

**All Saints' Church
Cottenham with Rampton**

**Pastoral Letter #67
3rd November 2021**



Dear Church Family,

I do hope that you are all well. It's been a few weeks since I've penned a letter but in that time we've celebrated Harvest Festival in both churches, had Cottenham Brass play a concert at Cottenham, remembered those we've loved and lost at the Time to Remember Service, joined together with old members and new at the Back to Church Service, and we've changed the clocks!

It was so lovely to see so many at the Back to Church Service, welcoming back those who've been to the church for baptisms or weddings, those who've become a member of The Friends of All Saints' Church, Cottenham, those new to the village, as well as those who have been part of the church for some time. It's good to remind ourselves of what it can feel like when we gather together in a good number. Do be encouraged to prioritise coming as often as you can – we miss you when you're not there!

A few days ago, I came across the following story. It made me think about my own tendency to want to achieve tomorrow yesterday, and to rely too much on my own strength, and not God's. I wonder what you'll make of it.

"There is a story about a young man who lived in a cabin with a huge rock in the front yard. One day the Lord spoke to him, asking him to push against the rock with all his might. This the man did, faithfully, day after day.

For many months he toiled from sunup to sundown, his shoulders set squarely against the surface of the massive rock, pushing with all his might. And each night, the man returned to his cabin weary and sore.

In the midst of battling discouragement, the man cried out: "Lord, I have laboured long and hard in your service, giving all my strength to do that which you have asked. But after many months, I have not budged that rock even one inch. I fear I have failed you."

"My son," answered the Lord, "when I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your might, which you have faithfully done. Never once did I say that I expected you to move it. Your task was simply to push. And now you come to me believing that you have failed. But is that really so?

"Look at yourself. Your arms are powerful, your back strong and your legs muscled and sturdy. Through daily opposition, your strength now far surpasses that which you used to have.

"You feel you have failed because you haven't moved the rock, but I never asked you to move the rock. I simply asked you to push. It is my job to move the rock," explained the Lord.

So when God asks you to push... push. God will bring something good from your efforts. He is the only one who can. (Author Unknown).

I wonder if this story resonates with you. It certainly resonates with me. Currently, it feels that there is a lot of pressure on clergy to grow the church, but in a context of continuing uncertainty around the impact of Covid. I don't know whether you realise it, but there is much to celebrate in our church at the moment, specifically:

- The arrival of our new Curate, Marie
- The great atmosphere at the Back to Church Service last Sunday
- The 26 families who have been to Little Saints so far, the friendships that are developing, and the Bible stories and praise songs that families are hearing and enjoying
- The 5 young people and adults being baptised and/or confirmed next Sunday – do come along and support them.

But, if I'm honest, I still get discouraged when I look out on a Sunday morning and see lower numbers of folk gathering to worship. So, the little story above is a reminder to me that growing the Church is not all down to me! God called me to Cottenham to minister to his people, which I am faithfully trying hard to do. He commissioned *all* of us, as his followers, to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to follow his commandments (Matthew 28:19-20). But remember also those great verses in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (3: 6-9):

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. It's not the one who plants, nor the one who waters who is at the centre of this process but God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters has one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

This is a great message of hope to all of us. We each have our part to play as the Body of Christ, but we must keep praying to God for the growth we want to see. The prayer on the back of our Weekly Sheet is a great way to start:

God of mission, who alone brings growth to your Church,
send your Holy Spirit to give wisdom to our planning,
wisdom to our actions, and power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers,
in spiritual commitment to you,
and in service to our local community,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

As the numbers viewing the online service have significantly reduced – most of you have returned to church – we are pausing producing an online service each week. Do get in touch if you are adversely affected by this.

Stay safe and best wishes,

Revd Lynda Davies

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