

The Parish of Christchurch



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

for Sunday 4 July, 2021

Dear Friends,

This weekend, on July 3, the Church celebrates St Thomas, whose familiar description as ‘Doubting Thomas’ doesn’t do justice to his faith and commitment. As always with a character from the Bible, it helps to look at the whole picture which, in Thomas’s case, means going back to John 14 and the famous passage where Jesus tells his disciples that ‘In my Father’s house are many dwelling-places.’

He continues with the promise that ‘I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Which provokes a heartfelt response from Thomas, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’

Anyone who follows Jesus has to put a high premium on truth. As Paul teaches, ‘... putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members one of another’ (Ephesians 4.25). It’s not just that speaking truth to one another is the right thing to do; truth-telling (and its opposite!) has an impact on the whole community.

Ten verses earlier, Paul set the bar even higher: ‘... speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ...’ (Ephesians 4.15). Notice, Paul isn’t ordering his readers to ‘speak the truth in love’: he’s taking it as read. Speaking the truth in love is neither command nor the objective: rather, it is foundational for everything and the basis for our growing ‘in every way into Christ.’

This leads us into the realm of attitude and motivation: in what spirit, with what motivation do we speak truth? We all know from experience that truth can be told spitefully or aggressively. ‘Truth-telling’ can be a form of point-scoring. In some settings, ‘truth’ can be told in order to wound, diminish, or embarrass, to foster division or set the gossip mills rolling. None of that has any place in the Church of Jesus Christ. We are to speak the truth in love.

There’s something else here. Christians, as those who follow the One who said he was ‘the way, the truth and the life’, and are committed to speaking the truth in love, also have a responsibility to pray and work for reconciliation. Reconciliation is in our DNA. In 2 Corinthians 5, after describing the heart of the salvation that comes through Christ, Paul writes: ‘All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5.19).

We are called to be reconcilers. And that means always regarding the person with whom we may differ as a child of God, as my neighbour – the one whom Jesus commanded us to love as ourselves; the one with whom we are to speak the truth. Reconciliation is never easy: indeed, it is almost always costly. It requires honesty, goodwill, trust, compassion, and a willingness to change and be changed. Which, in turn, calls us to be people who seek the truth and resolve to speak the truth in love.

* * * * *

Summer Fayre

Just to confirm that the Summer Fayre will be going ahead this Saturday. The weather may not be perfect, but then this is England in July! I look forward to seeing you there.

* * * * *

Emerging from Lockdown

It has been rightly said that coming out of lockdown is proving much more complicated than going into it. At the time of writing, the signs are that many (though perhaps not all, as the infection rate is rising again) of the current constraints imposed on us all to restrict the impact of Covid-19 may be removed on July 19. How do you feel about this?

Those of you who have come back to worship at the Priory and St George's know that from the outset we have been committed to keeping you safe. Last summer this led to the adoption of a seating plan in the Priory that aimed at providing the kind of social distancing required both by the Government and the Church of England. Later in the year, that was replaced by a more developed seating plan, by which every other row of seats was removed and Perspex screens introduced to provide 'pods' of three seats, to enhance our capacity to keep you safe. We have also implemented the legal requirements re the Track and Trace scheme, as well as providing hand sanitiser at entrances and exits. Many of you have expressed gratitude at the care that has been taken at every step.

As part of our transition out of lockdown, the PCC has voted to bring back the missing rows of chairs to the Priory from July 19 (subject to any further announcements from the Government or the Church of England). In the coming days I, with my colleagues, shall be working out how best to ensure that we go on keeping you safe in all our services at this stage in the pandemic, as we have tried to do at every step thus far. More information to follow in next week's letter.

Confirmation 2021

A reminder that there will be a Confirmation Service in the Priory on Sunday 17 October, to be led by Bishop Debbie. This service will be held at 2.00pm. As usual, we shall offer a Confirmation Course in preparation for this important event, which will start in September. Please would anyone interested in joining a Confirmation Course, or perhaps wanting a 'refresher' at this stage of your Christian journey, write to me on vicar@christchurchpriory.org, or talk either to me or to Fr Richard.

* * * * *

Priory Choir

Under normal circumstances, Sunday July 18 would be the last Sunday of the Priory Choir year. There would be a celebratory Choral Evensong, with much fine music. As we all know, these have not been normal times. In particular, the current rules limit the number of amateur singers who can sing indoors to only six; which means that the full Priory Choir is not yet permitted to sing in our services – indoors, at least.

The plan, therefore, is to hold Choral Evensong at 6.30pm that day, outside on the monastic lawns. Obviously, this will be dependent on the weather, but I wanted to tell you about this now. Please hold the date and watch the weather forecast.

* * * * *

As we go forward together, may God give us grace to be people who seek truth, speak truth in love, and live out the ministry of reconciliation' which is given to us all. And let us thank God for St Thomas!

With every blessing,

