

## FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Church and Community

Date: Sunday 5 July 2020

Reading: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Theme:

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This week I have written my 16<sup>th</sup> weekly letter to the congregation and wider church family. And what a week it's been: Liverpool has won the Premiership, little children have burst in on important TV interviews, and the sun seems to have forgotten how to shine. Another great British summer is upon us once again.

What started as a small piece of local news in a far off country a number of weeks ago has become the defining news of 2020. And the story is far from over.

We have all learned new words and phrases: lockdown, Zoom, social distancing, home schooling, easing, rowing back. And we've been concerned to hear of a darker side: the alarming extent of the isolation, the loneliness and the abuse.

Although technology has in so many ways been brilliant, people have still said time and again that it's just not the same (as face to face contact) and children say over and over again that they really, really miss their friends (rather than Maths or Physics or History).

We can only speculate as to the longer-term effects of any of these things and what the future may hold as we seek to make our way back to a new normal, the like of which we

have never seen before and even now can only begin to imagine.

Many of us have been carrying the heavy loads of changed lives, restricted movement, limited access. I wonder where we have looked to help us through these difficult days. BBC Bitesize – for education? Daily briefing – for information? Family and friends in virtual conversations – for support? Kindly neighbours who have come alongside with shopping or picking up prescriptions – for practical help? The phone call, the letter or card, the text message, the Whatsapp picture or the Facebook video – to make us smile, or laugh or cringe? Our heavy loads will have been lessened by some or all of these, I guess.

In our Bible reading today, Jesus suggests that there is another place we can look, if we haven't already, which will really help us with the heavy loads we have been carrying. He says we should look to him and learn from him.

*<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest ..."*

One of the great things about Jesus is that he knows what we're going through. He knows the struggles we have had to face. He can understand the challenges each day might bring. And he says "Come to me ...and learn from me"

What does this mean? And how do we do it?

## **Come to me ...**

What “coming to him” means is we should become followers of Jesus if we’re not already; and if we are, we should remind ourselves why we are.

The first disciples (2000 years ago) were those men and women who left things behind to focus on spending time with Jesus, listening to his stories, hearing his wisdom, watching him heal, seeing his miracles. Now of course, we don’t get to do that in 2020: we are 2000 years too late! But we can still be his followers, we can still follow him.

How do we do it? In reading the Bible and spending time in prayer we can develop our relationship with him, increasingly relying on him for the things we need, bringing to him our anxiety and our fears about what is going on all around us, hearing his words of comfort and reassurance.

## **Learn from me ...**

What “learning from him” means is taking note of what we read in the bible, putting his teaching into practice, doing what he says, looking at the world through his eyes, taking on his priorities, aligning ourselves with him and his will for our lives.

How do we do it? We make time to listen and to learn. This might mean a daily appointment in the diary, a fixture in our routine, a commitment to sit still and to focus. At one level this is not difficult to do. An appointment with Jesus of this kind can be like Maths second lesson, or a meeting

with the boss at 2pm or a site visit with the team (socially distanced, of course) in the morning. But there are all kinds of distractions and diversions which can mean this doesn’t happen. We need to be intentional about it.

John Josey and I have been on various calls this week to help us make sense of what is going around us and to find support for all that we are trying to do. One of the calls included some advice from a man called Peter Shaw. Peter works for the diocese as a coach, mentor and expert in leadership development.

One of the key things we said to us this week came with a warning – he said that he might be being controversial and make himself unpopular, but he was going to say it anyway. He said that looking after ourselves, developing ourselves, stretching ourselves was down to us to do. No one else could do it for us.

Coming to Jesus and learning from him is something we need to do for ourselves, to be serious about, and to make happen.

When I was younger there were all kinds of comics and magazines for children and young people out there. The Beano. The Dandy. Beezer. Buster. Eagle. Roy of the Rovers. Scoop. Shoot. Topper. Whizzer and Chips to name just a few. There was also a magazine I remember called “Look and Learn”. This magazine was informative and helpful. A bit like BBC4 or Newsround might be today. And it’s Jesus who says to us: Look at me, look to me. Come to me ... and learn from me.

Doing these things for the first time or reminding ourselves of their importance and making them more of a priority in our lives again, will be a great help in this time of transition as lockdown gives way to easing, restriction gives way to greater freedom, and all things virtual are added to by our beginning to get together in person once again.

Let's pray together ...

God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church, send your Holy Spirit to give Vision 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.