

Dear friends,

**Using** the road to Emmaus story, we all need to remember that Christ is walking with us, mostly unseen and unrecognised but that when we come together and break bread, his presence is revealed. Depending on your eucharistic theology, this had a wide variety of interpretations, but in the church service of Holy Communion, whatever your view, there is a special feeling or “spirit” that ensues. That spirit is more palpable at some occasions rather than others for reasons known only to God, but I sensed that spirit on both services on Sunday at All Saints and St. Michael’s. More than one person has confided in me just recently that they have sensed a movement of the spirit in their soul, which I take as confirmation that whatever local difficulties we have to contend with, the signs are there that God is indeed travelling with us and is being recognised and felt as a reality in people’s lives.

## 30th April – 4th of Easter

I will be presiding at St. Peter’s at both services in the morning and Archdeacon Trevor will preside at both services at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30 and 11am respectively.

**Acts 2: 42-47.** The lectionary inexplicably translates as “many” what Luke actually wrote which was “3000” people baptised that day. Certainly the Pentecost story is born out of enthusiasm and therefore a little idealisation is evident. Indeed, the book of Acts as a whole is a success story where even apparent setbacks turn to evangelistic gold – a massive encouragement for early Christians living in harsh times. Paul’s letters written about 20 years after these events give us a warts and all reality check on what early church life was like and we have no evidence of common property ownership but the principles of direct apostolic oversight, the breaking of bread, and generosity to the needy is what eventually won over many thousands of people.

**1 Peter 2:19-25.** The command to submit to pain and unjust suffering because Christ did takes on an embarrassing tone for modern congregations when you realise these comments are made to slaves. But Peter doesn’t use the usual word for slaves in the NT (Doulos) he uses a more specific word for a household slave (Oiketai). His wider meaning is that we, the church, are part of the household of God and we are slaves of God. Again, modern congregations may wince but this is the language of the Bible. We are obedient slaves of God just as Jesus Christ was, so we are to follow Christ’s example and bear suffering for doing what is good and right, just as he did.

**John 10:1-10.** Jesus as a good shepherd is a popular image in people's mind but the notion of Jesus as a gate is perhaps less appealing. But if you imagine that gate or door as open and that you are a prisoner then the image becomes more appealing. Jesus is then a gateway to freedom, salvation and abundant life. Who the "thieves and bandits" are "who came before me" is open to enormous speculation. But the consensus believes he means the usual suspects – the Pharisees and priests of his time.

## St. Peter's Giving Day – 13th May – 10am till 1pm

This has been a difficult five-year spell for all churches and Saint Peter's is no exception, with the covid disruption and the recent cost of living crisis. It has caused us significant financial problems. Of course, the favoured method of giving is a Direct debit which ensures a steady regular monthly income, but I do know that there are many very generous people who are both willing and able to support their church with one off payments. On the 13th May I will be in church with our treasurer and other wardens who will be there to gratefully receive any offering that you can afford to give – either one off payments or direct debits.

## Thought for the day.

"When I am weak. Then I am strong" says Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. These are words we would do well to remember when the world seems against us. We are situated in a usually indifferent and sometimes hostile culture. Adherence to any kind of faith, let alone Christianity is falling. Less than half of the UK's population now identifies with Christianity. Cultural trends seem to be against us and the gospel more generally. All the statistics that come our way are depressing. Less than 1 in 10 now choose a religious burial. The greatest decline in faith affiliation is amongst the over 65s according to the census. Aging congregations and difficulty filling positions in the church fill us with anxiety. Decisions by the national church are splitting the Anglican church nationally and internationally. So, objectively we are certainly weak so how come St. Paul said that it is now that we should be feeling strong?

When you are strong you believe you have all the answers and the strength and capability to make them happen all by yourself. It is when you are weak that you realise that you have no control over events and little strength to change anything at all and that is when Christians turn naturally and humbly to God to supply the strength, courage and direction that we now realise that we lack and have always lacked. Reliance on God and seeking his will for our lives and the corporate life of the church. "Let go and let God" is a well-known phrase but it needs to be practiced . We in the Raleigh Mission

Community are not immune from any of the problems that face the church but there are enormous grounds for hope in all the green shoots in each of our churches. The triumph of Easter was reflected in a large upturn in attendance, that hasn't faded away entirely. We are to be comfortable in our skins, proud of what we do, seek a closer relationship with God and ask if I may paraphrase JF Kennedy "Ask not what my church can do for me but what can I do for my church"

**The prayer for Today** was written by William Barclay

**O Father give us the humility which  
Realises its ignorance.  
Admits its mistakes.  
Recognises its need.  
Welcomes advice.  
Accepts rebuke.  
Help us always  
To praise rather than criticise.  
To sympathise rather than condemn.  
To encourage rather than discourage.  
To build rather than destroy.  
And to think of people at their best rather than at their worst.  
We ask this for your name's sake.**

Love and peace,  
Martin