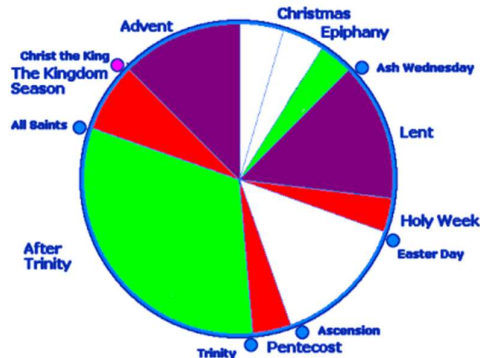


SERMON, 24 OCTOBER 2021 – 2 Timothy 3.14-4.5, John 5.36b-47

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



Today is a Sunday with two names – Bible Sunday, and the Last Sunday after Trinity. It's the last Sunday in Green. Next week, although we keep these Ordinary Time books for a bit longer, we move into what is known as the Kingdom Season – All Saints', All Souls', Remembrance, Christ the King – leading up to Advent Sunday. In this church we add Edmund King and Martyr into the mix – but we build up, to finish the liturgical year on a high note, before Advent Sunday, when we start preparing for Christmas, preparing for the Coming of Christ, and we do it all again.

So we are green on the altar today, red next week and through November (red for the saints, the martyrs), then into purple (a penitential colour) for Advent, and white when we celebrate the Christmas Festival.

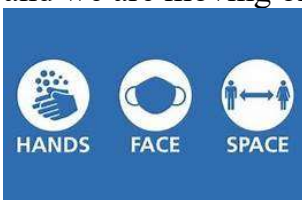


One of the sadnesses of today's Society is that we have lost the rhythm, the pattern, the weekly round of worship, the journey we are on together. I had a rather snotty email from someone last week "can you confirm there will be a service in church on Remembrance Sunday" – to which my response was "there's been a service in church every Sunday since Easter Sunday, so I am assuming there will be." I almost made a comment about how we are working to keep the church open week by week so you can make your annual visit – but my wife reminded me that when she was a child she only ever made an annual visit to church, when her dad (who had fought in the last war) went to church on Remembrance Sunday. I mustn't be critical of those who only come once a year – use it as an opportunity and build on it. My wife, as you all know, is always right!



A reminder for all of us that worship should be regular – and it is sad that “regular worship” has been a casualty of Covid. People who were coming every week, have got out of the habit – and we need a sense of habit to keep us going. I am the man paid to be religious, and I found it very hard when our churches were closed – I knew there were lots of ways I should be worshipping, but I wanted to worship here, leading worship here, being here with you. I didn’t want to join the Bishop on zoom, or the Archbishop on the television, or even listen to a stunning Choral Evensong on the radio – I didn’t want alternatives, I wanted normality. None of us have found it easy, have we – we didn’t in lockdown, we haven’t found it easy since we reopened. I am fed up of masks, of walking round with bread only, of only having a couple of hymns, of not having coffee, of having to do it all again on Zoom at 11.30. But that is where we are, and I see no chances that anything will change in the near future.

It is amazing, actually, how well we are coping and, being very serious for a moment, thank you to all of you for your good humour, your patience, your willingness to cope when things are different, the way so many people have stepped up and helped, and the way we are supporting each other – and me – and we are moving on.



There is more stepping up going to be required. I have no doubt that it is going to be a long winter, and we will need good humour as we face a second Christmas with restrictions. We are getting busier, especially with baptisms, and we could do with some more people willing to help and support those. I know that 1 and 2 pm on Sundays are not the most convenient times, but the more people who will come and help welcome, the more we share the load. If you can help, please drop me an email.

churchwarden

churchwarden - Definition:

(plural church-wardens) noun 1. lay person with church duties: a lay person who manages secular matters in an Anglican church 2. pipe with long stem: a long-stemmed clay tobacco pipe

And we still need two churchwardens to start working with Michele now, so she can step back next May knowing we have a team to continue the work. We've tried over the last year to get more people involved, to do more as a team, to share the load together – and in many ways we have succeeded - but even though we are a team, and we do things together, and we help and support each other, despite all that, we do need named people willing to say “I'll be Churchwarden”. And I know we're all tired, and we've all had enough, and someone else can do it – but Christ doesn't say “there, there, go back to sleep”, rather he tells us there is work to be done.



The Gospel reading we listened to. The Jews have listened to John the Baptist. He has come across as a prophet, a man worth listening to, a man proclaiming the Kingdom, perhaps he'll be the one to drive the Romans out. Now Jesus is taking them a stage further. He dares to proclaim that he too is sent by God, but more than that – he takes their Scriptures, the Word of God, and he proclaims that he is the one the Scriptures point to. The passages that we read every Christmas, the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah, the vision of the Messiah who will suffer and die – it's me he says. I am the one those prophecies point to.

Now you and I have had two thousand years to get used to that idea, to believe that the Jesus we read about in the gospels, is the one proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Testament. We can base two thousand years of church history on Jesus – we can listen to the stories of men and women who believed, those stories in our gospels, the stories of men and women becoming Christians and forming church communities that we read in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's letters. We can read the stories of the saints of the church, and we can imagine the ordinary people who built this place, who sat where we sit, who have sought to follow Christ in their lives. We can be inspired by them, by those we have worked and worshipped with, and by those we share faith with today.



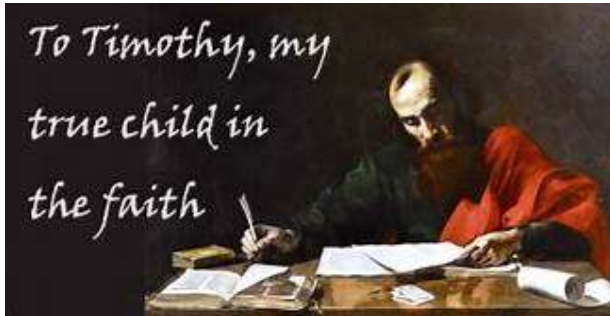
Sonny with parents Gavin and Emma and big brother Jude (left) and Cruz with parents George and Natalie and big brother Marley (right).

Last Sunday I had two baptisms here – two lovely families, bringing their child to baptism. Neither family has a particularly deep faith, none of them are what we would describe as “regular worshippers”, but as we gathered there was a sense that this was right, this was good, God was with us. We celebrated together – we need celebration at the moment – we thought about God’s challenge to us all, we asked God’s help as we seek to bring the youngsters up, as we all journey with him – and afterwards I had two lovely emails from the mums telling me how special the baptisms had been, how welcome they felt, and what a lovely church we are. They also told me what a lovely Vicar I am, and when two young ladies tell me I’m lovely – well, that’s good for my ego! The challenge for us, is how we keep those families feeling part of the church community, how we can help them deepen their faith. I am glad to say we will be re-starting our Thursday Toddler group in a couple of weeks’ time – a way of keeping in touch. We’re going to do it more simply than before and, for now, we won’t be asking for help with refreshments (mainly so we don’t have too many people in the Hall), but it’s a start. Let’s try and build on that.



We need to build on it, because Christ calls us to share his good news with everyone. We offer the love of Jesus, the purpose of Jesus, a relationship with Jesus which helps make sense of what life is all about, which helps us navigate this difficult world, which gives us confidence and faith for all that is to come. We do believe faith improves community, brings people together, helps us be better people, and is a good thing. That in itself is radical – there are many people in this world who argue that faith is bad, it is divisive, it causes hatred, it simply reinforces ideas of power. We know that faith can be bad – but we also know that it can be the most wonderful thing in the world. We want to share

that love and friendship and forgiveness and purpose with our fellow human beings – not just because it is the most wonderful thing in the world, but because we are commanded by Christ to seek his glory and to share that glory with others.



When Paul wrote to Timothy, he was writing to a young man he'd trained. A young man he knew was called by God, who was serving God, the sort of person who would take the life of the church on into the next generation. Timothy was someone bought up in faith, taught the Scriptures, part of the worshipping community, and Timothy is now leading that community forward. Use the Scriptures – and Paul would be thinking of what we call the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures which point to Jesus as the Messiah, who explain that he is the Word of God. We add to them with the Gospels, the stories of Jesus' earthly ministry, recorded and written down by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – his teaching, his actions, his death and resurrection. We include the story of the early church in the book of Acts, the letters written by Paul and the other disciples, full of practical advice, advice which may need some unthinking as we use it 2,000 years later, but advice none the less – and the vision of the Kingdom in the Book of Revelation. So much there to inspire, to guide, to strengthen, to make us think. Sound doctrine, which speaks to us today as much as it did 2,000 ago, and which helps us in the challenges of 2021 and into 2022.

Today's Collect is probably my all time favourite. I know we've prayed it once already, but I want us to pray it again.

Blessed Lord,
 who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
 help us so to hear them,
 to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
 that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
 we may embrace and for ever hold fast
 the hope of everlasting life,
 which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
 who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.