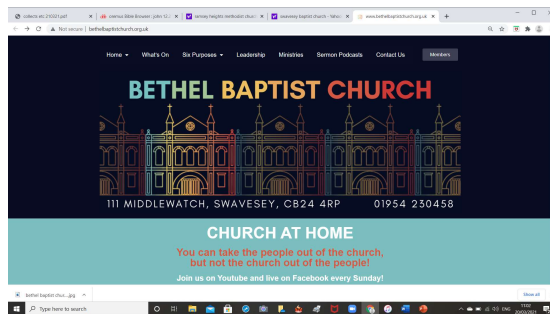


SERMON, 20 MARCH 2021 – JEREMIAH 31.31-34, JOHN 12.20-33

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



In our youth, Julie and I used to preach in Baptist and Methodist and Congregation chapels all across Cambridgeshire – up into the depths of the Fens. Many of them were huge buildings, built in the day when people of a certain class went to the parish church, and the labouring classes were non-conformists. Many of these chapels had been built with real sacrificial giving, and most of them had been full Sunday by Sunday. By the 1980s that was no longer the case, and now, I’m sad to say, many of the chapels we cut our preaching teeth in are now sitting derelict, or have been converted to very large houses.



I’m glad to say that, looking at their website, Swavesey Baptist Church is still up and running – and I like that tagline: “You can take the people out of church, but you can’t take the church out of the people.”



In many of these huge chapels, there was a notice in the pulpit. Sometimes it would simply say “John 12.21” because we were all biblically-literate, sometimes they would have written the verse out “Sir, we would see Jesus”. A constant reminder to the preacher of what our purpose is, to bring God (in Jesus) to his or her community, to share the word of God, to strength your faith/our faith, so we can bring God (in Jesus) to our communities, to proclaim the Kingdom of God, the love of Christ.

23rd March  
National Day of Reflection  
Reflect • Support • Hope

Take a minute's silence at 12 noon on 23 March  
to show your support for the millions of people who are  
bereaved and take a moment to connect with someone.

Scan this QR code to  
light a candle online

St Matthew's Daltry Abbey  
Open 11.30 to 12.30, 3 to 4  
St Edmund's Allestree  
Open 11.30 to 12.30  
Zoom Evening at 7.30 pm  
www.stedsandstmatth.co.uk

God of Love,  
As we think about all that has changed this year,  
help us to trust that you are always with us.  
As we remember those who have died,  
help us to trust they are at peace with you.  
As we reach out to others with kindness and care,  
may hope shine out in every heart and home.  
Amen

National Day of Reflection  
23 March

THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

In my more reflective moments, the moments when I am struggling with ministry in a pandemic, I wonder whether I can really hold my head up and say that is what I am doing, that is what we are doing. How much of last Tuesday's Zoom PCC for St Edmund's had that as our focus, how much of tomorrow's St Matthew's Zoom PCC will have that as our focus? But, before I get too depressed, the focus of Tuesday is a Day of Reflection, and our churches say to our communities that the love of Christ is not defeated by Covid or anything else. We proclaim that Christ has been with us all right through this year, God's love has been witnessed in amazing ways, and we continue to journey with Jesus. We offer holy places, we offer silence, and music, and prayer, and a listening ear, and we offer the love of God in Christ Jesus. A God who knows what it is to suffer pain, the God who has defeated death.



None of us must give the impression that our church is closed this Easter. The buildings may be, the church is not. Invite others to join us, 7.30 every evening in Holy Week as we journey to the Cross and the Empty Tomb. We can't invite hundreds on Easter Sunday morning, but we can invite them to Zoom. And as we slowly and carefully open up, invite people back into the Holy Places, make time for them, drink tea and eat cake with them (do you remember church cake?),



celebrate that marriage they have been waiting for (and have reorganised four times – I'm not exaggerating), we do it as disciples of Christ. Yes, we are people who maintain buildings, yes we are people who care for graveyards – but first and foremost we are followers of Jesus Christ, and our primary job is to share his love and his purpose.

In the Gospel there are two Greeks, they want to meet Jesus. They ask Philip and Andrew to take them to him – they are wary of approaching by themselves. I wonder if they understood what happened? Jesus talks about glory, but of glory through death. A grain of wheat, falling, dying, yet rising again. (You'll be glad to know that "Now the green blade riseth" is one of the hymns recorded for Easter Sunday). He tells them, tells us, that this life is not the only one – that this life is the forerunner of the next life – he is here for a purpose, we are here for a purpose. His purpose is the cross, to take away the sin of the world. It is healing, redemption, the power of love. That even in death, there is life.



On a Day of Reflection – indeed every day – we say that those who have died are not gone for ever, they live with God. I don't really know what that means and I struggle to picture it – but I know they are in God's love. We say to those who mourn, that God knows how you feel, that the pain will heal, and that we are here for you. We say to those who have given so much in the last year, that we are grateful, and we show our gratitude in more than words (and clapping).



And, as we always do, in the days and months and years to come, we will celebrate with those who celebrate, and mourn with those who mourn. The world will not become perfect when Covid is ended (if it ever ends), it will not become perfect when our churches are open again, it will not be perfect when we start eating Church cake.

One day, each of us will find the fulfilment of our journey, and one day God's Kingdom will be fulfilled. In the meantime, we journey in his Kingdom, proclaiming that kingdom to the world.

Peter Barham  
20 March 2021