

THOUGHTS THAT MIGHT HAVE MADE A SERMON FOR SUNDAY 26  
SEPTEMBER 2020 – Philippians 2.1-13 and Matthew 21.23-32

We're holidaying at home this weekend. Melonie is taking tomorrow's service at St Matthew's (and I forgot to ask her for a sermon for the website) and Neil at St Edmund's (I suggested I could put the sermon on the website, but there was no response – knowing how long it takes to get it sorted, I quite understand). I think this is the 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday for which I have had to prepare internet material (and probably at least 29 still to go).

Here are some thoughts which might give you something to think and pray about (and if not, there's lots of far better material out there!). May I suggest you read ++Justin's address to General Synod  
<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterburys-address-general-synod>

I commend it to you.

I've got the Philippians reading in mind (and, of course, *At the name of Jesus*, with whatever tune you like best!)

On Monday we went to Southwell. I did a month's placement at the Minster when I was at Theological College. It was here I first precented for Choral Evensong ("well done Sir" said one of the choristers at the end of the service – I was chuffed). We went to meet Helen, who was one of our lecturers on our Heritage degree. She is now Community Engagement Officer for the Minster. The Leaves of Southwell project is conserving the carvings in the Chapter House, and she is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (or whatever it is called this week) to tell the story and make connections outside the building. We didn't actually get into the Minister on this visit (spent rather too long in the pub garden), and she tells me life is tough. The finances are difficult, schools work has stopped, and yet they are planning for the future. The carvings are thirteenth century, this is not the first crisis they have lived through.

I also had a press release from St Edmundsbury Cathedral announcing the formation of a Girls' cathedral choir and the appointment of a choral scholar (to work at the Cathedral and in one of the town's Upper Schools) and an organ scholar (to work at the Cathedral and in the other Upper School). Our boys had a Cathedral choir upbringing, Hannah couldn't – I am delighted that the Dean and Chapter have made this commitment for the future, despite all that is going on. Beautiful music in the service of God still has its place.

Tuesday we called in at Tideswell and Castleton churches. The former was open for visitors, the latter (St Edmund's) was opened especially for us (thank you).

The drop in tourist income at the Cathedral in the Peak must be more than worrying, to say nothing of everything else. In Castleton we were told that they are in a group of three (with Edale and Hope). One unpaid Vicar. They now have one Sunday service a month in one church, the second in the next, the third in the third, and the fourth on zoom. Will this be sustainable? I doubt it? Will we see mass closure of parish churches over the next decade? Probably. Will Christian work and witness continue? Yes, it will. I have to believe that – as Paul says, “God is at work in you.”

Wednesday was so wet we got no further than Shipley Park Country Park – that’s a wonderful discovery, and only 20 minutes away. I recommend the scones. In the evening I did my National Gallery course on art 1250-1400. We’re looking at the art of North Italy - Giotto, Duccio, Daddi and d'Arezzo. As I put on facebook, I know nothing about art, nothing about this period, but I do understand the symbolism and the stories. I have learned to notice whether an image is Christus Patiens or Christus Triumphans – Christ suffering pain on the cross, or a triumphant Christ (that’s the meditation for next Good Friday sorted out!!). How do you think Paul thought as he wrote his letter – was his Christ the suffering, crucified Saviour, or the triumphant Lord of all, or a mixture of both?

*Christus triumphans*



Umbriai mester, San Damiano-ból (?)  
Assisi, Sta Chiara, 12.sz.

*Christus patiens*



Giunta Pisano: Croce dipinta  
13. sz.közepe  
(Assisi, Santa Maria degli Angeli)

Thursday was a trip to Harlow Carr gardens. Plenty of God in Creation, plenty of my daughter being dynamic, plenty of conversation with her about where she thinks Covid is going (and she is not being positive). Download the app, check

on your neighbours, this is going to be a long haul. How do we, as Christians, support our medics, how do we support our neighbours, what can we do for the youngsters trapped in University flats, how do we work for justice in those who lead us (actually, at the moment all I ask for is competence)?

Friday – the Black Country Museum in Dudley. We last went here 25 years ago. I remember taking the kids on the fairground, watching nails being made, going on a boat trip into the Canal Tunnels. A lot has changed – more buildings, no fairground, but the fish and chips were great, as was the boat trip (Morgan, Julie’s powerchair, has now been afloat!). I had a chat with a lady on a boat – she felt that, although she had a tiny space in which her and family would have lived, even though they worked long hours up and down the Cut, it was still better than being in the foundry and a factory. We talked to a lady who was a Chain Maker. She told us about the Chain Makers’ Strike of 1912 and a lady called Mary Macarthur, “the working woman’s champion”, 1880-1921. I now have her biography to read!



I went into the old Methodist Chapel (too many steps for Julie) and went back to my youth. A box chapel, with a text above the pulpit, pews, galleries – once the place would have been packed as the Word of God was preached. No images of Christ here, but passion and triumph were all in the Word. Thousands of lives were touched, transformed – and in the basement below the children would be taught practical skills. Now most non-conformist chapels are closed, demolished, converted into houses, static exhibits in a Museum – will we let Anglican churches go the same way?



Beside the canal was a Methodist caravan – the base for many evangelical, caring missions. They would meet the boat families, teach the children for the few hours the boat was moored and being unloaded/loaded, then see them off, and be there for them when they came back. These evangelists would be there, preaching, praying, caring, serving – who knows how many lives they touched. We got chatting with the lady on the caravan and, when I said I was a Vicar, she started talking about her faith (as opposed to the faith of those in the past). She said something like “I’m not supposed to proselytise, and I don’t, but when someone told me earlier today that the church was useless because it has all this wealth and does nothing, I did tell him my church has been working through this pandemic as a food bank, our minister has taken lots of funerals, and we’ve worked to keep in touch with people.”

A reminder that we’re having a Harvest focus for the next couple of weeks – and we are collecting for the Food Bank too.

The image of Christ means that Christians work for the Kingdom of God. They did in Paul’s day, and in Matthew’s day, and we do today. We work with so many, we catch glimpses of the Kingdom in all sorts of ways, we bring light into the darkness.

Today (Saturday), two friends are being ordained. Dawn, the curate at St Nicks and St Pauls in Quarndon, is one of them. She came to us for Evensong on a few occasions, and we’ll welcome her back for training. I’ve also got to teach her how to take a wedding!! We send her our love and prayers. Across in Ely Cathedral, our friend Jan is being ordained. Jan and her fiancé Bob were friends when we lived in Huntingdon back in 1985-1990. The four of us were the young people in Trinity Free Church. Jan has also ended up in the Church of England, she is one of the Chaplains to the Deaf in Ely Diocese, and is being ordained deacon. We send her our love and prayers.

There are times when I feel old, tired, and looking forward to retirement. Jan and Dawn will forgive me for saying that neither of them are in the first flush of youth – and here they are starting their ordained ministries. O well, perhaps the Church is stuck with me for a bit longer!

But I am still on holiday for the next day and a half – Melbourne Hall gardens this afternoon, and Kenilworth Castle tomorrow. Behave yourselves while I'm gone!

Peter Barham  
26 September 2020