any brokenness in the world. And then Jesus makes this ambiguous promise:

'Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.
Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

What on earth do we make of this?

Well, I think 'this generation' could refer to at least three different groups of people. I wonder which seems right to you.

Firstly, 'this generation' could refer to Jesus' disciples, and all of this strange and unsettling language could tell us something about how he is feeling at this moment on his journey. Perhaps it reflects the fear and the anxiety which is building as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, where he knows he is going to face betrayal and the cross. Perhaps this whole passage is inviting us to show compassion to Christ, along with all those suffering anxiety today.

Secondly, 'this generation' could refer to the early Christians who belonged to Matthew's church. In year 70, the Temple of Jerusalem really was torn down, not by Jesus but by the Romans. I don't think we can overemphasise how terrible this loss would have been to the people of Jerusalem; it really would have felt

like the centre of heaven and earth had passed away. And so lots of scholars have argued that Matthew was writing his Gospel just after the loss of the Temple, using Jesus' teaching to try and make sense of what had happened, and reassuring his church that God was still with them in the words of Jesus which he was writing down.

And thirdly of course, 'this generation' could refer to us, and to all people who have lived and believed since the resurrection, and who are still waiting for Jesus to come again, waiting for that day when history will be fulfilled and made whole. Perhaps Jesus uses such extreme language because he wants us to keep awake over this long period of waiting, to keep watching for signs of the kingdom. In fact, after today's passage, Jesus goes on explicitly to say that we should keep watch carefully, for the kingdom will come, not with the certainty of the seasons, but like a thief in the night, or the unexpected bridegroom. Although of course, thanks to climate change, perhaps this is increasingly how the fig tree's leaves will come in future years as well.

However we interpret this passage, though, I personally think it is the tenderness of the fig tree which is key for us today. This, I think, is its lesson.

Because despite the strange and violent imagery in Matthew's fifth discourse, this passage isn't ultimately about destruction at all; it is about life. Jesus doesn't say that God will come in wrath like winter stripping leaves off trees; he says that God will come in glory, like summer growth, like sap rising through branches and bursting through their buds into unimagined fruitfulness.

Because God's Word, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made, *is* life; and it is this life which will endure, and which rolls down gloriously from heaven to overwhelm the brokenness of the world. This Word comes like a doctor, fracturing a badly healed bone in order to reset it; it comes like a gardener pruning her tangled fig tree so that it bears healthy fruit again; it comes like the miracle of a newborn child after the pains of labour. This Word has come this year in the cries of protesters insisting that Black Lives Matter, in the Rebellion against Extinction, and this week in the criticism of MPs who voted to let children go hungry this half-term. It has come in the stories of compassion and friendship which emerged during lockdown, and it comes to us today in the lesson of the fig tree, tenderly opening its leaves to the sun, a sign of God's enduring, and glorious creativity.

This year we have felt keenly the fact that worldly structures and routines are not as secure as they seem, but are always liable to change. Chaos has come like a thief in the night and divided people, one from the other. Perhaps we have all looked to the sky at one time or another, hoping to see a cohort of angels swooping down to rescue us all. But perhaps above all else, Matthew offers us courage today. Because whichever generation you think he is talking to, and however you make sense of the strange language in his fifth discourse, the one thing which remains obvious is that Matthew clearly believes that all of history ultimately belongs to God. I think he is able to face and to describe brokenness head-on because he knows the story doesn't end with the cross, but with the Resurrection. He knows that nothing is beyond God's power to redeem and to heal; he knows well God's ability to create life in the midst of brokenness; and he knows beyond any doubt that it is not violence or fear or illness, but the tender, compassionate glory of the risen Christ which will be the final word.

Amen.

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