

Christ the King - Our renewed MAP - joining in with the building of God's Kingdom - 25 Nov 2018: John 18:33-37

'My Kingdom is not from this world.' Jesus' famous challenge to Pilate leaps out of this morning's gospel reading. But for us, the Church on earth, though not *from* this world, the Kingdom is *in* it. We pray for it to come *on earth, as it is in heaven*.

I was with other clergy from Tandridge this week, discussing Mission Action Planning [MAP], and a powerful point emerged: that, first, our life and work as the church is not about the survival of the church, but the building of *God's Kingdom*.

After an extensive process and consultation over the past year, and seeking the help of God, our church council this week adopted our MAP - our Mission Action Plan for St Peter's, the Parish Church for Limpsfield, and part of the whole church - for the coming years. With its core purpose '*To be a beacon, shining as a light... Sharing the love of God in Christ, for all.*'

With its vision, '*to take steps to grow St Peter's through our worship, music and our presence in the community; to serve; exercise good stewardship of our treasures, and to try new things, seeking God's Kingdom in the power of the Spirit.*'

And with its values, how we want to do everything: *Listening, Learning, Loving.*

This MAP is a means not an end, and an organic document that will change over time. But it gives us a good signpost and practical expression for our plans and priorities that we have discerned as a church, our visions and dreams, and our next steps.

And this insight into the first importance of joining in with the building of God's Kingdom can hopefully release us from anxiety and fear about the future, and renew our purpose and joy as the people of God in this place. So, if you yourself, and others you can encourage, are in a position to contribute to any of our priorities for action that stir you and your gifts - whether nurturing faith and service, developing our musical heritage, growing our provision for those in later life, or for children and families, and investing in our church and managing our resources - please don't hold back, but offer yourself to join in.

And this is also a good moment, on behalf of our whole church, to thank you for all those things you have done and continue to do to sustain and nourish the life and witness of St Peter's. The deanery clergy noticed too that maintenance is not separate from mission - but we are at a stage in the church's life where we are being called to reach out in new ways as well as cherishing our traditions.

On this last Sunday of the church's year, I'd like to share something from several wonderful talks I have heard recently by 3 different people, none of them priests actually. The first was by **Jane Williams, on Vocation** for all people - that is, *Called - to what?*

God calls Creation into being. Human beings have conversations throughout the bible, from Adam and Eve, to Moses and Isaiah, to Ruth and Mary and Mary Magdalene, which help us to remember what it is to be a human being in relationship with God, over against the other enslaving Gods, again and again.

Our call is refracted through Jesus Christ, the Word and Image of God. It is personal and relational.

Our vocation does not diminish us, nor give up our freedom. Rather, it helps us to become more and more ourselves. Humanity cooperating with God is liberating, not God competing for our time and space, and not coercion. It is not meant to make you less, though it is sometimes tough.

Jesus grew in wisdom, years, and stature with God & people; praying, not beamed down without his cooperation, reacting, interacting, negotiating being the Son of God. He grows in vocation, in choices. Like us, he has the freedom to discern. He is not told what to do. His primary identity is in relationship with God (Jesus in Hebrews, 4:13, 5:8)

[John 1]. People - like us - are invited into this relationship, given power to become children of God. That calling and invitation to Jesus-shaped life is through our daily decisions, growing, continuing to become, shaping us. Don't underrate them.

The role of the church, its primary calling, is to help people to grow as children of God, growing in our humanity, in the

family of God. There are different images of community, prayer, brothers and sisters.

The Church in Ephesians [1.9 -] makes Jesus visible, through the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. The Church, the ecclesia, is not, first, a building. Our instincts & practice are otherwise, even as we respond to the call of God in our lives, not just on Sundays, not just in church.

But our church buildings are amazing, a great gift, not negligible; places of beauty, prayer, reality, witness to the call of God, and response. They give us a sense of what it might be to commit to the vision and work of God in world.

The church building, Jane says, is like a family home, a place to be fed, washed, have quarrels, but not to stay in, but rather to be sent out.

How does what I am doing connect with my calling?
The recent national initiative *Setting God's people free* is seeking to raise our awareness of how we live out our faith from Monday to Saturday.

Setting God's people free - from lack of confidence, from running the institution, to be a Christian building relationships. Releasing people to bear fruit.

Moving on from any sense of a sacred / secular divide, separate from daily life, imprisoning; refusing the notion of some of our life being God's, and some not God's.

[We begin next week our Advent series of interviews with members of our congregation in our 10am service hearing something of where God is found in ordinary, everyday life.] And I hope this will be interesting and encouraging for each of your different callings.

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Calling - Vocation in the World and in the Church was the theme of a talk by **John Spence** (Chair of Archbishop's Finance cttee) and the C of E Renewal & Reform project. He has run the race of life with extra hurdles, having become blind in his early 50s, but continued in a senior career with Lloyds Bank. He is an Essex County Council member, working for ways of making better lives.

He says: 'Management is management, everywhere.' You have a greater chance of realising your goal if all your resources are aligned. Being:

1. Informed but not driven by evidence; intuition is also important
2. Driven by AND demonstrating your values
3. Liberating people from the limits of their aspirations
4. Steeped in humility. Recognising that we don't have all the divine wisdom, but our own failings, so encourage and enable others around you to achieve the goal.

Vocation is when you know in your head and your heart that you are the best person for a job (he said no 3 times) . Or sometimes someone else knows it and needs to encourage you. He is not seeking simply to balance the books or oversee an institution in relentless decline.

Not content with that. We fail to engage millions of people with the joy of the risen Christ, and he longs to return that to the centre of this country, its conscience and culture.

Vocation, for John: to support every parish & diocese, stretching its imagination beyond its constraints.

Personally, couldn't cope with his blindness and his daughter's brain tumour (and its beastly prognosis) without hope in Christ.

He thanks and blessed all us parish clergy in our work. "Please don't let anyone go through their lives without the chance to know the joy of the risen Jesus in their hearts."

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Lucy Moore, Founder of Messy Church, in her own special and quirky way exudes that joy. She is the third speaker I wanted briefly to share with you as we pray 'Thy Kingdom come.' Her talk on Messy discipleship centred on the challenge and opportunity - applying to us all, however we 'do church' - of *HOW* are you doing it? Best not to be just functional, but open to where God might be, she says. The Holy Spirit is braced for action, if we allow it.

'Discipleship' is best translated as 'apprenticeship' [George Lings] -

acquiring skills AND becoming more like Christ, by more and more deeply encountering Him.

It's a helpful image because there are lots of apprentice opportunities through the church, as we encounter Christ, and continue to ask the question: *Where is God in it?*

'Where did we see God at work?'

Get into the habit of seeing shoots. Not just how many people there etc, not the only measure of success, but looking out for what God is doing -
- this may be as simple as a smile. :-) Or a word.

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So Jane, John and Lucy - these three humble and great lay Christians - offer us a lot of sense, a lot of questions, and a lot of inspiration in our callings to follow Jesus, to be the church in the world, and to continue to ask '*Where did we see God at work?*' to lead us on.

On behalf of all those many people who have contributed to it so far, I hope and pray that you can see something of God at work in our renewed MAP, our Mission Action Plan for the coming years: as someone called it, a business plan with a spiritual heart. But a plan that seeks to recognise *God's* business for us here and now, and to join in with it.

So God bless us as we pray:
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.
And act out of our prayer.

Listening, learning, loving.

To be a beacon, shining as a light...in the church, and in the world...sharing the love of God in Christ, for all.
Amen.

James Percival
Team Rector