



ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, SUTTON

17 MAY 2020 6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Please join me for our

Service on the 6th Sunday of Easter at 10.30am

(or at another convenient time) by following the Order of Service and singing in your own home.

I will be thinking of you all and praying for you at The Rectory at the same time and longing for our future reunion in Church.



Christ is risen
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Frances

Duty Warden: John Kerr

Server: Cedric Burge

Musician: Paul Waton

Sidespersons: Mary Meldrum, Peter Wilson

Welcomers: Jean Chappell, Sylvia Cowling

Sound desk: Roger Barnes

Refreshments: Margaret Ager, Glynis Osborne

Here is a view of St Nic's from The Rectory garden at 10.28am on Easter Day



St. Nicholas, Sutton
Worship on the 6th Sunday of Easter
at 10.30am on 17 May 2020
led by Revd Frances Arnold, Priest-in-Charge

The Gathering

The Greeting

President

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Hymn Great is thy faithfulness

Prayer of Preparation

We sit or kneel

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.

Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

1 Corinthians 5.7,8

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.**

President

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon *you*,
pardon and deliver *you* from all *your* sins,
confirm and strengthen *you* in all goodness,
and keep *you* in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Glory to God is said or sung

**Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

The Collect

President says 'Let us pray'.

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us
to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings

First reading Genesis 8.20-9.17

God's Promise & the Covenant with Noah

read by Jenny Gillbe

Second reading Acts 17.22-31

Paul in Athens

read by Jenny

At the end the reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn Alleluia, sing to Jesus

Gospel Reading John 14.15-21

Jesus the Way to the Father

read by Matthew Phillips

The reader says

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to *John*.

Glory to you, O Lord.

At the end

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon *The Revd Frances Arnold*

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you „, God ... gives to all mortals life and breath and all things...'
(Acts 17.23-25)

What impression must Athens have made upon a Jew in the first century AD? What impression must the city have made on a Jew as passionately committed to the worship of the one true God as was Paul of Tarsus, and equally passionately convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God? Not surprisingly, he was deeply distressed to see the city full of idols; and he resolved to do something about it.

However, the encounter between faith in Jesus Christ as Lord on the one hand and Greco-Roman paganism on the other called for a different kind of witness from that which he had used elsewhere. That is the first thing that we learn from the story we heard from Acts, as St Paul addressed the curious Greeks in a large, open square, called the Areopagus, in a way calculated to engage the attention of that particular audience. It is different from the way in which he spoke to Jews indoors in the synagogue.* Paul adopts a broad approach with the Athenians, finding common ground in common humanity, in a common experience of nature and in a common enjoyment of culture. He is, as we say, speaking their own language - indeed talking almost entirely either in quotations from or allusions to their own writers, even picking up the reference to the inscription on one of the outdoor altars 'to an unknown God.' (The altars to unknown gods had originally been constructed

so that sacrifices could be made during a terrible plague in Athens 600 years earlier; and these sacrifices had been credited with saving the city).

Now, it is sometimes said that St Paul's speech in Athens was a failure and that, precisely for this reason, he then resolved, as he said in a letter to the Corinthians, 'to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2²). In other words, Paul then adopted the other basic form of witness, not relating to nature and culture and the common interests of his listeners, but concentrating in depth on Christ and on his cross alone. That judgement, however, doesn't give enough weight to Paul's ability to adapt his approach to different circumstances when that was necessary.

This (broad) kind of witness, finding common ground with local people, adopting their ideas and vocabulary, has its place. Its strength is that, though it does not lead to mass conversions, it does attract individuals, as the end of this story shows. The passage continues, 'When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this".... some of them joined (Paul) and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.' Dionysius and Damaris, one man and one woman, may be individuals, but they are presented as typical, representative individuals, a new Adam and a new Eve, into whom new life is breathed by the preaching of the gospel. Incidentally, Damaris must have been a woman of substance to be named on her own without a husband, and Dionysius was an Areopagite, which is roughly equivalent to a Judge of the Supreme Court. Presumably they are mentioned here, because they were remembered later for the part they played in the life of the church.

But the weakness of this broad approach to preaching, so far as we can see, is that it did not produce a community. There was no early church in Athens to which Paul might have written a letter as there was, for example, in Corinth. To move masses of people requires the preaching of the cross with all its risks. The preaching of the cross both repels more people and - because it strikes home at a deeper level than mere thought - captures more hearts for Christ.

The history of Christian witness shows a constant interplay between these two kinds of approach, both of which go back to St Paul: between preaching in breadth and preaching in depth, between the response of individuals on the one hand and of whole groups or even tribes and nations on the other. If we only take the broad approach, we run the risk of having nothing worthwhile to say; if we are too narrow, we run the risk of losing our common language, and thus of having no-one to listen to our message. This is what happened when Paul started speaking of resurrection to people who had no idea what he was talking about. True witness needs both - and something more - because the transmission of the gospel requires three things if it is to be credible. It requires preaching in breadth, preaching in depth *and* their living embodiment in a community, both as an example and as a source of nurture. It was precisely the lack of a Christian community which hampered Paul's work in Athens. People are attracted to the Good News of Jesus Christ when they find it embodied in a congregation and feel that they want to have a part in something they haven't found elsewhere. That is as big a challenge to us now, as it was to the Athenians then. The care that we are showing to each other and to our neighbours, both in and out of lockdown, goes a long way to achieving this. **Amen.**

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[I am grateful to a close friend for this idea about broad preaching and preaching in depth (on the cross, judgement and resurrection) on which this sermon is based]

The Creed

We stand

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ,
let us pray to the Father.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
you promised through your Son Jesus Christ
to hear us when we pray in faith.

Strengthen *Christopher & Jonathan* our bishops and all your Church in the service of
Christ,

that those who confess your name may be united in your truth,
live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

Bless and guide *Elizabeth our Queen*; give wisdom to all in authority;
and direct this and every nation in the ways of justice and of peace;
that we may honour one another, and seek the common good.

Lord, in your mercy...

Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours,
that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy...

We hold in prayer all those affected by the Coronavirus and especially our chaplains, volunteers and NHS health workers, nursing and medical staff caring for increasing numbers....

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit ...;
give them courage and hope in their troubles;
and bring them the joy of your salvation.
Lord, in your mercy...

Hear us as we remember those who have died in the faith of Christ ...;
according to your promises,
grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.
Lord, in your mercy...

Rejoicing in the fellowship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Nicholas and all your saints,
we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Peace

President

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples
and said, 'Peace be with you.'

Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

John 20.19,20

The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

Let us pray

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

**Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants, give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness.
We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
and that we show forth your praise,
not only with our lips but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Blessing

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**