

15.01.2021



Dear Friends

A change has begun

Last Sunday we heard the story of the baptism of Jesus Christ. It's really lovely story that describes a quite glorifying moment; a dramatic public manifestation of Jesus as Christ and the Saviour of the world. So what is the message in it to us who are living in this pandemic?

I remember saying to myself last year around this time. 'Well, maybe in 2021 Spring, things would be different.' But here we are, living under another national lockdown. It might feel hard to see whether there is any change at all.

According to surveys, more people are feeling depressed, stressed and disheartened than the first lockdown. Perhaps it's because we have been hanging on for the last 12 months and just when we thought change was coming, we found ourselves pushed back again.

You see, when Christ was baptised in the river Jordan, the Spirit of God descended from heaven like a dove on him. What is important here is the timing of it.

"As he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." (Mark 1.10)

It was only after Christ was immersed in the water by John the Baptist and when he was coming out of the water, the Spirit of God descended upon him. There was a human action and then divine response followed. Jesus came to John the Baptist. John the Baptist responded to Jesus. They worked together, bringing Jesus into the water. And finally when he was coming out of the water, he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove on him. And he heard this voice,

"And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mark.1.11)

Prayer, baptism or other important parts of our faith and ministry; These are not about acquiring some magical power that will just change everything with a snap of finger. In most cases, they may not bring a sudden 180 degree change in a person's life immediately. I mean in some rare

cases yes they do but in most of cases they don't work that way. But that doesn't mean our they are mere symbolic gestures or mere rituals either. There is a real strength, real change, real action involved in them. It's just they are more like sowing a seed. If you are a gardener, you would know this.

For a seed to bring any change to the land, you have to sow the seed first. And then you water it, look after it through storms or cold or draught until it blossoms.

The baptism of Christ tells us of that glorious moment when the saviour of the whole world was revealed to those around him. But think of where it all began. It all began with that moment when Angel Gabriel told Mary that she was pregnant. Can you imagine, a young girl being told that she was pregnant? Do you think Mary would feel suddenly everything surrounding her life was changed? No. Everything seemed to be exactly the same as they were. Mary still had the problem of having to deal with the custom of Jewish society and the same neighbours and problems of the world. She was worried about how she is going to break the news to her Fiance, Joseph. She could see hardly any change with her life. And yet, there it was, the seed of change that will change the course of entire human history. That small, unrecognisable change in teenage girl's body, there it was the change that God has already started for the whole world.

Friends, it may be hard to see how long we will be in this or when the change that we are longing for is going to come. But just like baptism of Christ began from that tiny little change in Mary's body, the little step you take today, to keep yourself, your loved ones and your neighbour safe; those little acts of kindness and love that you do for someone; those small offerings of prayers and intercessions you make at your bedside or in your car or during your walk; our little attempts to bring everyone together through our online worship no matter how imperfect it might be; WILL bring the change and the healing of the whole nation. And you are not alone in this. God will respond to your action just he did at the baptism of Christ. Because you are his child.

"You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mark.1.11)

So many people have been hanging on but now it may feel like we are pushed back again. But there is still hope. The hope of vaccine but also the more ultimate hope for us as children of God. The end of the end is positive. Because God is beside you, he is in you, he is above you and he is for you. He tells you today. "You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Urgent Appeal for Prayer for St. Christopher's

I was very sorry to hear that there are now 15 confirmed cases amongst the residents and 8 cases amongst the staff at St. Christopher's. It is very serious and challenging situation. However the responses from Sarah, the manager, the members of the staff and the residents couldn't be more encouraging and faithful. Donald, one of our churchwardens and the Chair of Trustees at St. Christopher's wrote the following.

It is a great blow to the staff and everyone involved especially when they have been taking so much care to follow all the safety measures, it is also very stressful. The staff are supporting each other by doing extra work and also doing tasks they would normally do. Local clinical support groups have been contacted and they are content with the clinical steps we are taking.

I have asked Sarah what more we could do for her and the staff at the moment and there was nothing of a pecuniary nature and of course, unfortunately, we cannot go in and lend a hand. I told Sarah that we are praying her, all the staff and the residents and assured her of our pride and respect for them. They have recently been notified that they have won a county wide award for the standard of their care.

As Donald rightly said above, although we cannot go in and lend our hands, we can pray for them and let them know that they are being remembered, prayed for and appreciated. So we are going to have a special **Prayer Afternoon on Zoom** to show our solidarity, support, love and prayers for our friends at St. Christopher's. It will take place **on Saturday 16 January at 4 pm** and anyone who wish to add their prayers are welcome to join this prayer time. We will have a couple of residents to tell us how they are doing and receive our prayers. Please join if you can to add your prayers for our friends.

Topic: Prayer Afternoon for St. Christopher's

Time: Jan 15, 2021 04:00 PM London

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2227506484?pwd=a2lLV2NuWTRYOTNtM1U1bFdNK0NZdz09>

Meeting ID: 222 750 6484

Passcode: 5PixqX

If you couldn't join on this Saturday, please remember them in your personal prayers.

Prester's Licensing as Lay Reader of Abington

The times we are living is indeed challenging and difficult and that is why it gives me all the more encouragement and joy to announce you that Prester is going to be formally licensed as Lay Reader of Abington by Bishop Donald on Sunday 17 January. The licensing will be a brief and it will begin right after the Sunday Online Worship. It will take place on Zoom. Please join this Zoom Service to support and pray for Prester.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86863450102?pwd=ZEc4YnRuc0ZLL1dJK0QzRnp2L3VFUT09>

Meeting ID: 868 6345 0102

Passcode: 910417

This link will also be displayed on the chat at the end of the Sunday service.

Prester's Lockdown Musings: Activists and Contemplatives

Prester has offered to write his reflections on Lockdown which I am sharing with you here

It's been said there are two kinds of people: those who divide people into two categories – and those who don't! In the church we sometimes define people as activists or contemplatives. Activists are to be found where there is a job to be done: anything from evangelism to flower arranging. They find fulfilment in their outer life. Contemplatives are more likely to be found on their own. In church they will gravitate to the quieter services or prayer times. They find fulfilment in their inner life. I realise that this is a broad brush description. Most of us are a bit of both. But many of us would readily identify as "I'm more of an activist" or "I'm more of a contemplative".

I'm not making any suggestion that one is better than the other. (Jesus, of course, perfectly combines both!) I suspect, though, that activists have a harder time during lockdown. In "normal" times we have been used to freely travelling to our work or church or favourite leisure activity. We value keeping up with friends and family, and exploring new places on holiday. To have these things severely restricted, or even taking away from us entirely, is difficult for all of us. But it seems to affect activists more severely.

The supreme New Testament example of an activist is probably the apostle Paul. No one did more to spread the Christian gospel. Wherever he went – unless he was kicked out of town – he left groups of believers. If your Bible is one of those that contain maps, you can easily see the extent of his missionary journeys. He endured stoning, shipwreck, and finally imprisonment,

followed by execution.

Paul's response to his imprisonment is very striking. It can help all of us – activists especially – in responding to the restrictions of lockdown. Writing from prison to his friends at Philippi, Paul does not say he misses being able to go to new places to spread the gospel, or to revisit and strengthen the fledgling churches. He does not say he regrets having exercised his right of appeal to Caesar, which meant he spent longer in prison. He does not even say he misses regular communal worship – though no doubt he did.

"One thing I do," says Paul. "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3: 13 -14.) He knows he's had a heavenly call. He knows he has a heavenly reward. He's not complaining about his restrictions. He says he can still press on to do what God wants despite his restrictions.

What could Paul do from prison? He could – and did – pray faithfully for friends, colleagues and fellow disciples. He could – and did – keep in touch by the means of communication of the day: hand delivered letters. The support and instruction he gave would have been eagerly read by the people he wrote to. They have helped countless millions since. Earlier in the letter he says "what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel." Other believers had been made confident by his imprisonment and were daring "to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear". (Philippians 1: 13 -14.) If Paul was prevented from doing it, they would take on the task.

In lockdown we are all given the opportunity to develop our inner life, spending time daily in prayer and scripture, and using whatever means of communication we have to bless and keep in touch with others. Today we are less likely to write letters, more inclined to telephone or use emails or Zoom. (Other video calling systems are available!)

If we're prevented from doing things we normally do, we can feel frustrated, even guilty. The frustration is understandable, but the guilt is unnecessary. It's guilt feelings, rather than true guilt requiring repentance. God knows our circumstances. He does not require the impossible. Whether we think of ourselves as activists, or as contemplatives, it's my belief that if we follow Paul's example we can come out of lockdown stronger than we went in. "One thing I do..."

Lent Groups 2021

This year, we are offering Lent Groups on Zoom. We shall be using Tom Wright's book, 'God and the Pandemic' to try to make some sense of what has happened over the last year. He invites us to consider a response that is Bible based and draws on the way of living, thinking and praying that is revealed by Jesus.

You do not need internet access or a smart phone, a standard landline will do. There will be five one hour sessions and you will need a copy of the book.

Bob Purser will offer a group on Mondays at 7.30pm starting 22 Feb

Alison Barnes will offer a group on Tuesdays at 7.30pm starting 23 Feb

Liz Kelly will offer a group on Wednesdays at 10.00am starting 24 Feb

I am very grateful to Liz who is organising this. Please let her know if you wish to take part by emailing Liz Kelly at lizmk@outlook.com or telephoning Dianne Ward on 01604 281264 and telling us which group you want to join and whether you need us to order a copy of the book for you. If you wish to buy it for yourself, it is available in paperback on Amazon, from Eden Christian Bookshop online, or on Kindle, and costs between £6.25 - £7.99.

I have attached the e-poster to this letter.

May God bless you and all those whom you love. May he protect you and those around you.

With love in Christ

Jun