

St Mary's Ticehurst and St Augustine's Flimwell

To: Congregation members and those on our circulation list

Dear Friends

CHURCH UPDATE as at Thursday 30th July 2020

Worship Returns to St Augustine's Flimwell! (9th August)

St Augustine's Flimwell will re-start their worship on **Sunday 9th August at 5.30pm** with a shortened said socially-distanced Evening Prayer (BCP 1662) in the churchyard (go around the west side). Or inside if inclement! Limited parking in Church Farm next door by its churchyard boundary. See below for COVID-19 protocols (risk assessment summary on our website soon). The 9.30am service that day will be a Communion (Common Worship Contemporary Language) at St Mary's.

Sunday 2nd August 2020: 9.30am Communion (BCP 1662; a shortened said service) in St Mary's Ticehurst. Organ music on entry and departure (our thanks go to Richard Karn). Face-coverings are strongly advised. And an **11am Morning Worship livestreamed** from the Vicarage on our Facebook Page: c.45 mins, with music (hymns old and new), a shortish talk; **service sheets/reading texts found on our website homepage.**

COVID-19 Protocols. For services in church we have, **and continue to recommend strongly, that you bring and wear a face-covering.** In church (or the churchyard) do bring your own cushion if you need one, your own sanitiser if you prefer, and your own copy of the service sheet/reading texts: see our website and also www.achurchnearyou.com Service sheets, sanitiser and a giving envelope will be available at church - do bring your own pen to fill out the envelope so that gift-aiding can apply. Couples/'bubbles' can sit together if there's room to maintain 2m distancing. You must be shown where to sit, and we have to record your presence and have your contact details. Singing/chanting is not permitted as yet. When we have communion, I will wear a visor and face-covering for the administration of the bread (the wine will not be offered). Sadly, but understandably, the government guidance says we are not to linger and socialise. Whereas if you are categorised as vulnerable it is undoubtedly safer to stay at home, government guidance has however stated that these groups "...can choose to manage their own risks".

Future Services. The interim arrangements continue for August and September. For the time being there will be a 9.30am service in church each Sunday. For 2nd and 9th August, see above.

16th August: 9.30am St Mary's Patronal Service (Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary). 11am Online Communion.

23rd August: 9.30am Flimwell Morning Worship. St Mary's: 8am Communion & 6.30pm Evening Prayer (BCP).

30th August: 9.30am Communion (CW Trad. Lang.) in St Mary's. 11am Online Morning Worship.

6th Sept (tbc): 9.30am Climate Sunday Service in St Mary's (Creationtide begins). 11am Online Communion.

Our Online Worship is under review, possibly more but different. **Harvest Festivals** are under review also.

Especially for those of you not on the internet – DAILY HOPE is continuing: a free national phone line of hymns, reflections and prayers, as well as full worship services from the C of E. 0800 804 8044.

Private Prayer. St Mary's remains open for private prayer (only) on Tuesdays from 10.30am to 12.30pm.

Eco Church News: St Mary's has been accredited as an Animal-Friendly Church! This accolade was assessed and confirmed this week by the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals (ASWA). With thanks to Penny Evans for making the application. We hope to have the Pet Service again on 4th Oct. St Mary's Eco Church Working Group are working on a submission to *A Rocha* for the national Eco Church Silver Award.

PCC meeting. St Mary's next PCC meeting will be on Tuesday 18th August, venue/modus operandi *tbd*.

Church Finances/Charity Giving. Your continued giving, contactless or otherwise, is much appreciated:

Nat West Bank 60-22-15: Ticehurst PCC 71164383 or Parochial Church Council of Flimwell 35098651.

Ashley Evans

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This update will also be placed on the homepage of our **website www.ticehurstandflimwell.church**

Facebook Page - @stMarysTicehurst **www.facebook.com/stMarysTicehurst**

Morning Prayer (BCP) Address ... 12 July 2020 ... Trinity 5. Back in Church Sunday!

Readings: Matthew 13.1-9 & 18-23 (also Isaiah 55.10-13; Psalm 65.1-8; Romans 8.1-11)

Thanks to Penny, we have a very productive garden. And yet it is often the produce that hasn't quite worked out that is uppermost in my mind: which critters have been eating all our strawberries, what happened to last year's garlic, why do our carrots never work, when are any apricots going to appear? Instead, I should be rejoicing and giving thanks for the surplus and the excellence of our many other crops (including garlic this year), even the never-ending raspberry crop - not my favourite. And as we return to worship in church today, missing the singing, parts of the liturgy, the extended conversations afterwards, we perhaps should think similarly and focus on what we can now do in church and hereon in our not-so-lock-downed lives as followers of Jesus.

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower to a multitude, then explains it to his disciples. It's no wonder with the readings set for today that it was chosen as Rural Mission Sunday! However we can be forgiven, on this historic day, for not having mission uppermost in our thoughts & plans. For some, the re-start of worship in church may be a personal re-start: social, spiritual or psychological, or all three. And we should wonder what today marks for this parish church. Even if we think of it being the start of a recovery or, worse, a battle for survival, mission has to feature in those thoughts, being integral to our existence and evident to the community we live in. We have to look to grow, even if we're uncertain of our ground & that of our community. We must grow in & out of that ground, reaching nearer God's kingdom, taking more of the community-wide crop in that same direction, towards the Son, Christ, and eternal fruitfulness.

You may grimace at mention of a 'Mission Action Plan', and yes they are too easily fossilised, filed away & forgotten, unchanging and changing very little around them. But things are changing around us, & within us (the Church). So, our mission must adapt, considering how the ground is changing, whether we are using the right seed or enough of it ... and what can be done about the pernicious weeds & pesky birds? (I know, they have to eat too, & weeds might flower or turn out to be something edible, so being overly generous with the seed may be no bad thing.) As with any metaphor, let's not over-tax this parable and get lost in the translation of its meaning for then or for now. Jesus had to explain it even to his Disciples! They would in time see that parable's prophetic fruition. It is one, I believe, that can deepen our roots into the soil of faith-life, into life with God who is love, who as Paul Tillich wrote, is the ground of our/all being.

So, think of the ground we and our community/society are now on. It is shifting: the re-energised community spirit and neighbourliness, but also the growth in poverty & joblessness, and possibly isolation.

Think of the seed we have been sowing as church and individuals, and should sow in this unexpected future, weighing up what has been fruitful, what Mission is (the 5 Marks – to tell, teach, tend, transform and to treasure ... that last one, is our Mission green enough?)

Think of what's then needed for growth. Prayer for/communion with/nurture of our community, of what's germinating. Most of all the Holy Spirit, to inspire us and all around us.

So hopefully you won't grimace if I mention the word 'Away-day' (for reflection on these things) or APCM (our annual meeting fixed for on 1 Oct) and what plans we might discuss there, or indeed 'Zoom' (should that still be needed). By God's grace, our gatherings for worship and discernment, physical or virtual, must be positive, forward-looking, and shortening of the distance between us and the kingdom, because that closer proximity makes us safer, holier, eternally fruitful and truly blessed.

Revd Ashley Evans

Ticehurst Morning Worship ... 26 July 2020 ... Trinity 7

Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52 (1 Kings 3.5, 9-12)

My training incumbent was barmy about trains (and buses). Many clergy were, maybe still are! In the Church Times, I read it was to do with the 19th Century rise of the railways heralding modernity and increasing its network across the land, as the Church was doing then with new parishes and schools. My incumbent said it was the railway's orderliness that appealed to him: timetables, routine, reliability. A letter in the Church Times the next week said the obsession was scriptural, Isaiah 6.1 – *'In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord, and his train filled the temple.'* I had to disagree with my incumbent because my experience of trains from Malvern to Birmingham was that they were unreliable and often impossibly overcrowded. If only I could have known when to drive to work instead! Many times, my reaction to a station announcement was far from Christian. (I wasn't the only one.)

A challenge for us as Christians is to react to all situations in a way that honours God. We need to understand not only ourselves, but God too, by means of our faith. Today's readings deal with the issue of understanding, and the relationship between faith and understanding, both being imperfect. King Solomon who built the 1st Temple, came close to having perfect wisdom, being granted the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil. But in the end, he succumbed to human folly and his legacy was a divided kingdom.

How are we to live and act in the face of a sometimes bewildering world? The answer lies in placing our trust in a spiritual relationship with God. Nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8). Although in this world we can feel at a loss, we can rely on God's love for us, shown in Jesus, with us still in the Holy Spirit. God's love and our response is the key relationship for faith. It gives the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Matthew gives lovely descriptions of God's kingdom and the foundation of faith. In the mustard seed parable Jesus lays out a blueprint for faith and understanding. Firstly, the seed is our fundamental interior love of God, which may begin as little more than an inkling. Secondly, its growth suggests that understanding is a process, to be worked at. Love, nourished by scripture and Christ's example, is to form the basis of our reactions to the world. Our faith and understanding can then grow greatly, out of loving experience.

In the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value, we see people making a decision. They decide that it *is* treasure, or a pearl worth everything else. They sense its value, that it is truly 'treasurable' above all else. We too can sense, feel - experience - that in our faith we have discovered the truest treasure, and be truly joyful!

To be a disciple of Christ is a way of living in heartfelt joy at the kingdomly treasure we have to hand. We are not quite sure what it is that we have got, but we know it is beyond price. It's easy not to devote our lives to something which seems impossible to prove. It's hard to face uncertainty/surprises and know how to act 'righteously'. However, as long as we put our trust in the deep reciprocal love between God and us, then we have a firm basis for a Christian life. God's love understands us even when we don't. Holding to God's love we see in Jesus, reflecting that love to the world's kingdoms, is how we are to live, loving all creation, even if we understand fully neither it, nor its fallen ways, nor the glorious kingdom that is to come.

Revd Ashley Evans

A great many Christians have absorbed most of what they know about Mary Magdalene through the dual filters of tradition and liturgy, which inevitably direct our attention toward certain aspects of the story at the expense of others and perhaps direct us to the parts of the story that those who formed the tradition wanted us to see.

- I know from my own research, that there was much manipulation going on by what was then undoubtedly a patriarchal society but the sad thing is that even up to the present age, a certain amount of manipulation continues.

One interesting thing that I notice in the gospel texts is that, of all the disciples, Mary Magdalene was the one who was consistently there during Jesus' death and burial.

- Matthew chapter 27 v61: "And Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained standing there in front of the tomb."

- Even when the male disciples fled in fear, the women remained faithful to the end.

- Mary Magdalene came unerringly to the tomb on Easter morning because she'd stood by in silent, unflinching vigil from the time Jesus is first laid to rest.

- The first witness to the resurrection, she commissions the others to go and announce the Good News. 'I have seen the Lord.....and this is what he said to me', earning her the title of "Apostle to the Apostles."

All four gospels witness to Mary Magdalene as the premiere witness to the resurrection—alone or in a group, but in all cases named.

- Given the shifting sands of oral history, the unanimity of this testimony in all 4 gospels is astonishing.

- It suggests that among the earliest Christians the stature of Mary Magdalene is of the highest order of magnitude - more so than even the Virgin Mother (mentioned as present at the crucifixion in only one gospel and in none at the resurrection).

- Mary Magdalene's place of honour was so strong that even the heavy hand of a later, male-dominated ecclesiology could not entirely dislodge it.

- In an early 12th century psalter at Hildesheim, for example, she appears as a leader and apostle, announcing the Resurrection to the men, her right index finger pointing upwards in the traditional preaching gesture.

- Likewise, in frescoes, vestments, illuminated manuscripts and sculptures, she can be found portrayed in a pulpit, sometimes wearing the triple crown of Virgin, Martyr and Preacher. Yet at the same time as this high status was kept alive, the institutional church was so uneasy about such an archetypal breakthrough that it did its best to erase her memory, merging her with another Mary, the unnamed prostitute in Luke's gospel.

- The great 3rd century church leader, Origen, called her 'a wholly unsuitable first witness'. It baffles me that even today, our holy week liturgies focus on telling and re-telling the story of Peter's threefold denial of Jesus while the unwavering witness of Mary Magdalene is all but invisible.

- What if, instead of emphasizing that Jesus died alone and rejected, we stressed that there was one who stood by him and did not leave, one of such status that she was called apostle, apostle to the apostles no less?

- How would such a change affect the emotional timbre of the day?..... How would it affect our feelings about ourselves?..... About how we function as church?About the nature of redemptive love? Why do you look for the living among the dead? Christ asks.

- The characteristic activity of the risen Christ is to bring people and places to life, to subvert stale ideas, taboos and preconceptions, especially when they blind us to new creative ways of seeing.

- Even today, Christ calls us, just like he did Mary Magdalene, into new, transformed, ways of being and doing. That's a straight challenge to each one of us.

- Is our individual life, and our corporate life, stuck in Good Friday, or are we living as Easter people, full of hope and open to change and transformation?