

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 31- June 7

Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity

O God, the strength of all those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

or

God of truth, help us to keep your law of love and to walk in ways of wisdom, that we may find true life in Jesus Christ your Son.

Readings: Exodus 19.2-8a Psalm 100; Romans 5.1-8 ; Matthew 9.35-10.8

Meditation

'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Matthew 9.5-6

You can tell how long it is since I was a student in that I had one-to-one tutorials with a senior lecturer. And naturally, in such a situation conversations become very tailored to the people involved in them. He was (and still is) a great authority on the Syriac language and I asked him how on earth he'd managed to acquire something like six ancient languages by the age of 20. 'Well,' he said, leaning back at his desk, 'I learned Latin and Greek when I was about 8 – you know what it's like at that age, your brain soaks things up like a sponge.'

I reflected gloomily that the only way in which my brain resembled a sponge is that when I picked it up 90% of what it held drained out all over my feet, but that's probably why he was doing the job he was. Learning, for most of us, is neither easy nor cost-free.

The line from the Gospel reading quoted up above is just one of a number of sayings of Jesus which are uncomfortable because they seem to exclude or belittle non-Jews – remember the woman at the well, whom he implicitly insults as no more than a dog. Rather like picking our way across a particularly unpleasant bog, we tread very carefully round these lines, seeking a bit of firm ground which stops us falling into the idea that Jesus said some things which sound deeply prejudiced to our ears. Some commentators even try to find ways of proving Jesus didn't say it, often the sort of commentator who usually insists that the Gospels are just about word-for-word from Jesus' mouth. Anyone into serious Bible study, though, soon learns that the most difficult stuff is likely to be genuine - because no-one would make it up! So will the real Jesus please stand up? Is it the nice, inclusive one who heals the Centurion's servant, or the hard-line 'keep clear of foreigners' one?

One of my other lecturers, long since gone to his reward, had a talent for one-liners, and one of his most memorable ones was his dismissal of a certain way of understanding who Jesus was as 'God dipped in chocolate' – that is, that his humanity was only skin-deep. He knew Everything, but just didn't let on in case it gave the game away. Christianity rejected that very early on, but it still infects our thinking – because the reality is hard to cope with.

If it is the case that Jesus was brought up in Galilee, he's living with pagans just a few miles away and Samaritans just down the road. We all know that we fall out with our neighbours much more easily than with folk who live on the other side of the globe, and Galilee was notoriously nationalistic. If you like, Jesus wasn't being brought up in leafy North Oxford, but in a down-at-

heel northern town, surrounded by tension and suspicion of 'foreigners'. This is the air Jesus must have breathed in his early years. If he is genuinely human, it's going to leave its mark.

Learning is hard – but unlearning is even harder. What I believe we see in these difficult Gospel passages is Jesus unlearning so that he can learn – unlearning narrow and exclusive views of who might be children of God, of who might be inside or outside the kingdom, of what righteousness really is about. Those early brushes with the authorities about the Sabbath – did they lead him to look more critically at who was 'in' and who was 'out'? Is that dismissive line in John's Gospel 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' an echo of Jesus finding himself on the receiving end of being despised because of his origins? 'Isn't he the Carpenter's son? Who's he think he is?'

If Jesus is genuinely human he has to learn. And, like us, go through the agony of unlearning, of questioning assumptions and ways of looking which don't stand up to scrutiny. I once knew a physicist who said that when he finished 'O' level and started 'A' level study he was told, 'forget what you learned – it's like this.' And when he started his degree, he was told to forget his 'A' level stuff, it was *really* like something else.' I leave you to work out what he was told when his started his research....

The Church forgets this at our peril. We can talk (depending on Churchmanship) of 'The faith once delivered to the saints' or 'The Bible says' as if that forecloses all discussion. The pages of Christian history are littered with stories of Church leaders who shied away from learning the new things God was doing because the unlearning was too painful – perhaps it rang uncomfortable bells, or threatened vested interests or comfort, or perhaps threatened to knock such a hole in the ship of faith that it might sink – as if God could only be at work in the past, and not seeing how the story of Scripture (and tradition for that matter) is a long journey of learning and unlearning. Of unlearning that God was some sort of tribal mascot and learning that he was the Lord of all creation. Of unlearning that God cared only for the people of Israel, and learning that he was the light which enlightens all people. A painful setting aside of an old truth is the necessary precursor to receiving an even greater one. If Jesus has to grow in understanding and wisdom (Luke 2.52), can we duck the challenge?

Whether that says anything to us about the various agonies racking the world at the moment, is not for me to say – but I can't help but raise the question....

Fr David

Next Sunday – Second Sunday after Trinity

Jeremiah 20.7-13 Psalm 69.8-11 ; Romans 6.1b-11 ; Matthew 10.24-39

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.

Do keep in your prayers Juliet Large is recuperating over in Goole and enjoying the delights of talking to the family via electrons. Joyce Gibson isn't too well, though, and is over in Castle Hill. Janet Petch, we're happy to say, is now making progress and is feeling much more her old self.

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For your prayers

Church: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest:" we pray for Fr Robert and all those waiting to be ordained or licensed to Christian ministry; for our own response to the call of God; for the Church of the Province of Myanmar (Burma); for Chaplains in the NHS.

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. For the people of the United States (and perhaps ourselves), facing hard questions about their society.

Our Community: For all our schools and those who work in them. Nurseries, out-of-school clubs & childminders. Those who work to support families in difficulty. The Children's Society.

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, Kate Eaton, Mike Page-Chestney, Juliet Large, Stephen Wilkinson, Joyce Gibson, Janet Petch, Sally, Nell. **Thanks for progress:** Abby

Departed: Pauline Fields, Kathleen Mellor, Brian Pearson, Paula Taylor. Those who have died as a result of COVID-19, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

Updates

Dear Boris

It has been an interesting week – first we were told that the Prime Minister would be saying something about re-opening being permitted from the 15th last Tuesday (and he didn't), then it due to be said on Friday – or perhaps Sunday – and eventually we were told at a different time completely that we could pull the nails out of the planks across the doors from yesterday, Saturday. The bishops of the diocese sent out an email wishing there'd been a bit of consultation because there'd been no governmental guidance issued on some issues....

Anyhow, the upshot is we're almost ready to re-open for private prayer here at Barton. We need to finalise the latest risk assessment (very sensibly our bishops have told us to rely on our own common sense and local knowledge), get PCC approval (mercifully we can do that electronically) and then we can open up. I hope we'll be open from next Saturday morning at the latest, but it has proved a little... trying this week. We *think* we've covered everything but we want to be certain.

Funerals will be permitted in church, subject to social distancing from tomorrow if a parish feels it's practicable. Almost certainly we'll be going with that, but it will take a day or two to come up with the necessary plans.

Daily Hope phone line

A Church of England initiative, Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. The line – which is available 24 hours a day **on 0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. It's an 0800 number, so landline calls will usually not cost you anything.

Barton FM: Just a reminder that Robert is still keeping the station supplied with short acts of worship and meditations.

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.

This week...

I really missed one last week - **John of Dalderby** (d1320 at Stow). The (French) Pope of the time wasn't interested in taking up the case of John's canonisation, but he's remembered in the diocese on June 12. Chancellor of the Cathedral and head of the theological school, he was a generous and learned man who opposed the persecution of the Templars and the efforts of the king to bring the Church under his authority. In the diocesan worship material for his feast-day, two things are worthy of note for light relief: one, that he performed a miracle upon some people from Rutland, restrung speech to them when they could previously only bark, and second, a report to the Dean of Horncastle that '*Amabilia of Charneles is so devoted to the pleasures of the flesh that she remains in her bed until the third hour of the day, or even midday, and her parochial chaplain of Sausthorpe dare not celebrate mass... without her permission.*' Said Dean is told to sort it out and order the lady to amend here ways! Those were the days....

A few others, many of whom are very Anglican. **Evelyn Underhill** (Monday) may not be a name you recognise, but she was one of the people who 'rediscovered' the Christian mystical tradition of prayer for the Church of England at the beginning of the last century. We often hear of the modern discussion about why human beings seem 'hard-wired' for spirituality, it appears to be a universal phenomenon back to the Neanderthals (look for 'Shanidar caves' for more background on that), but it was a question raised by Underhill back in 1936, when she wrote, '*Humanity's universal instinct to worship cannot be accounted for if naturalism (i.e. evolutionary biology) tells the whole truth about life.*'

Tuesday celebrates **Richard of Chichester** (d.1253) a high-flier of the Middle Ages (lawyer, University of Bologna, Chancellor to Archbishop Edmund, etc) who, on becoming bishop of Chichester became the model of a humble pastor, visiting his people on foot, not shutting himself away in his palace, stamping down on corruption by those clergy who either demanded payment for administering the sacraments or who did so casually and carelessly. His prayer -

*Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ
For all the benefits you have given me,
For all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
May I know You more clearly, Love You more dearly,
Follow You more nearly day by day*

is well known throughout the English speaking Christian world.

Others, in passing – **Joseph Butler**, (also Tuesday), an eighteenth century Bishop of Durham and one of the greatest English writers on ethics since the Reformation, **Samuel & Henrietta Barnett** (Wednesday), social reformers at work in Whitechapel around the turn of the last century. And a reminder that Anglicanism is much bigger than the CofE, the martyr **Bernard Mizeki**, (Thursday) caught up in an uprising in modern Zimbabwe in 1896, and the (probable) martyr – he disappeared, presumed murdered in Tibet in 1929 - **Sundar Singh**, raised a Sikh who became a Christian *sadhu* or holy man and travelled throughout India evangelising.