

The Parish of Christchurch

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

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for 27th September 2020

Dear Friends,

One of the more unfortunate and unwelcome consequences of the disruption to our communal life caused by the current pandemic was the inability to complete our series of studies on prayer, which we had just begun in our small groups when we were forced to suspend those groups. I for one will admit to needing to spend more time thinking and learning about prayer – what it is and what it is not, how I can best engage in prayer and deepen and strengthen my relationship with God through prayer. So I lament the loss (or perhaps only the postponement?) of the opportunity to do this together.

Prayer is, obviously, a personal and intimate activity – each of us can only pray in the way that is right for us as an individual; we have to pray as the person we are, and that means that we are likely to pray differently, just as we each express our love for another person in ways that are dependent on our own personality. Some may pray loudly and others quietly or silently; some may pray alone and others together with others. Some may like to use words written by someone else; others may prefer to pray in their own words. Some may pray frequently and briefly and others on fewer occasions but for longer. Some may use words and some may use pictures, gestures, song, craft. In this sense, there is no right or wrong way – it depends on who we are.

But even if we should be wary about trying to identify the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to pray in this sense, we should not, I think, be shy about trying to think through what we think prayer is and what it is not. This is because what we think we are doing when we pray is necessarily closely connected with our understanding of God: who God is, what God is like, how God relates to us and we to God. Some ways of thinking about prayer, and therefore God, we can say are right and others are wrong.

Now, many books have been written about this, and there is much to think about – far more than I could hope to say in this short letter, even if I knew what I wanted to say (and I’m not sure I do!). So I will pick just one thing, which is that I believe that prayer should be essentially responsive – us responding to God. It is more about listening than speaking; more about receiving than giving; more about God than about me. If I treat prayer as essentially an opportunity of my own making to attempt to get something for myself or for others from God, I am at risk of what the Bible would call idolatry – creating for ourselves a false god and trying to manipulate that god for our own benefit. Prayer should not be about trying to make God act in the way we want, granting our requests like a magic genie in a folk tale, but about opening ourselves to God’s will, purposes and desire for us. We cannot tell God anything in prayer that God does not already know and we cannot inform God about what the good solutions are to any of our own problems or those of the world: God knows this too. Rather, prayer is essentially about being open to hear what God has to say to us, so that we might then act obediently to God’s will. By bringing to God the problems that concern us, we hope to learn what the good outcome might be – and then we must obediently try to achieve it. After prayer comes action; as Pope Francis has said, ‘You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. This is how prayer works’.

Jesus' own prayer in Gethsemane is a powerful example. Jesus first opens himself to God, admitting the intensity of his distress and asking that he might be spared the agony of his 'hour'. But he does not then wrap up his prayer and go home, trusting God to deliver the desired outcome: he waits, repeats the prayer, declares that he is willing to act as God wills, and he listens for the answer. Then, he accepts that his 'hour' has indeed come; he obediently acts in accordance with that answer and delivers himself to his betrayer and those who have come to arrest him (see Mark 14:32-42).

So as we pray this week, and as we bring to God those things that trouble us or delight us, we should take the time to listen, so that we might then respond.

With my love and prayers for the week ahead,



Reverend Jonathan Evans

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Sunday 4 October

Harvest Services

Priory Church at 10.00am
St George's at 9.30am

Both churches will be open between 2.00pm and 5.00pm on Sunday 4 October to receive your Harvest gifts. If you would prefer to make a donation directly to Christchurch Foodbank+, you can do so by bank transfer to 40-52-40 a/c 00015300 using the reference CFBFood.

Annual Meetings in the Priory Church

The Annual Meeting of Parishioners (the meeting that elects the Churchwardens) will take place in the Priory at 11.30am: NB the Annual Meeting of Parishioners may only be attended by residents of the Parish or Christchurch and those who are on the parish Electoral Roll. This will be followed by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting: this may only be attended by those who are on the Electoral Roll; i.e. regular worshippers not on the Electoral Roll may not attend.

To participate in the annual meeting online, please email: pccsecretary@christchurchpriory.org

Nomination forms for election as Churchwardens, to the PCC and Deanery Synod, may be picked up from the Priory Vestry or by email from Sue Haxby, pccsecretary@christchurchpriory.org telephone 01202 480789. NB All nomination forms must be proposed and seconded by 2 members of our Electoral Roll; nomination forms for Churchwardens may also be signed by residents in the Parish of Christchurch.

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New seating plan in the Priory

This is now in place. As described last week, each 'pod' of three seats may be occupied by one, two or (if appropriate) three people. Many thanks to Ian Penny and Colin Bacchus for developing this new seating plan.

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Services formerly in the Lady Chapel

A reminder that from this week until the end of January the Wednesday 11.00am Eucharist will be transferred to the front of the Nave; the 11.00am BCP Communion Service will transfer to St George's Church; and from Sunday 4 October, the Sunday 8.00am BCP Communion Service will move to the front of the Nave.