

**All Saints' Church  
Cottenham with Rampton**

**Pastoral Letter #68  
1<sup>st</sup> December 2021**



Dear Church Family,

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

It is the season of Advent! As we start this precious time of the liturgical year, we, as Christians, remember that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to save us, not as a mighty warrior, but as the most vulnerable of all human beings, a new-born.

This year again, our time of quiet expectation happens in a time of pandemic, and I am sure that looking ahead to Christmas, many thoughts come to the fore, many memories too, and a mass of emotions, some positive, some negative, perhaps a mix of excitement and anxiety, even fear for the future.

But as I prayed and asked God to speak through this Pastoral Letter, I was reminded of the words of Jesus in chapter 5 of the Gospel according to John. In this short, dense and very significant chapter, where Jesus reaffirms his true identity, he finds himself in Jerusalem at the pool of Beth-zatha where many invalids lie, blind, lame, and paralysed people. One man there has been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus asks him 'Do you want to be made well?' Perhaps we would expect the man to answer a strong 'Yes' which in some way would confirm he wants to take some responsibility for his own healing, but he replies, 'I have no one to put me into the pool'. Jesus accepts his half answer because he is about to make a much more important point to the crowd, and tells the man, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once, the man is made well.

Now that day is a sabbath, and some in the crowd take offence, accusing Jesus to work as a healer on the sabbath. And there come the words of Jesus that I think are significant for us today. Jesus answers them: 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.'

God is working now. God never stopped working and will never stop working in our world, in our hearts. God is constantly at work. And this is a great source of hope for us, especially when we doubt or when we fear.

The word 'work' appears so many times in Scripture it could be a fun thing to do to count all the occurrences and ask the question in a quiz. But here are a few instances taken from the Psalms. I love the Psalms because they show people of faith speaking to God in the powerful conviction that God is listening. And of course, he is listening.

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.  
(Ps. 92:4)

Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. (Ps. 90:16)

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples. (Ps. 96:3)

God is with us, God is for us, God works in us and through us, and we work to build his Kingdom. And this relationship, this covenant we have with God happens through a love so great that God himself came to us as a babe in swathes.

And so, how do we tie up the work of God and our period of Advent, a period of waiting and expecting? Well, I would like to share with you a poem by Sally Foster-Fulton who wrote a little book I read again and again at this time of year: *Hope Was Heard Singing*.

*What do people wait for?*

What do people wait for?  
Some wait to be noticed.  
Others wait for folk to forget.

They wait to be born.  
They wait to die.  
They wait for the bus.  
Seems like we are always waiting ...

But during Advent, we don't just wait – we expect:

that the poor will be filled with good things, that the oppressed will receive justice, that God will intervene.

We dare to expect that,  
because we wait on the Lord -  
and waiting and expectation journey side  
by side into Advent.

Jesus Christ, Truth-we-seek,  
guide our waiting and watching and  
wondering hearts.

Shine in our lives like the beacon that  
brought the wise ones to your side,  
and when we find you,  
may the angel-messengers call us to lay  
down our gifts.

Many blessings,

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Maybe they're waiting for us?  
Maybe they're waiting for us  
to notice their need and respond.

Maybe they're waiting for us to forgive  
and forget the things they did that hurt us.

Maybe those who will be born into the  
world we leave them  
are waiting for us to realise they are  
coming

so that we make room.

And maybe the ones who are dying  
simply want someone to hold their hand.

Jesus Christ, Truth-we-seek,  
as waiting and expectation board the bus  
into Advent,

keep them looking for the others who  
wait.

*Butterflies... God is listening.*

