*On June 14th, the church building reopened for private prayer and devotion with a vigil to mark the 3rd anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire – our bell tolled 72 times, once for each life lost.*

*The Prime Minister announced in his speech on Tuesday, June 23 in the House of Commons liturgical services will be allowed to resume from July 4. The Parochial Church Council and former Church Wardens will gather to reopen the church on July 4. Regular worship will resume on Sunday morning from July 5 at 10:10. Instructions from the London College of Bishops and guidance from the Government and Church of England has yet to be published so I am not sure what form our worship will take.*

*After 15 long weeks we will at last gather again – even if it is not as we have known before now and may not be similar for many weeks to come. Togetherness in prayer is what is essential to our Calling.*

Third Sunday After Trinity, June 28, 2020

We come to the end of Jesus's sermon on Mission found in Chapters 9 and 10 of Matthew's Gospel – one of the shorter Gospel pericopes in the Lectionary. It is exactly three verses (only two sentences) long.

Many reflect on the significance of this passage for understanding the orders of discipleship and how rewards are given out – but I join with those who see this passage as all about Christian Welcome. In fact I go a step further - I see this passage as about Christian peace and security. This is the heart of the Church – and the fullness of human life in community.

Jesus is clear – we are sent out two by two a reminder of the Covenant and the dual nature – a reminder of the diverse gifts of the Body of Christ. Christ is in each of the Baptised – and as the disciples go from town to town sharing in the Word there will be strong reactions to the Gospel.

So the gathering of the community of ministry forms and coalesces: the person who welcomes, the welcomed person, Christ in the welcomed person, Christ within the Father; the prophet, the name of the prophet, the one who welcomes the prophet, the reward of a prophet; a righteous person, the name of a righteous person, the one who welcomes a righteous person, the reward of a righteous person; the hospitable and generous, one of these little ones, the disciple, the reward of the hospitable and generous. This is the security of an interconnected and serving community where resources and well-being are mutual and reciprocal – this is the first glimpse of the Eucharistic Community – and the Peace of God which passes all understanding. This is the weaving of the Body of Christ within the mission and ministry of the Church – Called in Baptism to be One Body, Called to Preach One Faith, Called by the Authority of One Lord – and sent out to bring peace and security to *all* people.

How much the world needs to have a glass of cold water right now – some refreshment from the very source of all life! And we must focus on our ability to welcome and be welcomed – not to be fearful and timid hiding behind screens – but to be knowledgeable and informed and to bring calm to these troubled and unsettling days.

Our Lord understands our fears and troubles – but reassures us and sends comfort and kindness in the form of Christian Disciples. I have been heartened each and every day of these past 15 weeks by the gentle reassurance of members of my church family – the simple acts of togetherness, encouragement and prayerful support.

Following Christ is a life of adventure and marvel. Walking in the Way we are taken outside of our comfort zones and led to meet people we could not have imagined – and they become friends and fellow travellers on the Way. Our eyes are opened to blessing after blessing. And we are given strength to do new things, things we never thought we could do – don't play to your strengths but let God work through your weaknesses.

We live in a culture where marketing, industry and organisations love to give out rewards, awards and honours. There are so many cards and shops with reward points, industry standard awards and prizes that the entire culture becomes rather void of meaning – an echo chamber of self-congratulation. Entire web sites are designed around the psychology of winning – Yes! You are the winning bidder! Some Congregations are designed this way too – Yes! Jesus loves you because you are a winner! How depressing and how untrue. Jesus loves you because you were created through Him to become exactly who you are – not a passive audience, not a soundbite or parrot for cheap sentiment, not a sugar rush of gushing loveliness – in fact a messy, complicated, troubled, uncertain human being full of contradictions but seeking some understanding, seeking some joy and fulfilment – someone who is sometimes, on a good day, learning to be kind.

Corners of the Church have also fallen fowl to this rather poisonous and narcissistic culture of Prosperity Gospel (rewards for the faithful) – forms of pyramid marketing and brand recognition. Certain leaders of the church have claimed on-line services have reached more people in lock-down then services ever before – 25% of the population is Zooming straight into the Kingdom of God. Only they are not – people have been curious and click-bait abounds – but there are Views and there is Viewing – and let us be clear there is a deep theological difference between Viewing and Keeping Watch. Much of the on-line content provided by the church has the same anaesthetising effect as QVC infomercials – a certain unsad, medicated appeal. Religion as data collection for micro-advertising is simply horrible. Maybe there isn't such a thing as bad press – all coverage and all attention are good in a narcissistic world – but there is bad theology which harms people and leads people away from truth and engaged relationships. A church pushed to extreme stress about numbers and size will always have performance anxiety.

But please don't get me wrong, I am a firm believer in technology and using technology to communicate the love of God and the Christian Gospel – but the invitation must lead to relationship, togetherness and belonging. It cannot be about YouTube hits and profits – technology must not frame the Gospel in ways that are antithetical to its truth or hurtful to the Kingdom values Christ teaches us. The depth of our relationships must matter more than a false impression of our great reach – the miracle is in the sharing and generosity that is gifted to us constantly by the love of our Lord. Rewards and payment are a language constantly used in the Gospels to remind us of our worth not as slaves and hired hands but as co-workers for the Gospel, children by adoption and heirs of hope – we are raised up not kept down – we are invited to serve and be active – not to watch passively.

How is our society going to change? How are you going to participate in these changes? How will communities in general change? Will office blocks become new housing? Will people stay local and work from home? Will we manage to build the new infrastructure we need for this world? Will we find better understanding and integration? We all have so many questions right now.

But there is one aspect of life that is very clear – it all begins with a kind welcome. It all begins with us reaching out to the stranger, the other, the outsider – and offering hospitality, peace and security. In welcoming one another we welcome Christ – and we all become part of the gathering of prophets, righteous ones and little ones. We are taught that our ability to welcome others leads us to a better understanding of how we ourselves will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

We must participate in the Great Hospitality – the Family of the Church – we must all be responsible for the warmth, kindness and generosity we all seek. We will find it in each other – the washing of feet, the breaking of bread, a cup of cold water.

And what do we say when someone says thank you – we say what we hope God will say to us – YOU ARE WELCOME.

**This is Just to Say**

*By William Carlos Williams*

I have eaten

the plums

that were in

the icebox

and which

you were probably

saving

for breakfast

Forgive me

they were delicious

so sweet

and so cold