

# **St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week June 21-28**

## **Collect for the Second Sunday after Trinity**

Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth:  
send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,  
the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before  
you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever

or

Faithful Creator, whose mercy never fails:  
deepen our faithfulness to you and to your living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Readings:**

Jeremiah 20.7-13 Psalm 69.8-11; Romans 6.12-end; Matthew 10.24-39

## **Meditation**

### ***'I can't breathe...'***

Three small but incredibly powerful words. When linked to three others - 'black lives matter' - they recently served to unleash a wave of outrage and protest; not just at the killing of George Floyd (may his soul rest in peace), but triggering decades of suppressed emotion amongst people whose lives are affected by an overbearing sense of injustice and persecution. The initial focus may have been on the inequalities felt by those who are frequently labelled as 'ethnic minorities', 'BAME', or 'people of colour' (terms which might also be divisive, albeit not necessarily by intention), but it soon spread to other suppressed sectors of society (such as the women in Switzerland, who held a 'screaming protest' against unequal treatment and gender-based violence).

Of course, the truth is that ALL lives should matter, regardless of race, colour, sex, faith, physical ability, employment status and any other epithet you might wish to add. In the eyes of God, we are all equal. 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus', says Paul in his letter to the Galatians (3.28).

So, what should be our Christian response to these recent events? Well, to help us in our considerations, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a joint statement saying, 'Let us be clear: racism is an affront to God'. Their words are true, and were no doubt well-intentioned, but they hardly caused the demonstrating world to pause and take a sharp intake of breath at the realisation of the temerity of their actions. And perhaps that is understandable because, for a large percentage of our communities, God, Jesus, Paul and the Galatians may seem a world away from the realities of historic and modern slavery, racial and gender inequalities, and all the other injustices of life that still abound in a so-called 'civilised' society.

'What then are we to say?', asks Paul in his letter to the Romans (6.1). We may well ask the same thing when our minds are confronted, made uncomfortable, and sharpened by the reality of many aspects of our society that we may have, heretofore, not noticed, not realised, or quietly ignored. It is true that we should not 'airbrush history', as our Prime Minister recently said. However, that is not to say that we should continue to revere our history; at least not where we recognise that we have fallen well-short of Jesus' commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12.31). In that respect, we may well wish to reflect on whether it is morally correct to protect and preserve statues in public places, when those statues essentially

commemorate a past that should now cause us moral unease. By doing so, is it possible that, as a nation, we are subconsciously still 'living in that sin', as Paul warns us not to do (Romans 6.1-2)?

Understandably, for many of us who do not have the same sense of being treated unequally in life, it is easy to feel affronted by the desire of certain groups who wish to change the order of things. However, that is how it has always been: younger generations challenge the older generations, modern societies challenge the current norms based on historic values. It is likely that the Romans felt the same way about Jesus, and the Jews certainly perceived the teaching of Paul and his associates as a threat to their own status quo; and yet, the 'new' messages had much therein to commend themselves. Nonetheless, it is an historic fact that the 'old order' usually feels threatened by the 'new order', even if the new order brings something good within the proposed changes.

Whether we like it or not, the current unrest may well be exposing a long-standing, national moral corruption. In that respect, the ethical framework accepted by our forebears over a century ago cannot be protected by appeals to tradition. Instead, we need to appeal to our collective conscience, framed by our Christian faith, to assist our current society to construct an adequate moral base for the future. As Paul reminds us, we who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have also been baptised into his death, so that, in his resurrection, 'we too might walk in newness of life' (Romans 6.3-4).

In so doing, as we walk in that new life, we perhaps need to ask ourselves whether the current unrest is akin to that witnessed by the Romans and the Jews of the first century. Is it possible that what we are experiencing, within the recent demonstrations, is not unwelcomed anarchy, but the beginning of an improved society? Is it possible that the realisation and acceptance of the fact that so many members of our society have been persecuted for years, can be a driver for equality and the suppression of injustice? Is the current civil unrest a sign that the Kingdom of God is moving closer? After all, Jesus said 'do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword' (Matthew 10.34). He warned us of the need for action - to 'take up the cross and follow' him (Matthew 10.38). If that means urging society to make changes - even symbolically removing statues commemorating the sins of our past - then we should not shirk from the task. Perhaps the life of the 'old order' now needs to allow space for the life of the 'new order', and we should not be frightened of allowing that to happen if for sound moral reasons. Instead, we should remember that Jesus also said, 'those who lose their life for my sake will find it' (Matthew 10.39).

So, before we reject the views of those who demonstrate, and before we retreat into comfortable bunkers, not daring to put our heads above the parapet to lend a stronger Christian voice to those who dare rebel against the perceived evils of society, let us remember words from the Beatitudes: 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' and 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake' (Matthew 5.6, 10).

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, warned, 'wherever the church withdraws into invisibility, it is in fact scorning the reality of the Spirit'. Prescient of our situation today, 'the Holy Spirit,' said Bonhoeffer, 'creates a space for itself in the world with visible signs accompanying its own coming. The Spirit comes in the word itself, not in babbling and stammering, but precisely in words comprehensible to everyone.'

Perhaps, on this occasion, those words are three in number:

*'I can't breathe...'*

*Fr Robert*

# **St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week June 21-28**

## **Next Sunday – Third Sunday after Trinity**

Jeremiah 28.5-9 Psalm 89.8-18; Romans 6.1b-11 ; Matthew 10.40-end

**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....** Joyce Gibson is making progress in John Mason House. Janet Petch, having been home briefly, is back over the water after a fall. Dennis Cowe, we have discovered, has been in hospital but is now home. And sad news of Nadine Dickinson, Dr John's wife, who died recently and whose funeral was in the Cotswolds on 11 June.

## **For your prayers**

**Church:** “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...” we pray for all who suffer for their faith, and that we may be recognisable as windows into the love of God; for the Church in Nigeria; 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 society.

**Our Community:** For all our schools and those who work in them. Health centres and clinics. Our hospitals: Scunthorpe General, Hull Royal, Castle Hill.

**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, Dennis Cowe, Janet Petch, David Witter, Sally, Nell.

**Departed:** Kathleen Mellor, Nadine Dickinson. Those who have died as a result of COVID-19, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

## **Updates**

**First Primark, now us!** At long last we can get back to the job of Just Being There for the people of Barton, and from Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> St Mary's will be open for private prayer between 9 and 4 daily. We've set aside St Chad's and St Thomas' chapels for the purpose – it makes keeping the place properly clean easier and roped off the rest of Church. There's sanitiser etc etc, and – well, that's about it really. Welcome Back!

In a further sign of returning new-normality **San Damiano**, the Franciscan house just south of Lincoln at Metheringham is reopening to day guests. Maureen CSF writes:

*“If you haven't had enough time on your own, or if you would like to spend time in a different space, and if you are not self-isolating because of having been in touch with someone with Covid-19 or yourself have symptoms of Covid-19, you are welcome to come for the day. The suggested donation for coming for the day will remain at £12 per person, and I will continue to maintain the closed days on Mondays and Tuesdays.”*

You'll find there's a poster in the porch and another in Church (how nice it is to be able to write that!)

**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.

## **This week...**

OK, I missed another one from Lincoln last week, **Botolph** (Wednesday), decidedly careless of me since he's (a) a Lincolnshire saint, having done missionary work around Boston (hence the official dedication of The Stump) and (b) Anglo-Saxon. Not a lot's known about him, he died in 680 and is noted for setting up various small monastic communities around the fens.

I've sometimes wondered why the Syrian George gained such prominence as England's patron saint when there were two earlier home-grown contenders, one of whom **Alban** (d.c.250) is commemorated on Monday. He was charged with aiding the escape of a Christian priest – evidence of a Christian community in England in the third century – and executed. There are various legends surrounding the execution, my favourite being that the executioner's eyes fell out so he couldn't enjoy the sight of what he'd done. There's a wonderful drawing of this in a medieval manuscript somewhere....

Coming along a little later in history as well as in the week (Tuesday) is **Etheldreda, Abbess of Ely** (d 678). After two arranged marriages (which 'ahem' “got nowhere”), she became a nun and presided over a mixed monastery: Like Hilda, she's another example of the status which women could attain in Anglo-Saxon England. According to Bede, writing only a generation or so later, she had a reputation as a prophet as well as a person of prayer. And I have a feeling that her arm may be seen in the church at Ely which bears her name.

There aren't many saints as get more than one bite at the cherry, so the **Birth of John the Baptist** on Wednesday is quite unusual – in fact celebrating the birth of a saint is an honour only extended to John and to Mary: coincidentally, in many Eastern Orthodox churches, these are the two saints whom you'll see on icons at the foot of the cross, not Mary and John the beloved disciple. There's an interesting discussion there to be had on the relationship between history, art and meaning. But not here, you'll probably be relieved to hear.

**Cyril of Alexandria** d.444 (Saturday) isn't at all high profile unless you get into the theological punch-ups of the fifth century about how Divinity and humanity co-exist in Christ. All in all a rather messy time, with dubious henchmen lurking in corners etc. etc. His chief opponent was the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius. If you wince at the title 'Mother of God' being applied to Mary, you may be disturbed to hear that, according to the still-binding-on-Anglicans Council of Ephesus of 431, which sided with Cyril - 'If anyone will not confess that ... the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God ('Theotokos'), inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of God made flesh, let him be anathema'- technically you're to be excommunicated :-). (NB: There's a way round it which David will disclose for a small(ish) fee.)

Not much room for Saturday's **Richard FitzRalph** (d1360), Archbishop of Armagh who wrote extensively about racism, women's rights, corruption, business malpractice, dishonesty, place-seeking, nepotism, Anglo-Irish and Anglo-French relations, etc but he'd feel at home in 2020!