



Abington Pastoral Letter No.21 15.07.2020

Dear Friends,

I'm writing this on 15th July, which is St Swithun's Day. Many of you will know the following proverb which says that if it rains on that day, it will rain for 40 days.

St Swithun's day if thou dost rain

For forty days it will remain

St Swithun's day if thou be fair

For forty days 'twill rain no more

But who was St Swithun? He was an Anglo-Saxon bishop of Winchester from 852 until his death in 863. He was initially buried out of doors but he was moved from his grave to an indoor shrine in the Old Minster at Winchester on 15 July in 971. Later his main shrine was transferred into the new Norman cathedral at Winchester in 1093. His body was probably later split between a number of smaller shrines. His head was certainly detached and, in the Middle Ages, taken to Canterbury Cathedral and, of interest to us perhaps, an arm went to Peterborough Abbey! So, in our diocese, we have a tenuous link with St Swithun.

No one knows the origin of the proverb. Some say it was because it rained heavily when his body was moved into the Old Minster, but there is a scientific basis to the weather pattern behind the legend. Around the middle of July, the jet stream settles into a pattern which, in the majority of years, holds reasonably steady until the end of August. When the jet stream lies north of the British Isles, then continental high pressure is able to move in and dry weather prevails. When it lies across or south of the British Isles, Arctic air and Atlantic weather systems predominate bringing wet conditions.

But, as we know only too well, even on a single day, weather can vary widely in different parts of the UK, so it's impossible that the legend could be true everywhere! According to the Guinness Book of Records, the most false that the prediction has been, was in 1913 when a 15-hour rainstorm was followed by 30 dry days out of 40 and again in 1924 when 13.5 hours of sunshine in London were followed by 30 of the next 40 days being wet.

Regardless of what the weather does today, we know that farmers and growers need enough rain and sun at the right times in order to produce a good harvest. Our New Testament reading last Sunday was the Parable of the Sower and for those who aren't able to watch the online services, here is the text of my reflections on that passage.

Reflections on Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23 - The Parable of the Sower

I wonder how many of us have sown some seeds in the last few weeks during lockdown? We don't need a garden, or a greenhouse, or an allotment, a suitable windowsill will do and seeds are amazing things! They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and inside each one is everything that is necessary to grow a new plant. But if seeds are left in the packet, nothing will happen. For seeds to grow they first have to germinate, or sprout, and for that to happen they need water. But then, if the seeds have germinated and we forget to water them, they'll die. OK, our seeds have germinated and have been kept watered and if we're lucky, there will be so many of them that they'll need to be thinned out, otherwise they'll compete with each other and choke themselves to death. So, we've thinned them out and planted them in separate pots, but they still need looking after. If we want to harvest a good crop of peas or beans or tomatoes, or whatever, in addition to water, the growing plants need sufficient light, warmth and food. Depending on how much of each they receive, we will get a reasonable crop, a good crop or a bumper crop.

I think this shows how the parable of the sower is as relevant today as when Jesus told it 2000 years ago. I'm sure everyone has grown some seeds, even if it was just mustard and cress on cotton wool in primary school.

And just as the growing plants need the right conditions to flourish, we can't grow in our Christian faith without the right conditions. If we don't get support we will be like the seeds left in the packet, or those we forgot to water, or the overcrowded ones. Our faith will wither and the message of the Gospel will make no permanent impact on us.

But what support is there? There's our church community, with sermons, Bible studies, prayer groups and pastoral care; there are Christian friends we can talk to; there are courses, Bible reading notes, retreats, online resources and books; not forgetting of course, our own routine of daily prayer and bible reading. All these things act like the water, light, warmth and food, which seeds need if they are to grow and produce fruit, and which we need to grow as disciples.

In the Parable of the Sower, the seed is the Word of God, which is the Gospel, and it contains all that we need for life. The four kinds of soil are the differing responses we make on hearing God's message of salvation through Jesus. But, the good news is we are not one kind of soil for all time. At certain stages in our faith journey, we will respond differently. Sometimes we might not hear the message at all, or be put off by the reactions of other people, or be too busy to pay any attention to it. But then, we do respond. And what I find encouraging, is that God doesn't expect us all to be identical in our response. We are individuals and will produce fruit in differing degrees.

I wonder how Jesus might tell the parable of the sower to us today? It might sound something like this. A person is reading their messages on their mobile phone during the sermon, the words go in one ear and out the other without registering at all.

Someone else is immediately inspired by the sermon but their friends make fun of them when they tell them about it, so they don't bother to do anything about it.

Another person decides to put into practice what they've heard but the pressures of their job and money worries get in the way, so they give up.

But there are some who accept the Gospel and do their best to live as Christian disciples. Their witness brings others to faith, perhaps just one member of their family, who is inspired by how differently they treat people; or perhaps several work colleagues, who they tell about Jesus and share what he has done for them; or many people in a variety of situations, by giving their testimony, leading a house group or putting their Christian principles into practice in the local community. However, insignificant they might feel their action is, their lives all bear fruit.

So, ask yourself what kind of soil are you and how might you become better soil and bear more fruit? But remember, it is God who makes the seed grow, not us.

Prayer for the Week

Do you remember the simple prayer that Jun gave us at the beginning of his sermon series on Prayer at the start of Lent? I know it seems a long time ago now, but it goes like this:

God, you are good.

I need help.

So do they.

Thank you.

In Jesus name. Amen

Here is a simple reflection on each phrase written for these times.

God, you are good. Your goodness is all around us, even in these uncertain times: the sun keeps shining, the flowers bloom and people are kinder to each other.

I need help to stay positive in this crisis; to stay safe; to go on praying.

So do they - those who are ill; those who care for them; those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Thank you. Thank you that your love is unconditional. Thank you for our family and friends who love us too. Thank you for listening to us when we pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.

Daily Hope Telephone Number 0800 804 8044

The Church of England's free telephone service called Daily Hope is still running and has been updated to reflect the most recent events. It is worth using, especially if you have no access to the internet, as it has something for everyone. The options include a recorded message from Archbishop Justin Welby; 'Hymns we Love', where a hymn is followed by a short talk inspired by it; 'Hymnline' which plays several well-known hymns on a continuous loop; A 'Daily Reflection' by Pam Rhodes; the Church of England's Weekly Service; short services of Morning and Evening Prayer; the Mothers' Union Midday Prayer (which you can listen to at any time!);

and the latest Government Advice on the Coronavirus situation. Most of these options change each day, so it is worth listening to several times in the week, not just once. Remember, it is a free telephone number so it won't cost you anything and you might enjoy joining in with the services each day, especially if you live on your own.

Thursday Zoom Prayer Meetings

These have been running successfully for the last five weeks and it's easy to join in. The format is based on Common Worship 'Prayer During The Day' and includes plenty of time for personal prayers. It starts at 10 am, lasts for about 35minutes and you can join in via telephone if you have no access to the internet. Please contact me if you are interested in this service as you will need either to receive the Zoom invitation or you will need the phone number from me. You can install Zoom on your smartphone or laptop by downloading it from here <https://zoom.us/download>.

Reopening the Church Building

I know that most of you are keen to know when services will begin again in the church. Before that can happen, we have to reassure ourselves that the arrangements which will be necessary to keep everyone as safe as possible are put in place. Our church is small and the fixed pews and narrow aisles impose severe restrictions on how we comply with Covid-secure rules. The Ministry Team and Standing Committee have been studying the Government and Diocesan Regulations and the next step is for their proposals to be presented to the PCC for consideration and approval when Jun is back from his paternity leave. This PCC meeting is scheduled to take place on 29th July. It is hoped that worship might then be possible from 23rd August. However, as Jun mentioned in his last letter (No18 dated 24.06.20) our worship in church will be different from what we have been used to in the past and we must be prepared for this. Meanwhile, the online services will continue indefinitely, even after the church building has reopened for worship. Please pray for everyone who is involved in making the right decisions for Abington and pray that God will send his Holy Spirit to inspire us with wisdom. We all need to be open to change, so pray also for a willingness to accept the new arrangements in a spirit of Christian love and then to move forward with a sense of excitement and anticipation.

Communications

A reminder that until Jun is back from paternity leave, Bob is acting as coordinator for all communications, so if there are any messages that need sending out, please email them to bob.purser@abingtonchurch.org.uk

Also, if you have any pastoral concerns, prayer requests, or want to join the Thursday Zoom Prayer Meetings, please let me know and I will do my best to help. My email address is lizmk@outlook.com

And, finally, a reminder that this week the 10.00am online Sunday service will again be streamed on YouTube only, so if you usually watch on Facebook please follow the link below to find us on YouTube and spread the word to anyone who does not receive these letters but who tunes in to join the service. Bob is leading the service again and the service sheet is attached to this letter. The words will not appear on the screen so you will need either to print them out to use during the service or have them available to read on a device or bring them up on screen according to the instructions that Bob sent out by email on 10th July. You can watch on the same address as usual:

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCHK8eQzC5B6f-nH7H4SoVA?view_as=subscriber

Please stay safe in the coming week, especially as more public places start to open up and life begins to return to a kind of normality and, remember, make sure you have a face covering or mask to wear when you go shopping from 25th July.

With love in Christ,

Liz

Liz Kelly (Licensed Lay Pastoral Minister)