

Reflection for 23rd July 2020

At noon yesterday we talked about the example of Mary Magdalene, how she turned her life around and followed Jesus in loyal witness. We heard: "The old is gone and the new is here!" from Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians.

Yesterday afternoon I was at a Zoom conference and during one of the lectures the speaker asked us to consider what is our vocation as a Church? A huge subject, way too big to discuss here in a couple of pages but it did get me thinking about our community here at St. Mary's. We are meeting at the moment to look at what we have been doing these past 5 months online and to discuss how we have opened the church for private prayer and how can safely open the church for worship in the future.

It's a difficult time for all of us – we are all keen to be "back in church" but we know that we have to be prayerful and careful in our approach. There is much at stake, there is much to hold dear and we recognise that we must do our very best and be sure that we are before we can open for services.

So yesterday's call out at the conference seemed to feed in to what we had heard on Wednesday: "The old is gone, the new is here!".

Over the past five months we have begun to live in a very different way, we have learned many new ways of being. We have had to. "Unprecedented" is the word that seems to sum it up for us. Never seen before and hopefully never again as we cautiously head out of lockdown.

So, we are finally thinking about coming back together as a community in worship – of course, we have never stopped being community, but we have been "together though apart". It has been tough, really tough and we are understandably cautious. We are still caring for each other in the best way we can. And as a church, a focal point of our community here in Watton, we must set the right example. We must do the right thing in the best way we can. We may not always get it right – but we need to be able to put our hand on our heart and know that we did our very best for the people we care for. For each other.

So, in this conference, my friends and colleagues from around the globe talked about how change is affected at grass roots level. Grass roots. On the ground. That's us. To bring in the new starts with people like us, in our community in the heart of Watton.

So, what kind of community do we want to be? In today's reading for Morning Prayer from the Gospel of Luke Jesus tells the disciples the parable of the fig tree. Let's listen to that now:

Luke 21: 29-end

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So

also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Think about my question. What kind of community do we want to be? Not what have we been, but what do we want to be? Close your eyes and think about the image of the fig tree with its leaves and burgeoning fruit. Do we want to be a community of faith that is the signal to others (and ourselves) that summer is coming. Do we want to be the place where people can come and know that they will find witness to the Kingdom of God being near?

What does that witness look like? What does it mean?



A few weeks ago, I was lucky enough to spend some time in the Bishop's gardens in Norwich. A quiet day for clergy. I found my way to the little meadow hidden behind the more formal gardens. Surrounded by old stone walls, with ancient rooftops of the old part of the city just visible over the top of the walls. The meadow was left natural, with just a little path mown into the long grass, winding toward an ancient gnarled pear tree in the centre. This is the place the bishop keeps his bees and they were

buzzing about my head as I sat for a moment under the tree. A special moment. Not least because pears are my favourite fruit! The tree looked older than time and yet the leaves were a brilliant green despite the overcast day. The fruit was just beginning to swell and as I looked up through the branches I could see the spire of the cathedral in the distance. I had an image of us as a community like the pear tree, in the sight of the cathedral, with our old roots and glorious green leaves and burgeoning new fruit. Not quite a fig tree but you can see how today's reading resonated with me. I pray into that vision for us as a community every day.

So, what kind of community do we want to be? These are a lot of questions, but they are important ones. Jesus was always one to challenge his followers to leave their old way of thinking and being and to follow his way. Now I'm not saying that we are changing everything, certainly not – what I am asking is that we think about what we want to be as a community of faith in Watton?

Jesus warns us not to get caught up in the worries of this life or get weighed down with squander and I don't think that when we come back together as a worshipping community in one place that we will take it for granted ever again. I know I certainly won't.

But we have been given an opportunity to grow our vision, to expand our understanding of what it is to be "church" in our community.

We can affect change.

We can be as the fig trees sprouting new leaves and bearing ripening fruit.

We have an opportunity to reawaken our sense of our lives lived in the love of Jesus and to open out that welcome even further that we have before.

Jesus has brought us together as a community to be with him in this place. He asks us to come as we are, yes, but he doesn't leave us here – he draws us closer to him and forwards with him.

So, let's pray into this movement, this new opening. Let's come together as the leaves on the fig tree, unfurling and reaching outwards and upwards searching for the sun in every inch of the sky.

Let us listen to the words of Jesus in the early morning of this transition. Let us be aware and pray now to be ready for the extraordinary growth to come.