

Sunday Worship for 18th July 2021

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

From the Wirksworth Team Ministry

REFLECTION

Rev Carla Vicêncio Prior, filmed at Holy Trinity Church in Middleton

Including Faith in Daily life testimonies from:

Mr and Mrs Matthews, Churchwarden and Treasurer of St James', Idridgehay

Rev Alan Griggs, Lead Rural Chaplain

Paul Hunter, Headteacher of Elton Primary School

Mr Martin Tomlinson, Treasurer at Holy Trinity, Kirk Ireton

The readings we heard today talk essentially of building community under the loving care of God. The Jeremiah reading assures the people of Israel that now that they have returned from their exile in Babylon, the Lord will gather them together again in safety. In the New Testament readings St. Paul tells the Ephesians that communities that had always been separated by religion and culture are now one in Christ. The gospel reading brings us the return of the disciples as they once again gather around Jesus. Scripture shows us that the building of communities under God is an essential part of our faith. So with that in mind, I'd like to share some thoughts with you about what it means to us to be a community of believers here today. Our 10 communities are physically dispersed enough and the church building is the only really large building in the village. Being church here is a hands-on job. It requires full involvement and commitment. This is how the Churchwarden and Treasurer of St. James Church in Idridgehay put it.

So Jo, we're here at St. James Church in Idridgehay, a beautiful village church in the rolling Derbyshire countryside.

But what does church mean in Idridgehay? - Well, it means being a prayerful presence in the community. We're here for all the obvious occasions, for weddings, baptisms, funerals, but we're here for the things that you might not even think about, where you're offering support to the local people in times of need or joy.

So how does the church bring the people together in the community?

Well, have fun together. We've met loads of people through the activities that we do in church. We do lots of kind of fundraising activities for charities, but also to support the upkeep of the building. We've got lovely volunteers who come and help us. So we are, we're building a community in the church, rural village life wouldn't be the same without this church and its community. And it's the kingdom of God in action. So being a church here means looking after one another and being attentive to each other's needs, being a prayerful presence in the community and being the kingdom of God in action.

Saint Paul in the Ephesians reading, describes how Jesus brought together all people so that there should be harmony between disparate groups. He says that in Jesus, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Having a church family that is growing into a holy temple in the Lord within a village or a small market town is particularly important for those members of our community, which are often more isolated either by age or health or by the work they do. And in that I include our farming communities, which so often find themselves isolated and under great stress. They can't come to us, so we go to them. This is how Reverend Alan Griggs, the lead Rural Chaplain in Derbyshire puts it.

I'm here right next to the Oldfields Organic Farm in beautiful Carsington, Derbyshire. My name is Alan Griggs and I'm the lead Rural Chaplain for the Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy, coordinating a team of chaplains to celebrate the contribution of our agricultural and rural communities to our shared life and to walk alongside them when things don't always go to plan and the challenges come. Many farmers though tell me that it's the best job in the world. And they know how to navigate change and uncertainty with the skill and wisdom of many years of looking after and caring for the land and the livestock, they are shepherds of the sheep. And as rural chaplains, we are a christian presence in the ups and downs of rural life. Yet our own life in Christ is enriched by our connection with the community. In other words, through a deeper connection with the agricultural community, the greater the possibilities of discovering the kingdom of God together in Jesus Christ.

No community's complete unless it has children amongst them. And the last 16 months have been very hard on everyone, but children, particularly I've experienced considerable new stresses and worries and disrupted schooling and other family pressures. And yet as I meet them, often virtually nowadays back in their schools, they're full of joy at being back together and interested in discovering more about the world and God. A great deal of that is due to the care and support they receive from their teachers, support staff and headteachers who truly see what they do as a vocation. These are the words of Paul Hunter, a headteacher of one of our church schools.

As the head of a small Church of England primary school, I believe my faith permeates everything I do. I tried to look at the children as Jesus would, enabling them to feel loved and to thrive. I aim to treat the adults in school and out of school with respect and understanding. My faith gives me the courage to stand up for what is right and true, and to fight for the rights of those in my care. When things get tough, which in a school they do, I place the school and all within it into God's hands, believing that he has put me here for a purpose.

In our gospel reading, we heard that the apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. This is what I see in all our various communities. People who gather around Jesus and are willing to place it all in his hands, believing that God has put them here for a purpose. Wherever you are placed, whatever your community looks like, whatever your skills are, the important thing is to be gathered around Jesus. It is not enough for us to believe, it is vital that we live out our faith and bless others with it.

Not because that will make God love us more, or because it will make us better people, but because it is the most rewarding way to express our love for the God who is our Good Shepherd and demonstrates his love for us continuously. I have learned that, that sense of gratitude for God's love for us takes many forms. And it isn't always expressed in religious terms, but it is real nonetheless and felt at a very deep emotional level. I leave you with the words of the treasurer of one of our churches. This is a small village with a Norman church, the upkeep of which can be difficult. And he himself would agree that he would find it hard to put into religious words, why he volunteers to do this job of treasurer. A role that is sometimes thankless and always unglamorous. But when I asked him why do you do what you do, this was his answer. Martin, why are you a treasurer here at Kirk Ireton?

I do it because I just want to put something back into the community. I think all fit and healthy adults need to do something for their community and this is my way of doing it.

Thank you, Martin. Thank you, you really do bless us and this community with what you do. Thanks. What Martin and everyone else who engages with our churches at whatever level are modelling is a life of servanthood discipleship. It's the life Jesus demonstrated throughout the gospels, building community by looking after one another. It's us living our best lives. May that be true for you wherever you are today.

Amen.