

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 3-10

Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter ('Good Shepherd Sunday')

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Readings: Acts 2.42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2.19–25; John 10.1-10

Meditation

This Sunday, the 3rd May, we celebrate the life of Henry Vaughan, born in 1622. Vaughan was a physician-poet; a member of that group of spiritual writers known as the metaphysical poets, whose group includes the likes of John Donne and George Herbert. Vaughan knew at personal cost what it is to suffer. He lived during a time of Civil War; a war in which he endured the execution of his king (Charles I), the suppression of his church by Oliver Cromwell, and the death of his young wife. His poetry reflects on the events of his life and, to quote from an article about him, 'shows an intense awareness of the divine meanings in ordinary things'.

During the weeks we have spent in 'lock-down', socially distanced, perhaps even isolated from those we know and love, many of us will have experienced suffering at close hand. Some of us may be experiencing anxiety about the present and fear for the future. Some of us will have experienced the loss of family members or friends, and will have been prevented from saying 'goodbye' to them in ways that we find meaningful and dignified. Prevented from attending services of worship, or even from entering a church for private prayer, these are times when we might even struggle to hold close that faith we have nurtured throughout our lives.

However, it is during times of suffering and loss, during periods of anxiety and fear, and on occasions when the future looks uncertain, that God is closest to us. God comes to us in our times of distress. Whether we know it or not, God is forever present beside us and within us. At such times, we need to remember those events we commemorated and celebrated a few weeks ago – the events of Easter. For it is within the crucifixion of Jesus that we see and know God most clearly; God revealed to us through the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

The disciples knew suffering and loss, fear, anxiety and isolation. Following the crucifixion of Jesus, they faced an uncertain future. However, they hung on to hope – hope brought about by the witnessing of the resurrection. They did not necessarily understand what was happening at the time, indeed, why would they? Yet, they realised that something good had come out of bad; the events of Easter Sunday had brought light to the dark world of Good Friday. In this Sunday's reading from Acts (2.42-end), we are told that the disciples did what they could to hold their community together, sharing what they had with others in need, praying together as best they could, and breaking bread in their own houses. In this reading, Luke describes to us the important actions for keeping our faith alive – reading or listening to the teachings of Jesus, caring and nurturing the life of the community, praying, and the breaking of bread.

During these past few months, we have been brought into fellowship with those early disciples, who suddenly found themselves cast adrift by the crucifixion of Jesus. At a time when the followers of Jesus were small in number, there were no church buildings, and when the priestly formalities of the Eucharist through an established church were yet to

materialise, they struggled to hang on to the hope brought by the resurrection. Yet, they persevered because they had faith that the future held a promise of something better; a promise brought by the resurrection of Jesus.

And in the reading from 1 Peter (2.19-end), we are reminded that the hope brought to us by Jesus, the same hope that held those disciples together in the early days following that first Easter, is a hope available to us all. Peter reminds us that we all have self-worth and dignity regardless of our personal situations in life, even amidst times of personal suffering. Peter's invitation to us is to make the story of the suffering of Jesus our own story. By making the events of that first Easter a pattern within our own lives, to hold them close to us, and to find that faith exhibited by the first disciples, we too will be rescued and healed.

All of this is summarised in the words of John's gospel reading (10.1-10). Jesus said, 'I came so that they could have life – yes, and have it full to overflowing'. The 'they' he refers to is us – those who have faith in the risen Christ, and who look to him for the hope of a bright future; those of us who seek to have a close relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The promise of that full life is just as pertinent, just as relevant, to us today as it was at the time Jesus first spoke those words. It is a promise that we need to remember whilst we suffer our lockdown and isolation, during which time we find that the materialistic aspects of life are not what we need most for a life of richness and contentment.

Indeed, lockdown is a time when we are given the luxury of being able to move closer to God because, in the words of T. S. Eliot, we are no longer distracted from distraction by distraction. We have the time to read and listen to the scriptures, to pray, to try to assist the members of our community in need, and (albeit by spiritual extension through the power of the internet) to participate in the breaking of bread. It is a time when our faith allows us to look again at how we live our lives as people of God, as followers of Jesus Christ, and to truly renew that sense of hope within us as promised by the resurrection of Jesus.

Henry Vaughan discovered the power held within the cross, within the crucifixion of Jesus, and he understood the light, hope and peace that has been brought to us all by it. He wrote his poem 'The World' at a time of great suffering around him. However, the opening lines read as follows:

'I saw eternity the other night,
like a great ring of pure and endless light,
as calm, as it was bright...'

Those words are not just a way out of the present; they are words that help us through the present time. Eternity does not start somewhere or sometime in the future; it started before the world was formed. It may seem dark at present, but there is actually light all around us; a light that was present before lockdown, and a light that will still be there after lockdown; it is a light that remains present during lockdown. To see that light and feel the hope that it brings, we need to act like those first disciples – to listen to the teachings of Jesus, to pray, and to support our community, and we need to become more intensely aware of the divine meanings in ordinary things.

Put simply, we need to have the strength of faith.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Robert

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 3-10

For your prayers

Church: Chaplains in the NHS. The Nippon Sei Ko Kai (*The Anglican Communion in Japan*). That we may find opportunities to show our love of our neighbours.

World: Health workers, all those involved in keeping essential services running. Our own political leaders. Those charged with peace-keeping and peace-making. The governments & peoples of China, Syria and the Middle East, North Africa. All seeking to resolve the issues surrounding protection of the environment, of infection control and of migrancy. Our Muslim brothers and sisters keeping Ramadan under difficult circumstances.

Our Community: Churchwardens, PCC and church committees.

Those in need: Those whose lives or livelihoods are endangered by Coronavirus. Those who fear the prospect of isolation. All who live in areas of conflict or tension; the homeless, the poor, the sick, the enslaved, the hungry and the abused. Victims of terrorism.

Those for whom our prayers are asked: Melissa Milbourn, Julie Newton, Penny Archer, Vicky Page-Chestney, Kate Eaton, Mike Page-Chestney, Brenda Skinner, Henry Farrow, Stephen Wilkinson, Joyce Gibson, Sally, Abby, Jan, Nell.

Departed: David Redrobe, Kath Lambert, Henry Fell, Dorothy Pearson, Kathleen Windle, Rosalind Ellerby, Lillian Bratton. Those who have died as a result of COVID-19 infection, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

Next Sunday – the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2.2-10; John 14.1-14

Updates

It's with great sadness that we report that David Redrobe, Kathy Colwell's husband, died suddenly early on Thursday morning. While Kathy and David were here with us in Barton, not only did he provide Kathy with solid and encouraging support as she developed her ministry, he established good friendship at all levels with many folk in Barton. We offer Kathy our deepest sympathies and keep her, the family and (of course) David himself in our prayers. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Naturally in the present circumstances the funeral will be restricted to family members only, but as soon as we know when it is we'll let it be known so that people can mark the time in whatever way they feel appropriate.

Magazines for May have (with great inventiveness) been printed and are being delivered to subscribers. A stack of spare magazines will be found in the porch, along with various other bits and pieces, so if you don't subscribe and would like a copy, do help yourself and either 'owe' us or drop the money through the Vicarage letterbox.

As talk of relaxing the lock-down keeps the pundits happy, we're still in the dark as to when we'll be permitted to open up again. The RC's in Scotland have come up with a strategy but as yet we await the wisdom of our Archbishops as well as a nod from HMG. There is increasing concern about the hidden impact of the lock-down, though, and the loss of 'safe spaces' for quiet reflection or just getting away from the domestic pressure cooker, so be assured that as soon as we're allowed in any way to make St Mary's available once more to the community we shall.

Foodbank is still operating, but unable to take donations in the usual manner. We are accepting cash donations to help run things slightly differently during the present situation.

With support from Barton Town Council and others, the Ropewalk is providing meals to the elderly of Barton. Meals will be provided on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday and delivered to the door/outhouse/shed - wherever they can put it to avoid contact.

To book a meal ring the day before on 01652 660380. The service is free although donations will be accepted.

Ramadan: spare a thought and a prayer for faithful Muslims for whom these four weeks are like Lent, Christmas and Easter all rolled into one, and in which many of the features we'd recognise in our calendar – fasting, almsgiving, special worship, and celebration with family and friends – will be greatly affected: they are finding it difficult, as we can understand.

Those in need. Please help us keep our intercessions up to date and leave requests for prayer – either by email to david.rowett@lincoln.anglican.org, or the phone, or even a note through my door, and encourage others likewise.

Coronavirus Provisions

The provisions on the BBC and Barton FM as previously listed continue. If you know anyone who'd like a copy of the weekly bulletin, let David know.

Our websites and FB pages contains details of how to join others online for prayer, worship, study, and community life. The Diocesan Website in particular carries material of all sorts, and our own website carries a number of resources also.

See: www.lincoln.anglican.org
www.stmarysbarton.org.uk
www.facebook.com/StMarysChurchBarton

Meanwhile:

just the one Saint's Day of note this week, that of the fourteenth-century anchorite and mystic known to us as 'Mother Julian of Norwich.' An anchorite lived the solitary life (as opposed to the communal life of a monastery) but that does not mean they had no contact with the wider world: there are records of anchorites being sought out as spiritual directors; from their cell they would take part in the worship of the parish Church through a window giving in to it; they may even have had some sort of servant or maid.

Little is known of her personal life: she lived at a time of great upheaval, including a plague which killed a third of the population of Norwich and it is unlikely that she was ever actually a nun. It has been suggested that she may have been a young widow with children – certainly there as no shortage of opportunity to be widowed in the late 14th and early 15th Century.

Her vision of God received while she was thought to be dying, aged 30, form the basis of her 'Revelations of Divine Love,' a remarkable work (much ransacked for quotes about hazelnuts and so on) which is saturated with an awareness not of divine anger but of divine love and compassion. Her use of feminine language about God, while not unprecedented, is nevertheless remarkable, and her work has a widespread following today.

What's in a name? *The Holy Catholic Church of Japan*, for whom we pray today, was 'planted' by Americans when the U.S. Anglican Church was called *The Protestant Episcopal Church* (it's now *The Episcopal Church*). They changed the Japanese once when they realised '*Protestant Episcopal*' came out as '(The Church of) Old Men who Argue with One Another....'