

The Parish of Christchurch

The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell



for Sunday 16th August 2020 – Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Dear Friends,

The word that has predominated for me this week is ‘kindness’. Nothing very dramatic or earth-shattering, you might say. Kindness isn’t something that regularly makes the news, except when there’s not enough real news to fill the programme.

And yet, kindness is included in St Paul’s famous list of the fruit of the Spirit: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5.22-23). One can’t help but notice that kindness, as the fifth spiritual fruit to be mentioned, comes at the heart of the list.

Kindness means all sorts of things to all sorts of people. We know it when we see it; and it’s not hard to see when it’s absent. We could certainly do with seeing more kindness, and not only in challenging times such as these.

It’s also the case that, like goodness, kindness is a virtue practised by all sorts of people who are not Christians, people of other faiths or of none. Christians don’t have a monopoly on kindness, as witness a saying attributed to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944), an English don at Jesus College, Cambridge, and editor of the Oxford Book of English Verse. When welcoming a new Fellow to the Senior Common Room, he’s reputed to have said, ‘We’re delighted to have you here; but a word of advice. Don’t try to be clever. We’re all clever here. Only try to be kind, a little kind.’

Kindness is a good thing: it’s good for individuals and it’s good for the community. There’s a hint of that in the original meaning of the word which the NT uses here in Gal 5.22 – **chrēstótēs** – which included a sense of usefulness, something that was beneficial. But in Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit, and everywhere else it appears in the NT, it means kindness. There is no one passage of Scripture that sums up kindness – we’d need to do an extensive Bible study to cover all the relevant verses – so I want to mention just three.

I Corinthians 13.4: ‘Love is patient, love is kind’ – in Paul’s description of Christlike love, written to encourage us to emulate it, kindness is a primary way in which God-like love presents itself in action. Just as we know that God is love, that love is of the essence of who God is, so too is kindness. Like *agape* love, kindness is not just what God does, it is part of who God is; and because who God is always comes out in the way God engages with us, kindness is what God shows to us – always. By extension to us, as followers of Christ, kindness isn’t a virtue to be practised, but a characteristic, a personal quality that has a bearing on how we think, speak and act.

Luke 6.35: ‘for he [God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.’ In other words, God’s kindness isn’t just reserved for those who already love and serve him; it even embraces those who reject him. Nor does God reserve his kindness for people who deserve it; which is just as well, because that would exclude us all.

Finally, **Ephesians 4.32:** ‘... and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.’ Bishop Sandy Millar once said that everyone thinks forgiveness is a good idea, until they have something to forgive. Similarly, pretty much everyone thinks kindness is a good idea: it’s just not always easy to put it into practice.

But when we do, the positive impact on our fellowship and worship, and on the wider community, is incalculable.

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One-Off-Ask

Now that the One-Off-Ask has formally closed, I want to thank everyone who has made a donation in response to the appeal I made a few weeks ago. I was informed yesterday that just over £34,500 has been raised (including Gift Aid). This will go a long way to mitigating the impact of the loss of income in the parish since lockdown began. All donations to the One-Off-Ask have been directed to the General Fund, which funds our everyday ministry and mission – the essential, often unseen, often unglamorous core of all we do as a parish. Thank you for your generosity.

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We are at a delicate stage in the lockdown, not least because the gradual easing can lead to a feeling that perhaps some of the remaining restrictions aren't so important after all. So please may I emphasise that the following directions are still in place and are vitally important if we are to stay safe and each play our part in ensuring the safety of our fellow worshippers.

- It is now the law that we should wear a face-covering, unless we have a valid reason for not doing so.
- Social distancing must be maintained at all times: for public worship this is still 2 metres, even if you are wearing a face-covering.
- We are required to have a one-way system. Please follow the one-way system at all times, even if feels inconvenient. It is there for a reason and applies to us all.
- For example, if you are parking in Priory House Car park, **please do not** enter the building via Cloister Way. There is a no-entry sign on the Cloister Way door: anyone ignoring it will breach the one-way system and put other people at risk. Instead, please go round via the West End and enter through the North Porch.
- Similarly, please do not return to the Priory House car park via the wooden double gate at the West end. There is a no-entry sign there also. Please do not ignore it.
- Once in church, please don't go up to someone for a chat: that also risks compromising their health.
- Track and Trace: we have now produced a little form to help with this. The idea is that you take one (or more) of these slips with you at the end of the service, complete it at home, and bring it with you whenever you come to the Priory for any service
- We still need some more people to join the team who clean seats after our services. this will only take two people about fifteen minutes. We provide the cleaning materials. Please contact Roger if you would like to help.

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A final thought (for now) about kindness. In last Sunday's sermon, I mentioned a quote from Charlie Mackesy's intriguing, enchanting, wise book, 'The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse.' Here's what the horse has to say about kindness: "Nothing beats kindness," said the horse. "It sits quietly beyond all things." I suspect St Paul would have approved, and encouraged us all over again to "be kind to one another". May the God who is himself love, goodness, patience and kindness, bless us, every one.

Charles Stewart