

Cycle of Prayer

Sunday, 8 November to Saturday, 5 December 2020

Sunday, 8 November 2020

Third Sunday before Advent (Remembrance Sunday)

(Prompted by the Gospel set for Proper 27A: Matthew 25:1-13)

Hanging around is part of the guest experience at weddings. The photographer takes so long; the queue to greet the bridal party goes on and on; and the caterers are so keen on proper order that you've almost forgotten what comes next! One of the striking things about Jesus' parables is the way they so often touch common experience despite the centuries. The bridesmaids wait ... and wait ... and wait.

With no smart phones to play with, nor any open bar to lean against, those who wait fall into bored sleep. No criticism is aimed at them for doing so, despite Jesus' command to 'Stay awake' in chapter 24 and at the parable's end. And here the wise are as sleepy as the foolish. Sometimes life is tedious – even when you're looking for something great – and there is no harm in succumbing to escapist rest. The vital part is being ready for that something great when it eventually comes. There is a great difference between 'resting ready' and 'resting recklessly.' Being unsure about just when something great will happen is no excuse for not preparing. The foolish recklessness of the unready leads to their exclusion.

But what if this parable is Jesus speaking of an incident at a wedding, rather than telling an allegory of his own relationship to the discipleship community? The groom splits the band of friends; some are admitted, and the others refused. With which group do we sympathise? And what do we feel about friends who break bonds with one another so readily? And at the say-so of an apparently arrogant groom? The bride doesn't figure anywhere. It's clear where the power lies. This is much more than an earnest plea for readiness.

Perhaps it is also about harsh choices and the dilemmas of mutual responsibility? We all too often feel either unprepared or are swept along by others in the face of such things. This parable has perhaps a pandemic edge to it. God's word is 'a lamp to our feet' (Psalm 119.105) and maybe we need to consider carefully how we fuel those lamps in these coronavirus times. Hanging about isn't an option for the faithful.

Archbishop Howard Gregory - Primate and Bishop of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

Monday, 9 November 2020

0608 Middlewich

C: Simon Drew, Lorraine Reed, Alison Boulton, Liz Woode, Thia Hughes. LM: Jacqui Briscoe, Steve Broadfoot, Jeremy Coles, Duncan Goodwin, Christine Hamill-Stewart, Julie Hassall, Sue Ikin, Anne Latham, Elaine Reynolds, Tony Woode.

Please pray for our ongoing engagement with both our regular church members and our community. That church members will continue to be encouraged and developed in their faith, and that our community will continue to hear the good news of Jesus, through our various means of communication at this difficult time.

Bishop Dintoe Letloenyane, The Free State (Southern Africa).

Tuesday, 10 November 2020

0609 Moulton

C: Mark Green. LM: Grant Davis.

Pray for how we engage with and serve the community we serve in this difficult time. Special prayers for our brothers and sisters from Moulton Methodist Church which closed at the end of October, and our commitment that we give them a continuing place to worship.

Bishop Pedaculi Birakengana, Rumonge (Burundi). Bishop J Ebuloluwa Ogunele, Diocese on the Coast; Bishop Paul Zamani, Kwoi (Nigeria).

Wednesday, 11 November 2020

0610 Northwich, Holy Trinity

C: Carol Seddon. LM: Phil Baker, Rob Shepherd.

Bishop Geoffrey J Woodcroft, Rupert's Land (Canada). Bishop Tennyson Bogar, Dogura (Papua New Guinea).

Thursday, 12 November 2020

0611 Northwich, St Luke

C: Dave Mock. LM: Jim Crawshaw, Malcolm Evans, Sue Renshaw, Kenneth Smyth.

Bishop Pontien Ribakare, Rutana (Burundi). Bishop Uriah Kolo, Doko (Nigeria). Bishop Moisés Quezada Mota, Dominican Republic (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Friday, 13 November 2020

0612 Over St Chad

C: Chris Moore, Joe Smith. LM: Christine Keay.

Winsford C of E School.

Bishop Reuben Kisembo, Ruwenzori (Uganda). Bishop Vadapalli Prasada Rao, Dornakal (South India).

Saturday, 14 November 2020

0613 Over St John

C: George Crowder.

Please pray for our church family to connect with people in our community and help them connect to God. Evangelism at a distance is challenging, so pray for opportunities to share the gospel of Christ creatively and engagingly. People are feeling lost and helpless, so pray for opportunities to show the love of Christ in compassion and support.

Over St John C of E School.

Bishop Melter Jiki Tais (Primate), Sabah (South East Asia). Bishop David McClay, Down & Dromore (Ireland).

Sunday, 15 November 2020

Second Sunday before Advent

(Prompted by the Gospel set for Proper 28A: Matthew 25:14-30)

This is such a hard parable: the wealthy man is a thoroughly nasty 'piece of work'. He swans off to a secluded and safe hideaway in the Caribbean while his minions are left to struggle on. His wealth is so great that the death and economic chaos of a pandemic means nothing to him. He is tyrannical, harsh, and unforgiving. It's all there in the third slave's reasoning behind his anxiety, he knew him as someone determined to exact as much profit as he could for as little personal effort as he could.

There is no benevolence whatsoever in this character. We must get ourselves into the mindset of a first-century peasant economy to appreciate the consequences. This is a world where all goods are experienced as strictly limited. The sense of economic growth that came so easily to us – at least in pre-coronavirus and pre-ecological crisis times – simply didn't exist. Instead the goods of the world were seen as limited to what already is, so that to seek more meant that someone else had to lose. So, to behave honourably and ethically was to maintain what you had without either loss or gain. In this way of looking at life acquisition was theft. And the poor were always at the mercy of the unscrupulous rich whose power meant they could take whatever they wanted. The first two slaves want a slice of that action and eagerly apply the wealthy man's methods. They are vicious and rapacious enough to gain the wealthy man's commendation.

It is the third slave who does the honourable and responsible thing – he preserves what he has without taking advantage of anyone. That, of course, provokes rage and punishment from the wealthy man. Even what the slave has is cruelly snatched from him and he is left with nothing but pain and tears. Bodily, mentally and spiritually he experiences what every powerless peasant knows, 'to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'

The righteous one is condemned in the parable but take heart that kind of world is being overturned. The setting of this parable so near to Advent is no coincidence. The corruption of the world is plain to God, and God is about to do a new thing in the person of Jesus. God's Kingdom is coming. The old world of grasping, rapacious inequality is overturned. Sleepers, awake! A new day is dawning!

[Acknowledgement: based on Bruce J Malina and Richard L Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospel* (2003, 2nd ed), Fortress Press, Minneapolis.]

*Bishop Dushantha Lakshman Rodrigo, Colombo; Bishop Keerthisiri Fernando, Kurunegala
(Extra-Provincial to the Archbishop of Canterbury).*

Monday, 16 November 2020

0614 Sandiway

C: Ruth Mock. LM: Sue Hadden, Paul Stevenson, Hilary Chambers, Andrew Hardy, Dug Harris, Marian Harris, Jo Whittall, Nicola Boot.

Please pray that we will continue to forge strong relationships in the village through our online services and pastoral care, even though we will have to restrict the numbers who can attend our Advent and Christmas services this year.

Bishop Augustine E Ohilebo, Sabongidda-Ora (Nigeria). Archbishop Michael Geoffrey St Aubyn Jackson, Dublin & Glendalough (Ireland).

Tuesday, 17 November 2020

0615 Weaverham

C: Paul Withington, Phil Bishop. LM: Linda Jones, Gilly Latham, Jules Sanders, Mike Sanders, Brian Stevens.

We pray for our parish at this difficult time, that we may all be kind to each other. And, together with the other churches in the village, by our words and actions, spread the love of Jesus to everyone.

Bishop Raphael Hess, Saldanha Bay (Southern Africa). Bishop Daniel Deng Abot, Duk (South Sudan).

Wednesday, 18 November 2020

0616 Wharton

C: Tim Hanson. LM: Irene Greenhouse.

Our loving Heavenly Father, In these times of uncertainty but also opportunity please encourage us to produce 'deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom'.

Wharton C of E School.

Bishop Nicholas Holtam, Salisbury (England). Bishop Steven Benford, Dunedin (Aotearoa NZ & Polynesia).

Thursday, 19 November 2020

0617 Whitegate

C: Paul Dawson, John Stopford, Jane Millinchip. LM: Pauline Hayward, Teresa Finney.

Whitegate C of E School.

Bishop Pinuel Dip, Sambalpur (North India). Bishop Edmund Dawson Ahmoah, Dunkwa-on-Offin (West Africa). Bishop Sameer Isaac Khimla, Durgapur (North India).

Friday, 20 November 2020

0618 Northwich, St Helen

C: Andrew Ridley, Jane Millinchip. LM: David Drinkwater, Berenice Kirwan.

Witton Church Walk C of E School.

Bishop Susan Brown Snook, San Diego (The Episcopal Church, USA). Bishop Paul Butler, Durham (England).

Saturday, 21 November 2020

Macclesfield Deanery

Bishop David Rice, San Joaquin (The Episcopal Church, USA). Bishop Markus Yohanna Danbinta, Dutse (Nigeria). Bishop Stephen Takashi Kochi, Kyoto (Japan).

Sunday, 22 November 2020

Christ the King

(Prompted by the Gospel set for Proper 29A: Matthew 25:31-46)

In these troubling coronavirus times, we are told again and again that decisions must be based on expert advice. We are reliant on experts who know what they are doing. And most of us are content with that, not least because we feel our own knowledge inadequate. But then a disconcerting thought strikes me from this parable – in the story Jesus told, the righteous – the heroes of the piece – have no idea what they're doing!

The king says, 'You're blessed, the whole kingdom is yours because you served me again and again. What a joy you folks are.' And they reply, 'You what? I can't remember doing any such thing.' They weren't experts in social care, food logistics, or penal reform. Their good works didn't arise out of a policy decision, a funded campaign, or an aid strategy, as useful as those things might be. No, the good things they had done had no premeditated quality to them at all. No expertise was exercised here, in the sense of consciously learnt technique and application. None!

What they had done was feed, comfort, visit, clothe, and the like without a second thought – without a moment's calculation – without training, instruction, or practice. These efforts had simply issued from the people they are – as natural to them as breathing, without the hesitation of so much as a blink. They didn't know what they were doing – they just did it. The love of God had all unconsciously just poured out of them. No scores kept; they don't know what they have done.

Of course, it doesn't work the other way about. The unrighteous are all too clear about what they had done. They **know** that they had not responded; they know what they

hadn't done. The calculated failure to meet need means that they are cast out of life forever.

In Matthew's gospel this story is the last word from Jesus. Now Matthew's narrative will move on to the passion. It will tell of what happens to Jesus and that small band of followers who stay close to him – those awful last days and his death. His teaching is at an end. His last word is about the last things – about judgement at the end of time. But it's not some fanciful story of a future age or a calling to account after death. It's put in such a way that it asks a hard question of every person who hears it: Do you know what you are doing day by day, every single day? Do you live as a person who gives away God's love, God's gift of life, of care, of liveliness, without keeping score? This is about living in such a way that trust in God, trust in life itself, oozes from your very pores and flows all unconsciously in action and concern for others.

Bishop Nicholas Dill Bermuda (Extra-Provincial to the Archbishop of Canterbury).

Monday, 23 November 2020

1502 Bollington

C: Veronica Hydon. LM: Anne Coomes.

Please pray for our church and local community as the Vicar retires on 31 December and the search begins for a new incumbent. We are a vibrant liberal catholic parish, supporting two CofE primary schools and a population of around 8,000 people. Our motto is: "Be strong and of good courage, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go!"

Bollington C of E School. Bollington Cross C of E School.

Bishop Hector (Tito) Zavala, Santiago (Chile). Bishop Frenzel Ray P Piluden, Santiago (Philippines).

Tuesday, 24 November 2020

1503 Bosley

C: John Harries, Steph Morris. LM: Judith Harries.

Please pray for the community of Bosley during this time of Covid pandemic and for our church extension as it nears completion. May the reordering enable us to be a place of community engagement and outreach.

Bosley St Mary's C of E School.

Bishop Francisco Cezar Fernandes, Sao Paulo (Brazil). Bishop Robert Skirving, East Carolina (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Wednesday, 25 November 2020

1505 Gawsworth

C: Colin Wilson. LM: Keith Parrott.

Bishop Blessing Erifeta, Sapele (Nigeria). Bishop V S Francis, East Kerala (South India).

Thursday, 26 November 2020

1506 Henbury and Broken Cross

C: Suzanne Eddleston. LM: Linda Craig.

We give thanks for all those who have worked so hard to continue mission and ministry in this parish during the vacancy, and who have done this during a time of such global and national challenge. Please pray for the new phase of ministry in this parish as we welcome a new Priest-in-Charge and give thanks for the recent licensing of a new Lay Reader.

Bishop Michael William Hawkins, Saskatchewan (Canada). Bishop George Turyasingura, East Ruwenzori (Uganda). Bishop Brian Lee Cole, East Tennessee (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Friday, 27 November 2020

1507 Hurdsfield

C: James Gibson. LM: Eileen Delight, John Owens, Hellen Watson, Jared Brown, Melissa Wearden.

Please pray for HTH as we continue with a Live Online Service each Sunday am at 10:30 and a face to face service at 4:00pm. Please pray that we would be able to engage effectively and meaningfully with our community over the Christmas period through these services and other things that we are planning.

Please pray for our Building for the Future project, part of which involves building a new community building on the church site which should be happening in early 2021.

Bishop Christopher Harper, Saskatoon (Canada). Vacant, Eastern Himalayas (North India).

Saturday, 28 November 2020

1508 Macclesfield St Michael & All Angels (Macclesfield Team Ministry)

C: Martin Stephens, Andy Williams. LM: Peter Marshall, Lynne Spedding, Catherine Stephens, Mike Strutt.

- Give thanks for our two church members studying on Foundations for Ministry; pray that they would grow in faith as well as knowledge, and that God would speak clearly for their next steps in ministry.
- Pray for those helping develop a new sense of purpose for St Michael's as a Town Centre Church: for the overall team and for the three groups considering our priorities of 'Encounter', 'Exploring and Nurturing', and 'Sustainability'.
- Pray for wisdom about Christmas services, both on-line and in-person. We need to make decisions about what to do and who to include. We want to reach out to the town but need to make sure it's safe in the current situation.

Macclesfield Christ the King RC / C of E School.

Bishop Paul Kiptoo Masaba, Sebei (Uganda). Bishop Timothy Kwok, Eastern Kowloon (Hong Kong). Bishop Luke Ken-ichi Muto, Kyushu (Japan).

Sunday, 29 November 2020

Advent 1

(Prompted by the Gospel set for Advent 1B: Mark 13:24-37)

Mark's gospel today challenges us with stern words about the end, when even the powers of heaven are shaken. This is the Advent theme through the centuries of the church – the reality of evil, the crushing certainty of death, the horrors of human experience, the violence and hardness in the hearts of people, the profound fear of what might yet be on the basis of what we know has already been. Troubling thoughts in these hard times. Keep alert, says Jesus in this passage, keep alert to the realities of the world. But we can hardly raise our heads. How do you keep alert, and stay sane? Lighten our darkness! We cry.

Enter onto our human stage, Christ the harlequin, to lift the pain and make life bearable – to awaken us to reality and yet give us a joyful hope. The harlequin, the clown with the diamonds of variegated colour, came out of the 16th century Italian commedia dell'arte. This improvised popular comedy took common everyday kind of stories and dialogue, and linked them to topical issues in a way that lifted people's spirits, made them laugh, and steeled them with a vision of mirth that could lift them above the horrors and hurts of life.

The harlequin enables us to laugh at life – not the laughter of scorn, no, this is the laughter that looks life squarely in the face and draws the sting of its hurts by seeing the hilarity in it, the absurdity, the pomposity of evil, the over-weening arrogance of power, and the joy that is the foundation of life. The psalmist says God himself laughs at the wicked because he foresees their downfall (Psalm 37:13). For the foolishness of God is wiser than people, and the weakness of God stronger than human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Don't think this image of Christ a new one – far from it. One of the very earliest representations of Christ in Christian art depicts a crucified human figure with the head of a donkey (Alexamenos graffito, Palatine Hill, Rome c.238-244). No one is sure what it means. Is it an arcane sign or a cruel parody? Either might be the case, or perhaps those catacomb Christians who drew it had a deeper sense of the comic absurdity of their position than we usually think. A wretched band of slaves, outcasts, and powerless women – they were square pegs alright. Maybe they sensed how ludicrous their claims appeared. They knew they were fools for Christ, but they claimed that the foolishness of God is wiser than all the wisdom of humanity.

Bishop Jorge Pina Cabral, The Lusitanian Church (Extra-Provincial to the Archbishop of Canterbury).

Monday, 30 November 2020

St Andrew

1509 Macclesfield St John

C: Suzanne Eddleston.

We give thanks for all those who have worked so hard to continue mission and ministry in this parish during the vacancy, and who have done this during a time of such global and national challenge.

Please pray for the new phase of ministry in this parish as we welcome a new Priest-in-Charge and continue to explore ways in which we can proclaim the love of God in this place. Please also pray for our church school as we prepare for a new Headteacher in the New Year.

Bishop Alexander Asmah, Sekondi (West Africa). Bishop Todd Ousley, Eastern Michigan (The Episcopal Church USA).

Tuesday, 1 December 2020

1510 Macclesfield St Paul

C: Michael Fox. LM: Emma Dennehy.

Please pray for our young people during Advent as we launch Fun@4...in a bag on our YouTube channel as a way of of engaging children in the dramatic story of Advent.

Bishop Peter Lee, Seoul (Korea). Vacant, Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador (Canada).

Wednesday, 2 December 2020

1512 North Rode

C: Colin Wilson.

Archbishop James Richard Wong Yin Song, Seychelles (Indian Ocean). Bishop Patrick Bell, Eastern Oregon (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Thursday, 3 December 2020

1513 Pott Shrigley

C: David Swales. LM: John Ryley.

Pott Shrigley C of E School.

Bishop Pete Wilcox, Sheffield (England). Bishop William Mchombo, Eastern Zambia (Central Africa). Bishop Santosh Marray, Easton (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Friday, 4 December 2020

1514 Prestbury

C: Patrick Angier, Steve Murray, Avril Ravenscroft. LM: Anne Stirling, Keith Ravenscroft, Margaret Tate, Andrea Fitton.

Prestbury C of E School.

Bishop Johnson Chinyong'ole, Shinyanga (Tanzania). Bishop William Jay Lambert, Eau Claire (The Episcopal Church, USA).

Saturday, 5 December 2020

1515 Rainow with Saltersford and Forest

C: Vacant.

Archbishop Laurent Mbanda, Gasabo (Rwanda). Bishop John Armes, Edinburgh (Scotland).
