

HARPSDEN PARISH NEWS

JUNE 2021



Rector: The Rev'd Robert Thewsey
(0118 940 3484)

robert.thewsey@btinternet.com

Associate Priests:

The Rev'd Michael Forrer (07899 926020)

majing3006@yahoo.co.uk

The Rev'd Pam Gordon (0118 940 6098 or
0771 425 6272) revpam.sdh@gmail.com

The Rev'd Michael Seymour-Jones (0118 947 8632)

m.seymoure_jones@btinternet.com

Curate

The Rev'd Sarah Nesbitt (07770 930756)

revsarahjoy@icloud.com



**Sermon for Rogation Sunday,
9th May 2021
Reverend Sarah**

Readings for this Sunday:

Isaiah 55:1-11;

Acts 10:44-48;

John 15:9-17



Our theme today is around

creation as it is Rogation Sunday; the word ‘Rogation’ coming from the Latin ‘*rogare*’ to ask. It’s a time when we traditionally ask for God’s blessings on emerging crops in springtime. Sometimes, we celebrate this service outdoors, in the fields, but we decided against that this year because we have only just come back into our church buildings, it’s hard to livestream from the middle of a field and it’s not terribly inclusive for those who have difficulty walking.

Don’t let that stop you taking your prayers outdoors later today or during the week; Rogation isn’t confined to a Sunday. You might choose to do a prayer walk to support your community, on your own, or with friends; just remember to stop now and again, look around you at God’s creation and pray a blessing on what you see (there’s a suggested prayer of blessing at the end).

Our reading from Acts today reminds us that it’s not just a select few for whom the Holy Spirit comes, it’s for all of us. The Holy Spirit had been poured out ‘even on the Gentiles’ because our God is a generous God, pouring out his love on all who turn to Him. Accepting God’s word and therefore the Holy Spirit comes with responsibilities; one of these is good stewardship of God’s creation and we all know that we’re not doing particularly well on that count. There is much work to be done.

In Isaiah 55 we read:

‘For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.’

God gives us everything we need. We’re just not very good at managing what we’re given and have got into bad habits, forgetting how to share equitably and around the globe. This earth has finite resources, most of which are recycled naturally - water, nitrogen, carbon - until we upset the balance. At the moment, we export much of our carbon footprint, so might look good locally, but impact negatively on people elsewhere.

Creation is big news this year - COP26, the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference is being held in Glasgow in November; also the 16th meeting of the parties to the Kyoto

Protocol and 3rd meeting of the parties to the Paris Agreement. It's a fantastic time to engage in current affairs.

Much of the discussion at these meetings will be around becoming carbon neutral. A lot of progress has been made and our own Diocese has plenty going on in this sphere (www.oxford.anglican.org) but there is plenty more to do and each of us can play our part, as can our churches. But carbon is just one part of one of the so called 'planetary boundaries' that are beyond their threshold. These include:

- Climate change - atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration causing global temperature rise
- Biodiversity loss: extinction rate of species - examples would be a number of important pollinators - through change in land use, pollution, overexploitation and invasive species
- Biogeochemical changes
 - Nitrogen and phosphorus in particular
 - Anthropogenic nitrogen removal from the atmosphere - way past the boundary
 - Anthropogenic phosphorus going into the oceans - not quite at the boundary yet

Data from:

<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/download/18.8615c78125078c8d3380002197/ES-2009-3180.pdf> <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855>

One of our local farmers - Simon Beddowes - has written a column for the Henley Standard this week where he brings some of these things to our attention at a local level, available here: <https://www.henleystandard.co.uk/news/community-news--all-districts-/161721/helping-climate-and-feeding-us.html>

He writes about what it means for him as a food producer and protector of the land resources and has no doubt we are experiencing climate change. He writes about noticing higher temperatures overall; greater variability in temperature; an increase in the average rainfall, but longer periods of more extreme weather. This all has an impact on what we can grow and when, the yields and the cost. As a farmer, he acknowledges that he is part of the solution and reminds us that we have - as consumers - freedom of choice, so it's also up to us and our habits; if we buy it, producers will produce it.

So the choices we make are important - and difficult. It's an excellent article.

Bill Gates has also written a good book: 'How to avoid a climate disaster'. Both Simon and Bill ask us to think very carefully about the choices we make that result in our own carbon - and other - footprints merely being exported to other places around the world through the choices we make. If we are to change this, there will be sacrifices we have to make, but isn't this what is meant by 'laying down one's life for others'? We're not talking about death. This is about dying to sin, living in a way that keeps us in right relationship with God.

In our Gospel reading today, we read ‘You are my friends if you do what I command you’. We are not servants, we are friends; we have free will and can make choices about the way we live. As friends - rather than servants - we know what is being asked of us, to look after God’s creation. Rogation Sunday is one of those days when we can think deeply on this. It’s also tradition on this day that we ‘beat the bounds’, getting out to walk the boundaries of our parishes as we pray blessings on the crops, the rainfall and the people. This is about understanding the communities within which we dwell and being prepared to look across the boundaries to make sure that those on the ‘other side’ are in good health too, that they have food, electricity, water, sanitation. This isn’t just about looking ‘next door’, these are global boundaries. We are all neighbours and this earth isn’t very big - there are 7.8 billion people on this planet, up from 2 billion in 1927 - just three or four generations. It’s about identity: knowing ourselves and our communities; knowing who our neighbours are; what it is that joins us together and what separates us.

For our joy to be complete, we must love one another as God loves us. This means taking care of this world, the finite resources we have; working towards equity in healthcare, sanitation, food; preventing a climate crisis.

Where do we begin? Here. God chose us to do this, to spread His word and the Gospel of salvation through the way we live, how we relate to and think about others. So let’s begin right here and now with a prayer and blessing that you can take out as you walk around our countryside today.

Remember, Lord, your mercy and loving-kindness towards us.

Bless this good earth, and make it fruitful.

Bless our labour, and give us all things needful for our daily lives.

Bless the homes of this parish and all who live within them.

Bless our common life and our care for our neighbour.

Hear us, good Lord.

Amen.



What do you expect from our Sunday Bible readings?

Expectation Sunday

Acts 1. 12-17 & 20-26

That was a new one for me ... a name for the Sunday after the Ascension and before Pentecost.

Expectation - what a wonderful way to describe what it must have been like for the disciples as they did what Jesus had told them when he ascended – wait in Jerusalem for the gift my Father will send.

Surely all adults can identify with the situation of waiting for a delivery and most children know what waiting for a gift is all about. But the disciples did not know how long to wait or what 'it' would be or how 'it' would arrive, let alone if they would recognise 'it' when it came. They knew how Jesus spoke of 'it' but what that might mean as a recipient? This is a new, a first.

As Christians, with hindsight, we do know about holy waiting: Advent, Lent and Holy Saturday in particular. We also come in trust that waiting with God has a purpose. It is a positive time, albeit challenging. The event, the celebration to follow that waiting, has the power to boost our growth as disciples, to nurture and strengthen, to give a new impetus or direction.

How did the disciples spend their call to wait time?

Acts 1.14 - *they joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.*

Following from this context we have the Expectation Sunday extract – Peter's call for an official replacement for Judas. He sets out the criteria, the very experiences and teaching that Jesus had given to the 11 – *one of the men who have been with us the whole time, the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.*

And, if we refer back to the angelic revelation after Christ's ascension, the witnesses were all Galileans.

Their 'how to choose' practice was first to pray ...

We don't know how they prayed,

whether they used the Lord's prayer as their guide,
or words from the psalms,
or extemporaneous words,
or sat in silence.

The 16th century mystic, Saint John of the Cross, once wrote: "*God's first language is silence.*" The idea is ascribed to others too - Fr. Thomas Keating, Trappist monk and priest quoted- **Rumi** (30 September 1207 – 17 December 1273), *who was a 13th-century Persian Muslim poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic.* "Silence is God's first language, Everything else is a poor translation." and Thomas Merton (1996) in "Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk & Writer", 'The speech of God is silence. His Word is solitude.'

We do not know how long they prayed

In other passages in Acts we read *fasted and prayed* 13.3, *with prayer and fasting*, 14.23 ... and fasting is never a quick activity.

And I imagine Matthias and Justus prayed too, albeit from a very different perspective –

IS IT I LORD?

It raises the very immediate question for each of us – when we see or hear of a need, face a choice, do we pray? **IS IT I LORD?**

Maybe Matthias and Justus and the disciples had memories of other callings to serve God, callings that came in unexpected and ground breaking ways. All led to speaking of God's kingdom – witnessing to His presence, power, authority, purposes and passion for His people.

Samuel with words in the night, and the guidance of Eli,
Moses at a burning bush,
Moses and the inscribed tablets of the 10 commandments ,
David with a stone against Goliath,
Joshua with walking around Jericho in praise and worship,
Elijah with a water soaked offering set ablaze,
Mary in an angelic visitation,
and 2 Josephs were guided by God in dreams.
There are so many ways that scripture describes God speaking to his people ... calling them to be God's witness.

At Pentecost, in Acts 2: 17-18, we read of the prophecy of Joel .

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old

men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

Do we expect God to speak today? Is there prophecy? Are there visions and dreams that we are ignoring?

IS IT I LORD? Are you saying something through me, showing something through me? Not just for me, but for us as the body of Christ?

On this occasion in Acts, Peter leads the decision making search for God's direction with a familiar process. It was their custom to use lots, their way of making a personal separation from the decision, no political favours, no lobbying, no bias ... this is the last time lots are referred to, interesting as it precedes Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

Just like Matthias and Justus, are we called to consider the part we play in the church team? Not historically, or by tradition, but now with the demands that are to be met in and for the community. Are we open to the possibilities of a new call in our lives, one that comes in unexpected ways, a different responsibility, a change of direction? Are we ready to step up? Are we ready to step down?

I am thankful that we have this account of how the 12 apostles were chosen. Justus reminds us that it's in God's will to consider that it may not be our time, not our way to live out our faith.

What did Justus do? How did he feel?

There is no further mention of him, come to that Matthias does not appear again either. We will not know this side of eternal life but we know that this decision could not negate years with Jesus. It could not eradicate the wonder of seeing healing and forgiveness flow unconditionally. He could not unlearn what Jesus had taught and shown about the Kingdom of God. The choice meant another path was open for him as a witness, a man with a testimony. Isn't it encouraging that witnessing to God's love in Jesus does not have to be a headline grabbing role, that living out faith in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom is what Paul describes to the Ephesians as 'becoming a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.' [Ephesians 2.22]

It seems to me that is God's expectation of and for us – that we will live in the power of His presence. Not because we can in our own strength or abilities, but because He empowers us to walk in the footsteps of His Son.

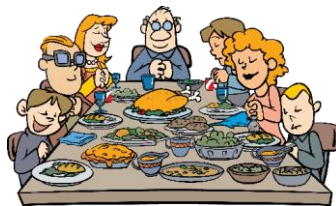
That is grace.

If you want to spend some personal time thinking about the HOW, looking for discernment with your choices, I suggest some time with this extract from the suggested Psalm for Expectation Sunday – Psalm 1, especially these verses with their proclamation of trust and expectation in the power of meditation / prayer.

but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

³ They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Thoughts from Rev Pam Gordon.



FELLOWSHIP LUNCH

Fellowship lunches will return once are out of Lockdown!

WEEKLY PRAYER GROUP



The Tuesday Prayer Group us unable to meet at the moment, but if you would like someone held in prayer please contact

JENNIE GRIFFITHS (01491 575137)

SERVICES IN JUNE

Wednesday 2 nd June	10.00 am	Midweek Eucharist with Wholeness and Healing Followed by Bible Study at 11	Online
Friday 4 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Sunday 6 th June	10.00 am	Eucharist 1 st after Trinity	Harpsden Live and online
Monday 7 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Wednesday 9 th June	10.00 am	Midweek Eucharist Followed by Bible Study at 11	Online
Friday 11 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Sunday 13 th June	10.00 am	Eucharist 2 nd after Trinity	Shiplake Live and online
Monday 14 th June	10.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Wednesday 16 th June	10.00 am	Midweek Eucharist Followed by Bible Study at 11	Online
Friday 18 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online

Sunday 20 th June	10.00 am	Eucharist Father's Day	Dunsden Live and online
Monday 21 st June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Wednesday 23 rd June	10.00 am	Midweek Eucharist Followed by Bible Study at 11	Online
Friday 25 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Sunday 27 th June	10.00 am	Eucharist Sts Peter and Paul Patronal Festival	Shiplake Live and online
Monday 28 th June	9.00 am	Morning Prayers	Online
Wednesday 30 th June	10.00 am	Midweek Eucharist Followed by Bible Study at 11	Online

**PLEASE REMEMBER - IF YOU WANT TO ATTEND A LIVE SERVICE YOU NEED
TO BOOK A PLACE WITH LEIGH AT THE BENEFICE OFFICE ON
0118 940 3484 OR EMAIL AT benefice.sdh@gmail.com
ALSO - IF YOU CAN'T ATTEND, PLEASE CANCEL YOUR BOOKING!!**

LAST ORDERS FOR:

Supporting Harpsden Garden Party on

SUNDAY 27 June 2-5.30pm

**By kind permission of the Ellis family
At Harpsden Wood End, RG9 4AF**

**By ticket entry only, £10 per adult to
include a delicious cream tea
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A free phone line of hymns,
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CHURCH WARDEN

Tilden McKean

Tilden.mckean@btinternet.com
(01491 572981)

P.C.C. SECRETARY

Sue Wright

susanpwright@hotmail.co.uk
(0118 9406220)

P.C.C. TREASURER

Jonathan May

JCMAQUA2@AOL.COM
(01491 575 525)

Parish Magazine Editor

Sue Wright

as above

Harpsden Parish News is written for and by the people of this parish, and contributions are always welcome. However, the views expressed therein are those of the writers and are not necessarily shared by the Rector, the Editor and Churchwarden.

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