**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**August 30th – The 12th Sunday after Trinity**

**‘Called to be… Church**

**(Acts 2:42-47 and Mark 2:13-17)**

*Dear Friends,*

*Great news! We’ve been able to be back in our church buildings today – we shared in a service of Holy Communion at St. Thomas’s Aslockton, which went, I hope, very well. Many thanks indeed to Graham & Pam Harper, and Eddie & Cynthia Molloy for all that they did to get the church shipshape, and then stewarding the service for us. Similarly, many thanks to Deborah Davies for playing the organ for us – humming the hymns behind our face masks!*

*We’ll be in St. John’s Whatton on Sunday 6th Sept. (BCP) and St. Mary’s Orston on 13th Sept. (Common Worship), for services of Holy Communion.*

*Given the length of time since we’ve had any services, we’re unsure of how many people may wish to join us and - since we have to observe social distancing measures to combat any Coronavirus risk – we’re continuing to ask you,* ***if you plan to attend, please would you book your place for the service, in advance. Please contact Jade Blaylock, our Administrator, at*** ***thecranmergroup@gmail.com*** ***or 07526 603766, to reserve your place.*** *Once again, this will help us to fit more people into the service; help us look after you better; and hopefully avoid us having to turn anyone away.*

*Please continue to keep us in your prayers at this challenging but exciting time.*

*Best wishes, and God bless,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for The 12th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

God of constant mercy,
who sent your Son to save us:
remind us of your goodness,
increase your grace within us,
that our thankfulness may grow,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**The Church’s One Foundation**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy Bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

Called out from every nation,
Yet one o’er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth:
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food;
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

Yet she on earth has union
With God the Three in One;
And mystic, sweet communion
With those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee.

**Bible Reading: Acts 2:42-47 (New International Version)**

**Read by Graham Harper**

***The fellowship of the believers***

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

**Gospel Reading: Mark 2:13-17 (New International Version)**

**Read by Annie Dickinson**

***Jesus calls Levi and eats with sinners***

*Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’*

**Sermon: ‘Called to be…Church’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**

Today is a very significant day for us all. A day, I’m pretty sure I’m right in saying, for which we’ve all been waiting for many long months, since, at the most recent, I think I’m right in saying, March 15th. Not far off six, long months.

I know that it’s the day, for a number of you, on which - for the first time - you get to poke and prod your now not-so-new vicar in the flesh – socially distanced of course! – rather than seeing him on the other side of a screen or listening to him via a pair of headphones. But I’m certainly not going to flatter myself that getting to see me is the reason why today is a red letter day for you, although it’s wonderful – finally! - to be here with you all.

Today, I hazard, is a particularly significant day for many of you since it’s the first time we have been able to do a number of things for the first time in nearly half a year:

- to enter into one of our Cranmer Group’s church buildings;

- to worship God in His house;

- to share in the sacrament of Holy Communion; and

- to meet in fellowship with our Christian friends.

Maybe there are other elements of being here today that are especially important to you as well. But I guess that these four are probably the principal things that we’ve been missing, and which, for the vast majority of us, we celebrate today.

So I suppose, therefore, that this is a pretty good starting point for us, as we start a sermon series over the coming weeks; a series that I have entitled, “Called… to be Church”.

The purpose of this series is to unpick what it means to “be church”; what are the things that make church, church, and not something else. Not just, as Archbishop Justin Welby says, “an NGO with a pointy roof”, but very much more than that. What we, as Christians, are called to be and to do, as members of Christ’s Church.

And I think we can get a very good feel for what this “something much more” is, by reflecting on what it is that we’ve all missed over these last months, as we have been unable to be in a situation like this.

In a similar way, back at the start of August, taking advantage of the government’s ‘Eat out to help out’ scheme (of which the last day’s tomorrow, for those of you interested in such things!); one evening Clare and I together picked up Esther from nursery, and we went out for a meal as a family for the first time since the beginning of March.

We had a real sense – and there very much seemed to be a similar feeling amongst those eating at the other tables in the restaurant – of rediscovery; of appreciating so much more the pleasure of eating out; of being looked after well by the staff; of tasting good food and good wine in the company of those we love, precisely because it hadn’t been possible to do this for so long. These things, in a sense, ‘define’ what it means to go out for a meal, and what we receive from that.

Similarly, turning again to this question of “What makes church, church?” the four things that I suggest we’ve especially missed:

- entering into one of our Cranmer Group’s church buildings;

- worshipping God in His house;

- sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion; and

- meeting in fellowship with our Christian friends,…

…go a good way, I think, towards showing us what it is that makes church - this particular church, and the universal church - / what makes church precisely that: church.

Our word, church, has its equivalent in the New Testament in the Greek word, *ekklesia* (from which we of course get words such as ecclesiastical) meaning an assembly of citizens, often for political purposes. It is this coming together that is the defining feature of an *ekklesia* – the coming together which we see in our first reading this morning, from the Book of Acts.

If I were to have told you before this morning that I was going to be starting a sermon series today on what it is to be church, I’d have placed a fair old wager on many of you guessing that this passage - Acts chapter 2 - verses 42-27, would be my starting point for the series.

It’s perhaps THE record that we have of what we might call the very early church; the coming together of a grouping of followers of Jesus Christ, only a few years, or even months, it seems, after Christ’s death.

And the way in which they live their lives is absolutely striking, focused utterly on what we might call, in theology-speak, being ‘incarnational’: putting into practice in every aspect of their communal lives, the example and teachings of Jesus; ‘being Jesus’ both amongst the group itself, and also to others outside their immediate fellowship. They devoted themselves, we read, to ‘teaching’, ‘fellowship’, ‘sharing’, ‘generosity’, ‘prayer’, ‘meeting together’, ‘worship’, breaking bread’ and ‘joy’.

These are some of the areas that I’ll look at in more detail, week by week, as we consider what it means to “be church”; being “Called to…teach”; “Called to…fellowship”; “Called to…be generous”, and so on.

But for the rest of this morning, I’m going just to ‘drop a few pebbles in the pond’, so to speak, of this whole area, and I want to start by looking at what Jesus says in our passage from St. Mark’s Gospel.

It’s often said - both by those with a very dry sense of humour and also by those who perhaps wish to undermine Christianity – (and I, too, have already referred to this in a previous sermon), that Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of Heaven, and ended up with the Church.

But if we look at our Gospel reading, I believe we can see clearly that Jesus’s ‘project’ - if we can call it that - was never to form some form of club in which ‘only the right sort of people’ were to be found; those who did precisely what the teachers of the Law who opposed Jesus did. Christ’s first action here is to summon to be one of his disciples Levi – also known as Matthew – a tax collector (who were notorious, cheating collaborators with the Roman occupiers in Jesus’s time).

In Jesus’s own words, replying to why he ate only with sinners & tax collectors, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

These words are a profound challenge to us all, as Christians. They have the capacity to bring us up short in shock, as we realize that we are the sinners to whom Jesus is referring here; we are the ones who need to approach God in humility and repentance, acknowledging that is can only be ever through Christ’s intervention that we can stand in our Father’s presence.

Not only that, but as followers of Jesus Christ, called by him to do his work on this earth, we too are called to open our fellowship to exactly the same people as Jesus did; to welcome those on the very margins of our communities; those who by the world’s standards might be ‘socially unacceptable’; to love them and minister to them, just are we ourselves are loved and ministered to, too. As Nicky Gumbel, the founder of the evangelistic Alpha Course, says, “Church is not an organisation you join; it is a family where you belong, a home where you are loved, and a hospital where you find healing.”

Although we won’t physically approach the altar rail this morning, when we receive Holy Communion in a few minutes, one of the profound symbolisms of sharing the sacrament together is that we all come before the Lord equal. No matter how “good” each one of us may be in human terms, we have all fallen so far short of the glory of God, that we are all equal in his eyes, and all need his grace, mercy and love just as much as one another. …Which brings me neatly back round, I hope, as I draw to a close for this morning, to reflecting on this place; and on why we have missed it, and our other church buildings so much; why it is that they are so precious to us.

In part, we acknowledge their symbolism and their beauty; their existence as witnesses to the faith of generations of believers who have gone before us, and whose desire to see God’s Kingdom come here on earth, and His name glorified, has led to them being built and sustained.

And then there is all that the people of God – His Church – have done over the centuries in our church buildings. The patina of prayer that has built up, generation after generation, in a place, where men and women of faith have met with their Heavenly Father.

But, ultimately, for all the devotion that has been shown by the Faithful in this building and our other buildings over hundreds of years, the reason for their significance; the reason, I suggest, why we have missed them so much, is this: it is not what the people of God have done in these places; it is what God himself has done here, that makes these places holy ground; that causes us to long to return, and continue the story of His people in His places. It is how He has met with those who follow Him; how He has come to those who have sought Him; and how He has ministered to them all; us all, that’s made us ache to return.

We return, to be sent out into the world once more, of course, and to meet Him there again, but that’s a story for another week. For the moment, as we prepare ourselves to receive Communion, we give thanks for this place; for the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ around us; and, above all, for our loving God who meets and ministers to us here, in Word, prayer, Spirit and sacrament.

In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

 **Intercessions**

**Led by Alison Stewart**

**Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Brother, sister let me serve you.
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow till
We've seen this journey through.

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**Show Me How to Stand for Justice**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Show me how to stand for justice
How to work for what is right,
How to challenge false assumptions,
How to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
In a world so full of greed,
Showing your immense compassion
By the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
Whether given or received -
For my need has not diminished
Since the day I first believed;
Let me seek no satisfaction
Boasting of what I have done,
But rejoice that I am pardoned
And accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
Modelled on your living word,
In humility submitting
To the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
Ev’ry day in all I do:
By your Spirit’s gracious prompting
May I learn to walk with you.

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**