

# The Parish of Christchurch



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

*for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020 – Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity*

Dear Friends,

As some of you may already have noticed, among the Christian leaders and heroes of the faith from the past century, I have a special regard for Pope (now Saint) John XXIII. At the time of his death in June 1963, this son of peasant tenant farmers, who had grown up in poverty and whose early education came about against the odds, through the generosity and perceptiveness of a few people, had become the Pope who called and launched the Second Vatican Council, whose impact on the world-wide Church, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, has been immense.

This week I want to share with you some words of John XXIII from 19 December 1962. This was only two months after the Cuban missile crisis, when the Cold War world came closer to mutually assured destruction than at any time before, or arguably since. John XXIII had played a significant role in enabling the de-escalation of the crisis, something acknowledged at the time on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This was also the source of much criticism from some of the hard-liners within his own church, who feared that he was 'going soft on Communism'. John persevered nonetheless.

This was the context for this December 1962 conversation with the man who was, in effect, his emissary to Khrushchev. During that audience, John said this:

“We must always try to speak to the goodness that is in people. Nothing is lost in the attempt.”

The background to these words was one of potential thermonuclear conflict – John went on to say that “Everything may be lost if men do not find a way to work together to save peace” – yet the essence of John’s message has a truly global significance. Speaking to the goodness – calling out the goodness – in people is for all people, in every place and time.

The trouble with goodness is that it’s notoriously hard to pin down. We hear someone described as a good man or woman, but what does that mean? How does their goodness manifest itself? Experience suggests it’s elusive.

Goodness – we know when we see it in someone else, yet perhaps rarely recognise it in ourselves. We may agree with Martin Luther King’s statement that “There is within human nature an amazing potential for goodness”, yet question whether that applies to us. It does; and the reason we can know this is because, like gentleness (about which I wrote three weeks ago), goodness is part of the fruit of the Spirit – qualities that may not come naturally, but which the Holy Spirit nurtures within us, as we permit.

This Spirit-grown goodness, however, is more than a personal characteristic: to be good means living out goodness in practical ways. As the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish minister, James Hamilton, wrote: “Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following His footsteps who went about continually doing good.”

Goodness that is truly “love in action” changes things, for ourselves and for our neighbours. Archbishop Desmond Tutu knew this, when he said: “Do your little bit of good where you are; it is those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

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When lockdown was announced back in March (was it really only five months ago?) many had to stop and some new things were launched to help us all stay connected and thrive spiritually during the pandemic. Now, the time has come to call a halt on one of the things we had started in response to lockdown, and also to restart one of the things that had stopped.

From this weekend, therefore, the Daily Reflection posted on our website will cease, at least for the time being; if a second wave of the coronavirus forces the re-imposition of lockdown, we can revisit this. I am very grateful to everyone who has contributed so generously to the Daily Reflection since it began.

Then on September 24<sup>th</sup> the first of the new series of Thursday lunchtime Organ Recitals will take place, starting at 12.30pm. This is a welcome return of a much-valued part of our cultural life. The first recital will be given by Geoffrey Morgan.

Because these Organ Recitals can only take place under the same social distancing measures as public worship, which means those attending can only sit in the seats marked with a green tick, we think it will be necessary to allocate tickets in order to ensure we don't exceed the numbers of seats available. There will be more about this in next week's letter and on the website.

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One of the challenges of the gradual relaxation of lockdown is the very short notice given about changes to the regulations. One of the most recent examples was the permission for choirs to sing in places of worship.

As you might expect, we are delighted that we have had this opportunity to restore choral music in the Priory and have moved quickly to do so. This isn't without its complications, however: the main obstacle, paradoxically, is the physical constraint imposed by the Choir Stalls. We have worked out that the maximum number that can be accommodated in the stalls is six, if social distancing is to be maintained. That explains why those who were present at the Sung Eucharist last Sunday will have seen (and heard) only six adult singers in the Choir Stalls.

It is, of course, highly desirable that more of our singers – particularly the girl and boy choristers – can start singing again. Accordingly, after discussion with Simon Earl, our Director of Music, the PCC has asked that a temporary order be granted by the Diocese to permit us to remove the Choir Stalls for the time being. This will enable many more of our choir members to return to singing in our liturgy: the idea is to space them across the Screen end of the Sanctuary, in single seats and properly distanced. We hope this can happen from Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>. In due course, when the social distancing requirements are no longer necessary and (to coin the phrase) 'normal service can be resumed', the stalls will be replaced. Meantime, they will be stored securely.

This Sunday, as an interim measure, some of our girl choristers and gentlemen of the choir will be singing from the North Transept. You will hear them, although this week you won't be able to see them. I hope we may all count on your understanding and support as we negotiate the journey back to choral worship.

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"There is no limit to the amount of good a person can do if they don't care who gets the credit." In the spirit of that anonymous quote, I invite us all to "speak to the goodness in people" and to make this prayer our own: 'Lord, show us all how to do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can, as long as ever we can' (*after John Wesley*).

May God give us the grace to be part of the answer to our own prayer. With every blessing,

