

5<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**1 Corinthians 15 15:** *'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death is thy victory? Where O death, is your sting?*

**Hymn by Edmond Budry:** *Thine be the glory, risen conquering son. Endless is the victory thou over death has won!*

With Easter on the horizon, we need to remind ourselves that God has in one master stroke vanquished the powers of death and sin. Jesus' resurrection gives us a reason for thanksgiving amidst all that is going on as we can celebrate our almighty victorious and loving God. Our response is to seek God's kingdom in prayer and action, leading unselfish lives – helping those sick or bereaved, calling on a stranger, helping those in need in our community and apologising to someone we may have hurt. As Mother Theresa put it:

*"We can do no great things – only small things with great love".*

## Vicar Recruitment Update



Seven candidates applied to become our new vicar. The interview panel (John Sturgeon, Paul Watkins, Archdeacon, Stephen Pullin and Area Dean, Ainsley Swift) have shortlisted four candidates and invited them for interview by Zoom. The Archdeacon, Rev. Stephen said that we have one of the best set of candidates he has seen for a while. This gives some testimony to the

hard work that has gone into the recruitment process and compilation of our parish profile. Thank you to you all for all your prayers. Keep praying, please! The interviews will be held by Zoom on Wednesday, March 10<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wednesday, 10th March. "Getting to know us Day".**

This will be an opportunity for the shortlisted candidates to meet some members of the PCC and some church members who are actively involved in the work of our teams, or who lead other activities central to the life of our church. This is not a time for us to interview the candidates, but for them to question us about life in our church and our expectations. Our candidates need to understand us as a church, for them to be sure God is calling them to the right church. This day will enable them to continue their journey of discernment of God's path for them.

Each candidate will meet four groups of church members, indicated above, for approximately 45mins during the day. The foci of these groups will be:

- Young People and Schools
- Pastoral Care
- Worship, Teaching and Mission
- Enabling Team, Hub and Homeless

In addition, each candidate will meet some of our children to play a game for 15 minutes after school.

John Sturgeon has prepared a brilliant set of videos for the candidates to see the inside and outside of the church, the drive from the church to the vicarage and a short tour of Dedworth. This

will be extremely helpful to them. They will see what they will be coming to even though they are only meeting us virtually! Thank you, John.

### **Thursday March 11<sup>th</sup> Interview by Zoom Day**

The interview panel will hold Zoom sessions with the candidates throughout the day and in interview, ask questions that have been drafted with the help of the PCC.

Each candidate has also been asked to prepare:

- a short talk on *Eph 2. 1-10* lasting 5mins. This will be recorded and made available to the congregation to watch later.
- a presentation lasting 10mins on the topic:

*'What are the most pressing questions for a church which come out of Covid? How would you help equip the congregation to navigate/shape itself post lockdown?'*

The interview panel will engage with each candidate during their presentation and make decisions based on the interviews, talks and presentations.

We need you to pray hard for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of our panel and our candidates, as they discern what is best for us all.

A reminder that the recruitment documents i.e. the Parish Profile, the role specification and person specification are available to view our web site

<https://allsaintschurchededworth.com/about-all-saints/recruit/>

## **Sunday Services in March**

We enjoyed the two YouTube services in February. One was pre-recorded and one livestreamed. This month we have returned to equally enjoyable interactive Zoom services until 21<sup>st</sup> March. This is to enable John Sturgeon to focus on his task of recruiting our new vicar. We thank Carolyn Carter for continuing to co-ordinate and lead our Sunday services by Zoom.

**7<sup>th</sup> March:** Zoom Service.

**14<sup>th</sup> March:** Zoom Service Mothering Sunday

**21<sup>st</sup> March:** YouTube Service

**28<sup>th</sup> March:** Zoom Service

**All services begin at 10-45am.**



**The Zoom Link for all Sunday Services and for Tea and Coffee after the YouTube services are the same each week. Click this link.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86583596990?pwd=VU1ha2YwWlJFOGJpeHBTeldvVFN0dz09>

or use these details.

**Meeting ID: 865 8359 6990**

**Passcode: 482876**

## **Private Prayer**



**The church is open and being used for private prayer** every weekday from 10:00am – 11:00am. Several people have been taking part. Sue Morgan is on hand to supervise arrangements for Covid precautions and safety. She is available in case of need. To protect each other, please enter through the main front doors where hand sanitizer will be placed and use the socially distanced seating in front of the main altar.



## Prayers in the Garden resume on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March !

Subject to Government confirmation, March 29<sup>th</sup> will be when 6 people are allowed to meet socially distanced outdoors. Hence, Prayers in the Garden can then resume. Sue Morgan will hold prayers every weekday, come rain or shine, at 9:30am and 5:00pm (Note new time for Spring sessions). Numbers will be limited to the leader (usually Sue Morgan) and five others, all socially distanced!

## Sunday School

### Sunday School to Meet again soon by Zoom.



The Sunday School had a great session on the 7<sup>th</sup> February. It was attended by 11 children and worked well, with activity packs having been delivered beforehand. The message of love – God for them, for themselves and for each other was central. Questioning why God loves us and loves others

was included. Chatterboxes were made so the message could be shared in their homes.

We will be holding another fun 'Zoom' Sunday School for 7–10-year-olds, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March at 10:45am, provisionally.



## Gatherings for Youth 11+ years of age



We continue to meet by Zoom every Sunday, starting at 6:30pm. It is great that this is continuing! Contact Michelle Sturgeon for Zoom details.



## Bible Study

### 7:30pm - 8:30pm on Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> March by Zoom.

#### Fruits of the Spirit: 'Kindness'



We are continuing our study of Fruits of the Spirit. We have covered Love, Joy, Peace and Patience. Ruth led our last discussion on Patience, when we read out and discussed key bible passages dealing with different aspects of this much needed virtue at this time.

Next is Kindness, an underrated virtue. This session will be led by Sue Morgan.



To join this Zoom meeting, click this link.

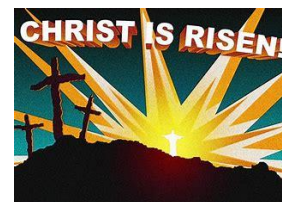
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83108655692?pwd=QVZGZWM1ZkJKQRW1TNmViZkNVYUUh3QT09>

or enter these details:

Meeting ID: 831 0865 5692

Passcode: 718871

## Easter Services



Easter will be celebrated mightily at All Saints' Dedworth and there will be something for everyone!! Read on.

### Maundy Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> April and Good Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April: Reflections

We are planning two reflections on YouTube on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. These contemplative sessions will enable us to be still and think of the enormity of the events on these two momentous days in the church calendar. Both will be available from early morning on the respective days, on YouTube.



### Maundy Thursday 'Family Time Together' and Service 5:30pm

In addition, there will be a Family Time Together at 5:30pm on Maundy Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup> on an interactive Zoom. Details are in the planning stages, but foot washing has been suggested...Watch this space!

### Stations of the Cross

For Holy Week, Rev Rosie at St Andrew's has organised the 14 Windsor churches comprising 'Churches Together in Windsor' to present '14 Stations of the Cross', one for each church. We will have one in our church garden.











## The Re - Opening of All Saints' Dedworth on Easter Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> April

**Traditional Easter Sunday Service 9:30am** We have provisionally decided, to **open the church** for a traditional communion service on Easter Sunday. We are hoping this will be celebrated by **Bishop Olivia**. She accepted an invitation by Mike and Jacki Thomas ages ago! *Covid restrictions will still be in place*, so congregation numbers will be limited, and 'track and trace' and a booking system will operate. Please inform Sue Morgan if you intend to come. We may have to restrict entry. However, we are planning to Live Stream this service so that any overspill and church members unsure about venturing forth, will be able to view the service by live video!

### Easter Sunday 10:45am YouTube Family Service

We will also be having a pre-recorded YouTube online service at 10:45am for the family, with lots of opportunity for participation, joy and thankfulness! You may remember the exceptional service of last year, which was a beacon of light and celebration amidst the gloom. A year on, one of great hardship for many, and we hopefully have a light at the end of the tunnel. We can give thanks for the presence and love of our never changing God.

### Provisional Schedule of Easter Services

	Service at Church 	Online Service  
Maundy Thursday April 1 <sup>st</sup>	-	Early morning YouTube reflection 
Maundy Thursday April 1 <sup>st</sup>	-	5:30pm Interactive Zoom Family Time Together and service 
Good Friday April 2 <sup>nd</sup>		Early morning YouTube reflection 
Easter Sunday April 4 <sup>th</sup>	9:30am Communion with Bishop Olivia 	9:30 Communion with Bishop Olivia live streamed on YouTube 
		10:45 am YouTube service of Easter celebration 

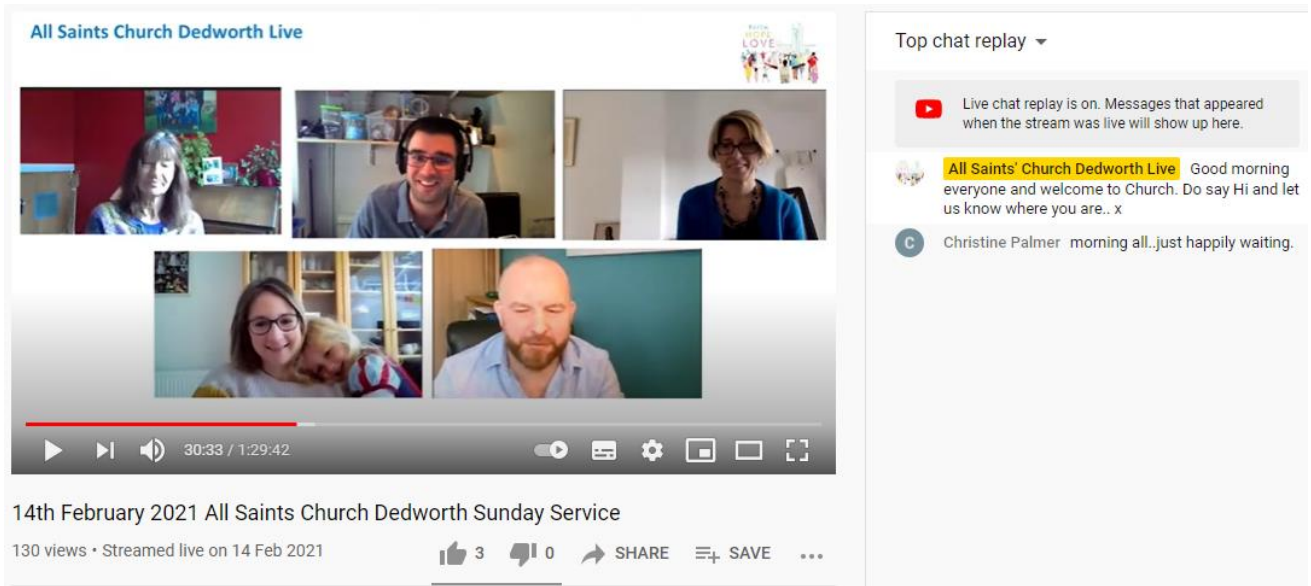
## Looking Back

### Valentine's Day – A Time for Loving One Another



To accompany our service on February 14<sup>th</sup>, we sent a card with greetings about love with bible verses inside, to the whole of our congregation (we think/hope! 150 in all!). This was a great idea initiated by Sarah Bissell, and wonderfully executed by Carolyn Carter. If you did not receive one, it means we do not have your contact details. Please give them to Andrew Giles!

We also enjoyed a splendid, livestreamed service that day. For those of you who have not attended a YouTube service livestreamed from people's homes, this is what happens. Those leading the service meet on Zoom and the Zoom meeting is simultaneously broadcast on YouTube. Pictured clockwise from the left are Ruth Norris, John Sturgeon, Sarah Bissell, Ken Kilner and Michelle Sturgeon (with Hannah!) who all took part in the service.



### Ash Wednesday, 17th February

Jackie Thomas recorded a special reflection for the website, delivered by YouTube to mark Ash Wednesday and to inspire us through this Lenten period. Follow this link to find out more.

<https://allsaintschurchdedworth.com/ash-wednesday-reflection/>



For the last 6 weeks, we have encouraged the person giving the homily at the Sunday Service to publish their message. This is for us to return to it, read it and allow

God's message to minister to us. If you have missed a service, you can catch up. There have been some very thoughtful talks. Click on the link below:

[Read our latest Thought for the Week - All Saints Church Dedworth](#)

Carolyn Carter's message to us on 28/2/2021 is printed on the back page of this newsletter.

## Jacki Thomas's Blog – just a couple of clicks away...



She says: "Following the publication of my book, 'Salt in a Secular Society', last year I have set up a website: [saltinsecular.com](http://saltinsecular.com). I have also started a blog called 'The Salt Cellar' which you can find on the website.

My hope is that you will find something of interest, possibly something that will help you in present circumstances, in the blog. Please feel free to pass it onto friends. I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:39) but sometimes we need a little help to hang on!" For more details please click on [Salt in a secular society - All Saints Church Dedworth](http://saltinsecular.com)

### Zoom Chat Coffee Morning 10.30am on Mondays.

Ruth Norris continues to lead her Zoom chat coffee mornings with several people "dropping in" and enjoying conversation. To join this Zoom meeting, click this



link. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88523434819?pwd=WEEdabks1VFRlb2RQWmdaMGdNejAzZz09> or enter these details.

**Meeting ID: 885 2343 4819**

**Passcode: 527946**

### Welcome to Age Concern

As some of you may know, Age Concern Windsor runs a Meals on Wheels service from the Spencer Denny centre. They needed to do some work on their kitchen and so to cook somewhere else while their kitchen was closed. They approached us for the hire our kitchen. We were delighted to help them from 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> February to enable their vital work to continue and liaised with Crossroads and West Windsor Hub to minimise risk of Covid contagion within our church building. Here you see the cooks hard at work. Thanks to Astra Parsons for cleaning the kitchen, café and toilets beforehand. Great to see our facilities being used!



### New Zone Structure

The new Zones have been in operation for two months and your Zone Leaders should be calling you shortly to check you are OK as we grapple with the winter months. If you do not receive a call, please contact Sue

Morgan on 07752 479624 or [sue@fountainschoolofmusic.co.uk](mailto:sue@fountainschoolofmusic.co.uk)

### Collection Time

Thank you to all those who have donated to the church in recent weeks. It helps us to do all the amazing things we are doing currently. THANK YOU. To donate to the church please use one of the methods below.

1. Our preferred method for one off donation is via **our JustGiving page**. Visit <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/allsaintsdedworth>
2. Or you can make a **transfer from your bank account**.  
Our Bank Details are: **Metro Bank**.  
A/c name = **All Saints Dedworth** Sort code = **23-05-80** Account number = **34016674**
3. Regular Giving is best through **the Parish Giving Scheme**. Details are on the church website. <https://allsaintschurchdedworth.com/about-all-saints/parish-giving-scheme/>

## The West Windsor Hub

We have been awarded a second grant from the RBWM for £5000 ( £10,000 in all) but it needs to be spent by the end of March! During this period of home schooling, we have been providing healthy Snack Packs to about 70 children in Windsor who are eligible for free school meals or whose families have a low income. Most of their families receive a food parcels or food vouchers from their children's schools and the 'snack packs' boosts their provisions with fruit, vegetables, oat bars and crisps etc.



Ingredients for a scrummy Snack Pack Bake activity for all the family are also distributed. Here is one of our children hard at work, at home, producing scones. On the right, Nigel from our church, is demonstrating how to make a banana cake!



Watch and learn how to make a banana cake, yourself.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&fbclid=IwAR3-0ITCgAKO\\_Y8ymK8to-9FCgLM EAea48aufgFzwe5hSon5nTRzHgfkwiw&v=TLHs0y1i5Mk&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&fbclid=IwAR3-0ITCgAKO_Y8ymK8to-9FCgLM EAea48aufgFzwe5hSon5nTRzHgfkwiw&v=TLHs0y1i5Mk&feature=youtu.be)

Some of RBWM grant is allocated to help families struggling financially, with their food and fuel bills during the months of Winter. We can also use it to make referrals to Baby Bank for warm coats, boots, hats and gloves etc. Another initiative to help families struggling financially has been for us to support Home-Schooling activities, with such things as pens and pencils. We have also been able to help some of the most vulnerable elderly folk by giving them 'cosy packs' consisting of a warm, fleecy blanket, a hottie and soups.

**Here are some of our amazing volunteers. Do you know any of them?**



## OUR AMAZING HUB VOLUNTEERS

We currently have 45 volunteers, with about 15 core members working regularly. Some are also trustees who help keep our paperwork and finances up to date. We need more volunteers to work in the hub and to man phone lines from their own homes. We have had 2 new volunteers in the last few weeks. If you can devote some time to helping us, please ring the Hub help on 01753 342110. WWH is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and phone lines are manned, every day between 9:00am and 7:00pm.

We are currently providing 15-20 shopping and delivery services each week and supplying food parcels on demand in cases of hardship, referring to FoodShare for long term needs. We are increasingly encountering people who need help with mental health issues and we are making an increasing number of recommendations for Talking Therapy. WWH are also working with representatives from Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and signpost clients who need debt counselling. We are also referring some to an online budgeting course, starting in March.

Thank you for your support. Carole Da Costa.

## Provisional Timetable of Events: 1<sup>st</sup> March – 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Date	Time	Title	Medium	Contact
Every weekday	10:00am	Church opens for private prayer	In person	Sue Morgan
Monday 1 <sup>st</sup> March	10:30am	Coffee with Ruth	Zoom	Ruth Norris
Monday 1 <sup>st</sup> March	12:00pm	Prayer Warriors	Zoom	Barbara Carter
Tuesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> March	7:30pm	Bible Study	Zoom	Sue Morgan
Wednesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March	7:30pm	Additional PCC meeting	Zoom	Sue Morgan and Andrew Giles
Sunday 7 <sup>th</sup> March	10:45am	Sunday Service followed by Tea and Coffee	Zoom	Sue Morgan and Carolyn Carter
Sunday 7 <sup>th</sup> March	6:30pm	Youth Meeting 11-16-year-olds	Zoom	Michelle Sturgeon
Monday 8 <sup>th</sup> March	10:30am	Coffee with Ruth	Zoom	Ruth Norris
Monday 8 <sup>th</sup> March	12:00pm	Prayer Warriors	Zoom	Barbara Carter
Wednesday 10 <sup>th</sup> March	All Day	“Getting to know us day” on Zoom for Vicar Candidates	Zoom	Paul Watkins and John Sturgeon
Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> March	All Day	Interview day on Zoom for Vicar Candidates	Zoom	Paul Watkins and John Sturgeon
Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup> March	10:45am	Sunday Service followed by Tea and Coffee Mothering Sunday	Zoom	Sue Morgan and Carolyn Carter
Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup> March	6:30pm	Youth Meeting 11-16-year-olds	Zoom	Michelle Sturgeon
Monday 15 <sup>th</sup> March	10:30am	Coffee with Ruth	Zoom	Ruth Norris
Monday 15 <sup>th</sup> March	12:00pm	Prayer Warriors	Zoom	Barbara Carter
Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> March	7:30pm	Bible Study	Zoom	Sue Morgan
Wednesday 17 <sup>th</sup> March	7:30pm	Possible PCC meeting	Zoom	Sue Morgan and Andrew Giles
Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> March	10:45am	YouTube Sunday Service	YouTube	Sue Morgan and John Sturgeon
Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> March	10:45am	Sunday school special service	Zoom	Michelle Sturgeon
Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	10:30am	Coffee with Ruth	Zoom	Ruth Norris
Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	12:00pm	Prayer Warriors	Zoom	Barbara Carter
Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> March	10:45am	Sunday Service followed by Tea and Coffee Mothering Sunday	Zoom	Sue Morgan and Carolyn Carter
Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> March	6:30pm	Youth Meeting 11-16-year-olds	Zoom	Michelle Sturgeon
Monday 29 <sup>th</sup> March And weekdays thereafter	9:30 & 5:00pm	Prayers in the Garden (max 6)	In person onsite	Sue Morgan
Monday 29 <sup>th</sup> March	10:30am	Coffee with Ruth	Zoom	Ruth Norris
Monday 29 <sup>th</sup> March	12:00pm	Prayer Warriors	Zoom	Barbara Carter
Tuesday 30 <sup>th</sup> March	7:30pm	Bible Study	Zoom	Sue Morgan
Maundy Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> April	Early Morning	Maundy Thursday reflection	YouTube	John Sturgeon and Jacki Thomas
Maundy Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> April	5:30pm	Family Service and time together	Zoom	Michelle Sturgeon and Carolyn Carter
Good Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> April	Early Morning	Good Friday reflection	YouTube	John Sturgeon and Jacki Thomas
Easter Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> April	9:30 am	Easter Communion Service	In Person onsite YouTube Livestreamed	Sue Morgan and John Sturgeon
Easter Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> April	10:45am	Easter Family Service	YouTube	Sue Morgan and John Sturgeon



## Useful Contact Details

Name	Telephone	Email/Web site	Address
All Saints 'Church Dedworth	01753 841710	<a href="http://allsaintschurchededworth.com">http://allsaintschurchededworth.com</a>	Dedworth Rd SL4 4JW
Sue Morgan Church Warden	07752 479624	<a href="mailto:sue@fountainschoolofmusic.co.uk">sue@fountainschoolofmusic.co.uk</a>	
Ken Kilner Church Warden	07739011503	<a href="mailto:Kenkilner55@gmail.com">Kenkilner55@gmail.com</a>	
Andrew Giles Church Secretary	07376 486023	<a href="mailto:j.andrewgiles58@gmail.com">j.andrewgiles58@gmail.com</a>	33 Harcourt Road, SL4 5LZ
Barbara Carter Prayer Hub	07932 636854	<a href="mailto:the.carters1@btinternet.com">the.carters1@btinternet.com</a>	
Carolyn Carter Children's and Youth Ministry, Hub & more		<a href="mailto:carolynjcarter@yahoo.com">carolynjcarter@yahoo.com</a>	
Peter Norris Outgoing Treasurer and Deanery Synod representative	01753869787	<a href="mailto:peternorris.windsor@btinternet.com">peternorris.windsor@btinternet.com</a>	
Ruth Norris GAP; New Daylight Schools Leader	01753869787	<a href="mailto:ruth_norris@yahoo.com">ruth_norris@yahoo.com</a>	
John Sturgeon Webmaster, Streamed Sunday Service Internet Singing Group	07714 339995	<a href="mailto:john@sturg.co.uk">john@sturg.co.uk</a>	
Michelle Sturgeon Family News Children and Youth Ministry	07834 377312	<a href="mailto:tichymichy@yahoo.co.uk">tichymichy@yahoo.co.uk</a>	
Michael Thomas Licensed Lay Minister	07850 326583	<a href="mailto:m.a.thomas@btinternet.com">m.a.thomas@btinternet.com</a>	
Jacki Thomas Licensed Lay Minister	07753 197923	<a href="mailto:Jacki.thomas@btinternet.com">Jacki.thomas@btinternet.com</a>	
Paul Watkins Incoming treasurer	07711 194560	<a href="mailto:pwatkinsuk@gmail.com">pwatkinsuk@gmail.com</a>	
Jackie Wiggins Safeguarding	07952807107	<a href="mailto:jewiggins2@yahoo.com">jewiggins2@yahoo.com</a>	
West Windsor Hub	01753 342110		



### The Priority of Prayer'

Reading: Matthew 3:16 – 4: 4

**Message from the 10:45am Zoom Service on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021 by Carolyn Carter**

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become

bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

The story that Lent is based on isn't in the set readings this year but I thought it was important for us to look at it. After Jesus was baptised by John, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days to pray and fast. Straight after the high point of His baptism the enemy came to tempt Him to distract Him from His purpose.

Jesus had just heard the Father's voice declaring His love and identity as His Son and that's what the enemy comes to question - 'If you are the Son of God'...he always tries to get us to doubt what God says, he did that in the garden of Eden – 'Did God really say?' .....so many of His tactics are still the same and I don't want to spend too much time on him but it's good to be aware of his plans – so we can arm ourselves with the Truth of God – as Jesus did.

WE also need to hear the Father's voice to be able to stand up to him. Hearing God's voice is vital! We can so easily be distracted from listening to God by all the other noise around us – there's so much of it at the moment that the enemy doesn't need to try very hard!

But Jesus was SO deeply rooted in God's Word and knew His voice so well that he was able to use it to silence him. An interesting thing is that ALL the verses He used were from a small section in Deuteronomy. Let's look at Deuteronomy 8, the quote Jesus uses relates to the Israelites who were about to enter into the promised land – I also think it is very relevant for us right now -

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna.... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

It's interesting that Jesus uses this passage - HE was now in the wilderness, this time for 40 DAYS. He was also LED there by the Spirit of God and HE was undergoing a time of testing BEFORE starting His ministry. He TOO was hungry - the enemy waited till the last day of the fast to tempt Him to make bread... but He knew that it was more than bread that gives life!

God is the source of life and His voice sustains everything. It ALL exists because He spoke.

We need His voice like they needed DAILY manna from heaven in the desert to sustain them - Indeed Jesus called Himself the True Bread from Heaven. He is also The Word. The Israelites needed to collect this bread each day and we too need to hear God's voice, to connect with Jesus EVERYDAY. We can't live on yesterday's manna. We need to feed from the word of God more than ever – in this time of shaking we need to be grounded in the truth!

God calls us each to come away to meet with Him, to receive His Word for us for Today.

Many times, in the gospels it says Jesus went away by Himself to spend time with His Father – He was so connected He only did what He saw His Father doing and said what The Father was saying. He was the perfect Son of God yet He took time out to pray, how much more do WE need to take time with God?

This is not meant to be legalistic or out of obligation – but a living relationship. We were made for this connection and we need it as much as we need bread. We abide in Him and He in us – we share what's on OUR hearts and He shares what's on HIS heart!

The first and greatest command is that we 'Love the Lord our God' – everything else including loving our neighbour as ourselves is meant to come out of that.

We can't come to know or love someone unless we spend time with them.

Brother Lawrence says “We must know before we can love. To know God, we must often think of Him”. Prayer is simply that, thinking of and talking to God, taking time out to be with Him, not just bringing our needs, or the needs of others (that's important) but it's about knowing Him. It's what the disciples saw in Jesus and why they asked Him 'Lord teach us to pray'.

We all live busy lives (me included) but let's remind ourselves to regularly to turn our thoughts and affection towards Him, to thank Him for His presence and ask Him into whatever we are doing. It only takes a moment and we can do this throughout our day. That's the 'Practice of the Presence of God' that Brother Lawrence lived and wrote about.

But it's also important we take some time out to be with Him. Time may be limited, and Jesus knows the pressures we are dealing with He knows what season of life we are in and there's grace, but I feel a sense of urgency for the church at the moment – so perhaps there is some time where we can to come away from distractions even just 10 minutes each day - I'm talking to myself here too – In order to do this we need to turn the volume down on all the other voices, set aside our to-do lists! Jesus had crowds of needy people turning up everywhere He went, yet He prioritised time with His Father up a mountainside because he knew that it was only through His Spirit that anything lasting and of value could be done.

In all relationships, if we want them to thrive, we need to invest in them, give them our full attention. Prayer sometimes feels hard because we can't see God and sometimes, we can't see the fruit of our prayers.... it seems unseen, like it's not achieving anything in our results driven world but whenever we spend time in God's presence, we cannot remain the same. He builds things on the inside of us – just like the roots of a tree....when you see trees standing strong in storms it's because of their vast root system - which is grown underground, in the hidden place.

In this lockdown it feels like God is inviting us to a deeper relationship with Him in the secret place. The verse in Deuteronomy says God led His people into the desert to humble them (it actually says it twice!) in order that He might know what was in their hearts and if they would follow Him.

In many ways this time we've been going through feels like a wilderness – perhaps God is using this time for the same thing?

So many of our usual activities have stopped. We don't have church meetings or anyone to lead us in times of worship at the moment. Maybe God has allowed it to be stripped away for the same purpose... to humble us so He can know what's in our hearts and if we will seek Him.

Are we going to take Him up on the invitation? I really believe that, if we do, when we come together to worship again, we will see God's presence and power in a way we've never seen before! James 4:8 says, 'Draw near to God and He will draw near to you' As we move towards Him God comes running out to meet us like the Father in the prodigal son story! He actually desires to meet with us WAY more than we realise!

Jesus identifies Himself as a Bridegroom coming for His Bride (the church). This aspect of who Jesus is isn't mentioned much in sermons but it seems to be highlighted at the moment in a way it hasn't been in the past – more and more preachers and prophets are speaking about it; it's appearing in songs - so I think we need to pay attention to it.

God is calling the Church back to their first love – to intimacy with Him. He loves each of us SO much and has such a deep desire to be with us (that is why he was willing to come to earth and die to end the separation that sin brings) He calls us to Himself that we might choose to love Him in return.

In Matthew 25 He teaches about the end times and says "In that day the Kingdom of Heaven will be like this" then tells a story about bridesmaids waiting for the Bridegroom to return. They have lamps. There are those who have oil to keep their lamps going, and those who suddenly realise they don't. Oil often represents the Holy Spirit but here I think it is speaking about our personal relationship with God.

They are all faithful bridesmaids waiting in expectation for Him to return, the lamps they carry may represent ministries or acts of service – they are all shining lights.

Both groups fall asleep when He's a long time coming back – but that's not what Jesus comments on – it was having oil that mattered – the ones that didn't have it ask those who do for some of theirs – but it can't be transferred and they needed to go and buy their own, to invest to get some – no-one can give anyone else their intimacy with God – it is for each to steward to keep the flame alive. It's about whether they know Jesus or not, and whether He knows them. We know God knows all of us – but Jesus' story states that those who have oil are wise – but those who don't He says He doesn't know (meaning in a current, living and connected way).

It's quite a sober passage - but it's important to look at passages we find hard sometimes - and I think God is highlighting it at this time for a reason....to challenge and inspire us to realise that He is calling us to get ready, to get oil, to invest time in knowing Him more.

Let's do what Jesus says - go into our rooms by ourselves to pray to our Father who is in secret, make space to hear His voice – seek the bread and oil that comes from His presence - let's ask Him, as the disciples did, to teach us to pray!

Amen.