

# The Parish of Christchurch



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

*for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020 – Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity*

Dear Friends,

A week after our Harvest Festival, the theme thankfulness mustn't just slip away. In one sense, it cannot: every time we celebrate the Eucharist together, we are being thankful – the Greek word *eucharistia* means 'thanksgiving'. Yet, when times are hard, as at present, finding grounds for thankfulness can be a challenge.

Pondering this during the week, I have been reminded of this passage from Colossians 3.12-15:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other: just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which indeed you have been called in the one body. And be thankful.

That familiar passage comes just after Paul has told the Colossians about all the behaviours and actions to avoid and remove from their lives; at v12, he turns to the good things that they, and we, should live by. In some ways, it's a predictable list: if asked to write a list of Christian qualities to commend, we would probably produce something resembling Paul's: love, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness and the rest.

Until we come to the last short sentence: "And be thankful". In context, it comes across almost as an afterthought, as if it had slipped Paul's mind. In fact, thankfulness is a recurring theme in Paul's letters, in several senses. There's frequent mention of "I always thank God for you" (1 Cor.1.4), or general expressions of "Thanks be to God". But there's another sense which we probably find less congenial: giving thanks when times are tough. Three examples of this strand of Paul's teaching on giving thanks:

... may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, **while joyfully giving thanks to the Father**, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. *Colossians 1.11-12*

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God,, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 4.6-7*

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is the will of God in Christ for you." *1 Thessalonians 5.18*

Giving thanks in all circumstances, or when we're having "to endure everything with patience", or when we find ourselves starting to worry – that's not so easy. And yet, says Paul, this is God's will for us.

It may help to notice that we're not asked to give thanks for everything: God is not telling us to thank him for whatever difficulties or problems we are facing; but we are being led to give thanks in everything. The distinction is crucial.

When, in difficult times, we keep on keeping on thanking God, it changes our outlook and puts things in a truer perspective. Remembering the many things, small and great, for which we can thank God. It doesn't remove the problem, but it reminds us of the wider picture, and of God's promise that he will never leave us nor forsake us. We are not on our own. We never will be.

It can help to pause and write down a list of the things you are thankful for. On days when we are not feeling very thankful – and in these days of Covid-19, there may be many days when thankfulness is not instinctive, then we can look at our list, and find a reason for gratitude. And let us not forget to thank one another for the little things, the kind word that brightens up a day or the helpful action that makes a difference.

Being thankful isn't a feeling: like loving one another as Christ has loved us, it is a choice, a conscious decision to live with a thankful attitude, whatever the circumstances in our lives. When God asks us to keep hold of a thankful attitude even in the midst of problems, disappointments, hurts or loss, it is not for his sake, but for ours. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "in ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

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Last Sunday it was announced that the Revd Jonathan Evans has been appointed as Rector of the Benefice of Bruton, Brewham, Pitcombe and Shepton Montague, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells (subject to a satisfactory completion of the usual statutory checks made on all clergy on taking up a new post).

It is too early to say when Jonathan and Alice will be leaving Christchurch; it will probably be in the New Year. There will be an opportunity, in due course, to thank Jonathan and Alice for all they have brought to us in Christchurch. For now, please hold Jonathan, Alice and their family in your prayers as they prepare for the move to Bruton, for the next phase of his ministry there, and for the people of his new benefice.

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The All Souls Requiem will take place at 10.00am on Saturday 31st October in the Priory. Please do pass on this information to friends or neighbours, especially those who have lost a loved one during the past year, They, and you, will be most welcome at this special service.

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While on the subject of giving thanks, those of you who attended our Annual Meetings last Sunday morning will have heard me thank several people who have given generously of their time, commitment, energies and much more to the parish: David Hewitt, who after forty years of service as a Lay Reader has handed back his licence; James Morton and Roger Haxby, who have stood down as Churchwardens; and Bob Savage, whose term of office as Deputy Warden at St George's has also come to an end.

Because of the lockdown and the uncertainty over whether we would actually be able to hold the APCM, we have not been able to make a collection to express our thanks to David, James and Roger for their service. (The church family at St George's are expressing their own thanks to Bob.) But we can do so now. May I invite you, therefore, to send in your donations for our gifts to David, James and Roger as follows:

- **Those who wish to donate by bank transfer**, please use: Account Name - P.C.C. of Christchurch No.2 Account; Sort Code 52-21-34; Account Number 52428001.
- Please use "Wardens" as reference for James Morton & Roger Haxby; and "Parochial Reader" for David Hewitt. Please email Ian Penny on [prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org](mailto:prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org), when you have sent the donation.
- **Anyone wanting to donate by cheque**: please make cheques payable to P.C.C of Christchurch No.2. Account and mark for Ian's attention. If posted, to Priory House, Quay Road, BH23 1BU.
- Whether by post or by hand, please put a note **in** the envelope clearly marked with "Warden" or "Parochial Reader". If you are donating to both, please use two separate cheques; the note in the envelope should reflect which cheque is for which presentation. Thank you.
- **Donations by cash**: please put in an envelope for Ian's attention and bring it to the Priory, clearly marked as above.

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Thomas Merton, an American monk of the last century, wrote that "To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything He has given us — and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him." With that in mind, and whatever our circumstances in the coming week, may God bless us all and help us to be thankful,

*Charles Stewart*