

All Saints' Church

Cottenham with Rampton



Pastoral Letter #42

6th January 2021

Dear Church Family,

A very happy New Year to you! I do hope that you were able to enjoy some contact with family on Christmas Day. Whilst we enter a third period of lockdown, it would be good to think that the distribution of vaccines will make a difference as Spring approaches.

One of the lectionary Bible readings for this week has been the story of Jesus' turning water into wine at the Wedding of Cana. It can often be regarded as a bit of a frivolous miracle, mainly because we don't fully appreciate the culture of the time and how disastrous it would have been for the bridegroom to have run out of wine. I think it's a timely reminder that in circumstances that appeared particularly hopeless, Jesus' intervention turned a situation of disgrace and shame into one of generosity and plenty. There wasn't just enough wine, but *more* than could ever be needed. At a time when the national news is so bleak, it's good to remind ourselves of what we *do* have – safe, warm homes; good health care; food aplenty; and a Heavenly Father who adores us. And a vaccine on the way – in plentiful supply – that, in time, will transform how we're currently living.

Over the Christmas period I was fortunate to be invited to join an online group reading a new book (prior to its release in February) by Jeff Lucas called '*Singing in Babylon: Finding Purpose in Life's Second Choices*'. Using the story of Daniel from the Bible, taken into captivity to Babylon 2600 years ago, Jeff's book reflects well on the reality that life for every one of us involves episodes or seasons that would not be our first choice. Deported with a few friends to a strange land, Daniel finds himself in a location and situation where absolutely everything about the culture – music, food, customs, religion, philosophy, education, values – was all utterly foreign to him. They left behind the Promised Land – the place of God's bountiful provision, and the temple – viewed by the Jewish people as the place where God dwelled on the earth. Whilst the text tells us that this had happened as a result of God's judgement, Daniel and his friends must have wondered '*Why us? Why now?*' And there are situations that we face – certainly not our first choice! – where we similarly ask '*Why me? What did I do?*'

I'm just over half-way through Jeff's book and was already thinking that the book of Daniel and Jeff's reflections would make a great sermon series for Lent this year when I heard that his book has been chosen for the second 'National Big Church Read'. This initiative is all about reading great Christian literature and discussing it with friends. It would be great as a Church to sign up to the 'Big Church Read' and work through 'Singing in Babylon' together. The 'Read' starts on 17th February (Ash Wednesday) and lasts six weeks. Each week, there will be online video content covering a few chapters of the book, followed by an All Saints' Bible Study Group through Zoom of those interested in going deeper. So, in brief, there will be:

- A sermon series from 21 February on the book of Daniel using ‘Singing in Babylon’ as a resource – accessible for all
- The opportunity for all of us to read the book together by taking part in the ‘Big Church Read’
- Access to online teaching material through the ‘Big Church Read’ website
- Joining a Zoom Bible Study Group to discuss a few chapters at a time.

If you’d like to join in and read the book when it is published, please let me know. The book (bought in bulk) costs £9.99. This is a good opportunity to delve into the Old Testament with a respected author and ask ourselves the question ‘*What does this mean for me (us) today?*’

Thank you to all who made the Christmas services such a joy – to Robin Horgan and the choir, Emma McCaughan playing the organ, the Unwin family for their support of the Live Nativity, to those who decorated both churches so beautifully, and to our Churchwardens (and Assistant Wardens) and their families in getting the church ready for services and tidying/cleaning afterwards. Hopefully it won’t be too long before we can gather again to worship.

Please can you remember in your prayers those who are unwell: Peter Tilbury, Janet Johnston, Bob Ward and Jean Wilmshurst; and for the families of Gladys Bransom, Sean Fuller and Kay Wilson who have recently died. It would be good if you could also pray for:

- All those working for the NHS and in research and the pharmaceutical industry
- All those who cannot work from home and have no choice but to be at risk of becoming infected and infectious
- Those in severe economic need and those relying on Foodbanks
- Those struggling with mental health in this third lockdown
- Local teachers and teaching staff who are providing education for children of key workers/vulnerable children as well as teaching online
- Parents who are juggling work with home-schooling
- Those with little contact with family who are feeling lonely
- The people of those countries who are a long way away from obtaining a vaccine
- All those with responsibility of leadership during this pandemic, locally, nationally and across the world.

Do please get in touch if you need to chat. I’m never too busy to talk to anyone and welcome contact. We can talk over the phone, using Zoom or go for a walk (daily exercise).

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Best wishes,

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