**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**September 6th, 13th and 20th**

**The 12th, 13th and 14th Sundays after Trinity**

*Dear Friends,*

*I’m sorry there’s been a gap in service transcripts reaching you over the last couple of weeks – technical difficulties with the filming of our first services in Whatton and Orston have meant that I’ve been very behind in completing these service transcripts also.*

*So, having returned into our church buildings at the end of August, we’ve now had a full cycle of services in our largest church buildings – Aslockton, Whatton and Orston. We’re seeing what we can do about worship in our smaller church buildings also. We will be in Whatton again on Sunday September 27th, 10AM, and hope to have a Group Harvest Festival at 10AM on Sunday October 4th – watch this space for more details of all of this!*

*We’ve continued with the sermon series I started when we returned to our church buildings, considering what it means to “be church”, and in these three weeks considering how we’re called to be scriptural; prayerful; and worshipful.*

*Since we of course have to observe social distancing measures in our services 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, on 07526 603766 or at*** ***thecranmergroup@gmail.com******, to reserve your place.*** *This will help us to fit more people into the service & look after you better - thank you for your help.*

*You all very much continue to be in Clare’s and my prayers.*

*Best wishes, and God bless,*



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**Sep 6th – The 13th Sunday after Trinity**

**St. John of Beverley, Whatton**

**‘Called to be… Scriptural’**

**(2 Timothy 3:10-17 and Luke 4:14-21)**

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

**The Collect for The 13th Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Thou Whose Almighty Word**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Thou, whose almighty word
Chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight;
Hear us, we humbly pray,
And, where the Gospel day
Sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring
On thy redeeming wing
Healing and sight,
Heal to the sick in mind,
Sight to the in-ly blind,
Now to all humankind,
Let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
Life-giving holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight!
Move on the waters' face
Bearing the gifts of grace,
And, in earth's darkest place,
Let there be light!

Holy and blessèd Three,
Glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
Boundless as ocean's tide,
Rolling in fullest pride,
Through the world far and wide,
Let there be light!

**Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 3:10-17 (New International Version)**

**Read by David McCall**

***A final charge to Timothy***

*You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

**Gospel Reading: Luke 4:14-21 (New International Version)**

**Read by Rev. Tim Chambers**

***Jesus rejected at Nazareth***

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.*

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me
because he has anointed m
to proclaim good news to the poor
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner
and recovery of sight for the blind
to set the oppressed free
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’*

**Sermon: ‘Called to be…Scriptural’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**
“In the Scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul: therein is no venomous meat, no unwholesome thing, they be the very dainty and pure feeding.”

It’s a happy coincidence that I can start this morning’s sermon - the second in our series this term in which we’re looking at what it means to “be church”; looking at what are the characteristics of a healthy church (or indeed a healthy group of churches) - with a wonderfully appropriate quotation from Whatton and Aslockton’s most famous son, Thomas Cranmer.

We’re considering today what it means, as God calls us all to “be church”, how – and why, also – we’re called to be scriptural. / To have Scripture - the Bible - at the very heart of what it means for us to be church together; to have Scripture as the heart of what we collectively believe; and to have Scripture at the heart of how we live our common life as the people of God in this place, as members of St. John of Beverley; as members of the Cranmer Group of Churches.

I wonder whether there are some of you here today who are thinking right now that the questions I’m putting to us are pretty blindingly obvious. Of course, if we’re considering what being a healthy church is all about, then naturally the place at which we start has to be the Bible.

But actually, if we’re all completely honest with ourselves – and please don’t in any way take this as me being particularly critical of all of you here today, and of our brothers and sisters in Christ across the Cranmer Group, since this is absolutely a question I have asked in other churches with which I’ve been involved in ministry - if we’re really honest with ourselves, is Scripture, and what Scripture tells us about God, and about ourselves; is Scripture really, truly at the heart of everything we do and think and say in our churches.

Or do we – and I absolutely include myself in this “we”, in case you’re wondering! – do we sometimes (maybe far too often, in fact) let so many other things get in the way? Perhaps we wouldn’t necessarily think of these things as “venomous meat” or “unwholesome thing[s]”, to use Cranmer’s rather colourful turns of phrase to our contemporary ears(!), but do we perhaps not give to Scripture the central place that we’re called to give it in our lives, individually & collectively, as followers of Jesus Christ?

If we are called to do this, what is it, then, that is so important about Scripture being at the heart of our collective Christian life - our life as the church; the Body of Christ?

In good sermon tradition, I’d like to suggest to you that there are three particular reasons why an active engagement with, and knowledge of, Scripture has to be at the heart of our church and our Benefice life.

And the first is this: REVELATION.

Revelation. Our God is a God who makes himself known. He’s not a deity who made the whole of Creation, and then decided to sit outside that, letting us all get on with it, for good or for ill.

Not at all! God is a God who’s actively engaged with all that He has created. He desires indeed that we engage with Him as much as we possibly can; He desires that we are in living relationship with Him. In order that this can be the case, God has to reveal Himself to us; He has to show who He is; what He’s like; how He’s acted in history. And the first way in which he does this is through Scripture.

In our first reading this morning, which David kindly read to us from Paul’s second letter to Timothy, all Scripture is described at “God-breathed”. That is, that the Spirit of God was active in inspiring (in the most literal of senses) the authors of the all of the books of the Bible. That God guided their hands, as they recorded the activity of God and those who followed him throughout the centuries. Through their words, springing from Him, God has revealed himself to generations who have believed in Him; and to us in this place, now.

Most importantly, God reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ – THE revelation; God incarnate; the Son of God made fully man as well as fully God; the whole of the story of the people of God coming together in one figure. As our Gospel reading tells us, Jesus, before his fellow Jews in the synagogue in Nazareth, quotes from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 61. Having been baptized by John in the Jordan, and then tested by Satan in the wilderness; in front of the people, Jesus steps into the identity of which the Baptist on the one hand, and the Tempter on the other, are both utterly aware: that he is the one in which the prophecies of the Jewish nation are fulfilled: the Saviour; the Messiah; come to bring redemption and freedom to all.

Without the Biblical witness, we can see and know God active in the world, but only in the world of which we have direct experience. The revelation of himself which God gives to humanity in the Bible, and supremely in the person of Jesus, is firstly how we are able to know God; and then secondly, in the person whose name is also “The Word”, how we see perfection in human form, sent to earth to die, that we might be saved.

So, firstly, Scripture is vital to us as God’s revelation of himself. Secondly, Scripture is critically important to us as church, in RELATIONSHIP, both between us and God, in the person of Jesus, and also between ourselves as fellow Christians. Scripture gives to us a framework for understanding what it is to be a follower of Jesus both as an individual, but also – and, I suggest, more importantly – as a member of the Body of Christ; the community that we call the church.

Our reading from 2 Timothy is often seen as being a bit controversial in this respect – and I have to say that I don’t always find myself sitting comfortably with it - as it tells us that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the Servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

I think that there’s often a tendency to focus on what might be seen as the critical elements of this passage – that Scripture can be used for “correcting” and “rebuking”. And we can’t deny that these words are there – and indeed that, elsewhere in the Bible, in Proverbs 27:17, we read, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” That is, that rubbing alongside one another in community, we smooth off the rougher, spikier parts of ourselves, such that we become more Christ-like.

But it’s really important to look a bit further back in our reading, and see that St Paul’s instructions to Timothy are all couched in - as he writes - “[his] way of life, [his] purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.” If Paul’s suggesting to Timothy that - for his life and for the lives of those to whom he is ministering - Biblical texts are precious for what they tell us about how to live a Godly life, & how they help us change more into who God wishes us to be - more into the image of Jesus Christ - then the challenges they give to us, and which we are called, therefore, to give to one another, are all couched in God’s encompassing arms of grace, open for all His people. The Lord’s word, offered in love, is, as the Psalmist says, ““a lamp for [your] feet, a light on [your] path”, given so our way may be made clear.

Those of us who are, or who have been, parents of smaller children know this all-too-well. Our daughter, Esther, at 2½, is in prime territory - as she pushes all sorts of boundaries - for us to have to do a bit of “correcting” and “rebuking”, often involving time spent on the bottom-most of our stairs. But I know that both Clare and I do so for what will be, in the long term, we really believe to be Esther’s own good, and we most certainly do it in an overall atmosphere overwhelmingly of parental love.

As church, therefore, we’re called to be Scriptural, first of all, to see and know God’s REVELATION. Secondly, we are called to be Scriptural, that we may learn what it is to be in Godly RELATIONSHIP, both with our Creator, and with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And, finally – in our third ‘R’ we are called to be Scriptural, for RE-TELLING. As followers of Christ, we’re called to share his Good News with others, that they too might know what it is to have Jesus at the centre of their lives. We are called to be evangelistic – in the words of Jesus’s Great Commission to his disciples at the end of Matthew’s Gospel:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

REVELATION, RELATIONSHIP, AND RE-TELLING. These, I suggest, are “the why’s” of our calling, as church, to be Scriptural. But what, before I finish very shortly, about “how”? Well, again, in true sermon fashion, I have three ideas for you – in addition - of course! - to listening to our Sunday sermons, of which there are always also recordings on our Cranmer Group website (have a word with me after the service, or drop me a line, if you’re not sure how to listen to, or watch, them).

First, follow a Bible study guide. If you don’t already, use one to develop a rhythm, a habit, of reading your Bible every day. I use [these guides], which follow the Church of England’s Morning Prayer readings every day, with a short reflection & prayer. You can get them as a book, or, if you’re like me, I now have it on my Kindle. Or, if you like, for those of you who may have a smartphone, there are the Bible In One Year or Lectio 365 apps, both of which are free, & which also have all their daily readings, commentary and prayers as audio files to listen to as well.

Second, it’s a great thing to do to read the Bible, and discuss it, with others: “iron sharpening iron”! Within our Cranmer Group, Annie Dickinson runs a small group – currently online, but which has been face-to-face. This “Wrestling with God” small group is currently going through Matthew’s Gospel, discussing a few verses at a time, trying to increase their understanding of what God is saying to us in these Scriptures, and, in doing so, deepening their knowledge of Him, and of His call on our lives. I also ran a similar group earlier in the Summer; if you’d like to join a group like that, do please contact me, or Annie direct.

Or, finally, I really commend to you something which some of you’ll have heard me speak about, or seen me write about, before: our Diocese’s Real LIFE discipleship course. This has been run for the past couple of years, and is about to start up again later this month, with the Cranmer Group as one of the hosts across the Diocese. It’s a course run by really gifted teachers from amongst the clergy in our Diocese, looking primarily at the Bible, also using the work of theologians who have studied these Biblical texts in detail, and is designed to deepen our discipleship as followers of Jesus Christ through teaching, discussion, prayer and worship. It starts on 17th September, in St. Thomas’s, Aslockton, every Thursday evening 7.30-9.30pm. I’ve been involved in it before, and have seen the really positive impact it has had on many people who have participated in it, deepening their faith profoundly. If you’d like to be part of this, or if you’d like to find out more, chat to me after the service, drop me a line, or sign up on the Diocese website – the Real Life information webpages are very clearly marked. Several people from our Cranmer Group family have already signed up, so you’ll be among familiar, friendly faces! Do join us – it’d be wonderful to see many of you there.

So, revelation, relationship and re-telling: these are the three reasons why, as church, we’re collectively called to be scriptural. Called, in the words of Archbishop Rowan Williams, to know the Bible, “the lively oracles of God”, … not intended to be a mere chronicle of past events, but a living communication from God, telling us now what we need to know for our salvation.” I pray that, as Rowan Williams says, each one of you will find the Scriptures alive; that our God will be revealed to you in them; that we will share them together & in so doing grow in relationship with God and one another; and from that place, re-tell the Gospel story – disciples, making disciples. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

 **Intercessions**

**Led by Rev. Tim Chambers**

**In Christ Alone**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life’s first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.

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

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

**We Have a Dream: This Nation Will Arise**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

We have a dream: this nation will arise,
And truly live according to its creed,
That all are equal in their makers eyes,
And none shall suffer through another’s greed.

We have a dream that one day we shall see
A world of justice, truth and equity,
Where sons of slaves and daughters of the free
Will share the banquet of community.

We have a dream that truth will overcome
The fear and anger of our present day;
That black and white will share a common home,
And hand in hand will walk the pilgrim way.

We have a dream; each valley will be raised,
And ev’ry mountain, ev’ry hill brought down;
Then shall creation echo perfect praise,
And share God’s glory under freedom’s crown!

**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.**

**Sep 13th – The 14th Sunday after Trinity**

**St. Mary’s, Orston**

**‘Called to be… Prayerful’**

**(Acts 4:23-31 and John 17:20-23)**

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

**The Collect for The 14th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

Merciful God,
your Son came to save us
and bore our sins on the cross:
may we trust in your mercy
and know your love,
rejoicing in the righteousness
that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Dear Lord & Father of Mankind**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise;
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee;
Rise up and follow Thee.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace;
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small Voice of calm;
O still, small Voice of calm.

**Bible Reading: Acts 4:23-31 (New International Version)**

**Read by Mike Senior**

***The believers pray***

*On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

*‘“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.”*

*Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’*

*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

**Gospel Reading: John 17:20-23 (New International Version)**

**Read by Annie Dickinson**

***Jesus prays for all believers***

*‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.’*

**Sermon: ‘Called to be…Prayerful’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**
This morning we continue with the third in our sermon series, which we started on the first Sunday we came back into our church buildings for services: ‘Called to Be Church’.

Against the backdrop of not being able, for almost six months, to ‘be church’ in the way we’re all accustomed to; we’re therefore reflecting in this series on what it is that makes church, church. We’re thinking about the ways in which church is distinctive; how it’s unlike anything else – as Archbishop William Temple famously said, “The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members.”

This, it has to be said, is a pretty challenging statement – and one which we don’t have scope to unpack this morning, I’m afraid. That’s for another Sunday! But for the moment I’ll leave it hanging for you to ponder, other than to say - and this leads us into our subject for this morning - that one of the chief ways in which this is the case; in which those of us who consider ourselves to be part of a church, of the Church, primarily look outwards, rather than inwards; is in prayer.

Last Sunday, we considered how, as church, we’re called to be scriptural. How the scriptural basis for our faith in God, through the witness of the Bible and especially the Good News of Jesus Christ, is found in revelation (of who God is, and how God is); in relationship (between us and God, and between one another); and in re-telling (the sharing of the Gospel in order to make new disciples of Jesus). The Bible is the bed-rock on which our Christian faith is built.

But very closely alongside Scripture comes prayer. “Prayer,” says the founder of the 24-7 Prayer movement, Rev. Pete Grieig, “is at the heart of not just what it means to be a Christian, but what it means to be human. Prayer, at its simplest, is asking God for help. At its best, prayer is conversation with God – listening as well as speaking. At its deepest, prayer is communion with God. It’s an awareness of God’s presence in which we walk and talk with him, sometimes even in silence. To know the presence of God”, Pete Greig concludes, “is the most important thing.”

In my interview for the post of Vicar of the Cranmer Group, I was asked to set out my priorities for the Benefice. You’re very welcome to ask me after this morning’s service or at some other point what specifically these are (and, despite the last six months, they have not changed in substance, only perhaps in timing!). But I started out by stating the following, which applies both to me as your Vicar, and also to all of us as the members of our church family across the Cranmer Group:

“Before, during and after all of [my main priorities], listen, pray and discern.” LISTEN, PRAY, AND DISCERN.

That’s all very well for you - me, that is! - you may be thinking right now. You’re our vicar and, amongst other things, that’s what you’re paid to do. This is absolutely true, of course - one of the ways in which I hope I’m able to serve everyone who lives or works or goes to school in our villages, is - in the words of Archbishop Michael Ramsay - “to be with God, with the people on my heart.”

And I hope - indeed, I pray! - that each and every one of you does as Pete Greig says, and spends time in communion with God, knowing his presence, in your times of personal prayer, whatever they may look like for you, and wherever and whenever you may pray.

But there’s also something uniquely special that happens when groups of Christians come together to pray; to lift their combined hearts and voices to God, speaking with Him as one, and listening to Him in the presence of each other. Jesus instructs his disciples, in response to their request, “Lord, teach us to pray”, to begin, “Our Father in heaven…” Every element of the Lord’s Prayer is in the collective – it is never “I”, “me” or “mine”, always “we”, “us” or “our”.

The way in which Jesus instructs his followers to pray, is expressed entirely in the plural. Whilst we see him in the Gospel accounts frequently praying on his own, it’s clearly his intention that those who follow him should - in addition to communicating with God individually, on a directly personal basis – approach him in prayer collectively, with one voice. And note the other important part of Jesus’s response to his disciples – he begins by telling them, “When you pray…” Not “if”, but “when”!

It’s immediately apparent from reading the Acts of the Apostles just how important to the faith of Jesus’s first followers, praying together was. So important, that it was fundamental to their understanding and practice of what it is to be followers of Jesus Christ; to be his church. And if it was fundamental to their understanding, it should be fundamental to our understanding too.

In our reading from Acts Chapter 4, we see the first believers not simply praying together, but doing so for a whole manner of reasons. The believers give thanks to God for the safe return from danger, of Peter and John. “Sovereign Lord”, they declare, giving praise to God for who he is; for what he’s made; and for what he’s done. They petition God collectively for strength and courage to stand against the tyranny of Herod and Pilate, and that He will heal many and perform signs and wonders amongst the people. And we read the result of this collective conversation with the Lord –the building shook; all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit; and they declared the Gospel with renewed boldness.

This is just one of many instances in the Acts of the Apostles where not only are the believers recorded as praying fervently, but they are recorded as doing so together, in large numbers. In chapter 12, for instance, it’s recorded that “the church was earnestly praying to God for [Peter]”, as he was kept in prison, and that the believers’ prayers resulted in a miraculous opening of the jail, with Peter walking free. And back in Acts 2, where we started this sermon series, we read that the believers “devoted” themselves to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. They devoted themselves to praying together. They were serious about it; persistent about it. They saw extraordinary results from it – we’re told of the signs & wonders that arose, and of the believers who were added to their number each day.

When we meet together to pray, like these first Christians, it’s not as if there’s some magic formula – just because there’s a dozen of us praying the same prayer together, certainly doesn’t mean that it’s twelve times more likely to be answered than if it had just been me praying my own, that God operates on some sort of ‘slot machine’ basis in responding to our prayers. But when we do pray corporately - as we share our common faith and bear witness to that, in our words for God, & our listening to Him – we grow our faith as we encourage one another; as we’re edified by one another; & as we’re unified with one another.

Jesus, in our Gospel reading from John 17, emphasizes to his disciples the absolute importance of unity amongst his followers; of common purpose in pursuit of the Gospel, both for their own sake, and so that others who see them may know that this extraordinary unity in love, is not of the world, but is a snapshot of God’s Kingdom. Corporate prayer is a hugely important way of bringing about that unity amongst ourselves, sharing our sorrows & joys; fears & hopes. As the saying goes, “the church that prays together, stays together.”

Many of you’ll know that we have held, since Pentecost, every Wednesday & Friday, Benefice-wide Morning Prayer via Zoom, and then, on Thursdays, joined together in Evening Prayer in the same way. It’s been a joy to have a regular, faithful group of pray-ers, combining our prayers with those of our fellow Christians saying the same liturgy, reading the same scriptures, praying the same prayers, throughout the whole, global Anglican Communion. This is one of the great strengths of more formal, liturgical prayer; that you know you’re praying in unison - and unity - with so many others at the same point of the same day. As we declare in every Morning Prayer, “O Lord open our lips”; “And our mouth [never mouths!] shall proclaim your praise”.

But it’s also hugely important that we complement our more formal prayers with those of a more targeted nature. Just as we’ll have very shortly from Patrick (and as I lead us in, as part of every Morning and Evening Prayer), we turn our collective voices to particular situations, places or people who are on our hearts, in our Intercessions, asking God to intervene.

Praying with others in this way, especially in a more informal setting, can be hard, perhaps especially to start with, before we feel more confident. Nicky Gumbel, the founder of the Alpha Course & Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton in London, admits that he found it really tough to start with, although he loves doing so now, you’ll be pleased to hear! I was certainly the same as him, the first time I prayed more informally in this way as well.

But it’s something that I think is both incredibly precious - to be able to spend time with God and with our fellow Christians in this way – and also central to a healthy, outward-looking, spiritually mature, unified church, to be able to join in less formal intercessory prayer in this way, on a regular basis. So, as of the start of October, on the first Sunday evening of every month, I invite you to join me for a short time, to intercede together. Exact details will follow very shortly, but I sense that, in this season, this is what God is calling us, across the Benefice, to do.

As I come into land, I want to share with you an image - a picture from God, if you like. On Friday morning, I was walking Ella over the fields between Aslockton and Scarrington, pondering what I was going to share with you this morning, and I noticed in the grass at the side of the footpath, beautiful, huge field mushrooms bursting up through the grass. I’d walked the same path the previous evening, & there was no sign of them then.

And I reflected on how, in many ways – and if you’ll forgive me a bit of poetic licence! - the appearance of these wonderful mushrooms is a bit like prayer. When we speak to God, it’s as if we are sending off invisible ‘spores of prayer’ into the atmosphere, which are blown where the wind takes them (the words for ‘wind’ and for the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, are of course the same in both Hebrew and Greek). The spores lie dormant, without any visible evidence of their presence, and then, often without anyone being there to witness it happening, the most extraordinary and beautiful mushrooms emerge from the soil – ‘fruit’ from those many, many spores.

I need to be a bit careful with my analogy of course, don’t I, given the existence of toadstools as well(!), but I hope you can see what I’m saying in this. There is something profoundly mysterious both in the appearance of this fantastic, nourishing object, and often also in the way in which our prayers, borne by the Spirit, alight, & are transformed by God into beautiful reality. Sometime, perhaps, it appears that they never alight, and we are left wondering why. Only the Lord knows the answer to that question.

But what Christ asks of us, as individual believers, and perhaps most especially collectively as his Church, is that we are faithfully, devotedly, imaginatively prayerful.

He promises us, that he will then do the rest. Let’s pray…

Lord Jesus, You have called us to follow in your ways of love and grace, peace and justice. Help us to be bold and faithful in our prayers, not diminishing what we ask of Our Heavenly Father by reducing him to human scale, but remembering all that the God who created the universe is capable of doing, for us, and for all for whom we pray. In Your mighty name, Amen.

 **Intercessions**

**Led by Patrick Newton**

Lord, settle our minds now and help us to reflect on Tim’s words. Help each of us to consider what it means to be part of a church community. Let us pray to God that we may be more prayerful in our lives. Help us to learn to rely on you Lord, to be our strength and refuge during tough times and good times. Give us the courage to lean on you.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

Lord, As we get back to somewhat more normal times we pray for courage and resilience. We are regaining many of the freedoms that we lost during lockdown but it continues to be an anxious and difficult time for many as we remain fearful of the spreading covid virus. This is especially true for our elderly and vulnerable. We pray that all in our society will be respectful of those who are vulnerable and that they may follow government guidance to protect them. We pray for wisdom for our government and medical advisers, and that the decisions they make are timely and effective in reducing the spread of the virus. May those who do worry feel your love and protection around them.

We thank you for all the NHS and Care Home workers who have given so much in caring for Covid patients. We thank you that we live in a society in which people are cared for and respected, and in which corruption is minimal. We pray for the professionals working on the vaccine – may an effective solution to covid be found swiftly.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for our local churches and communities. We pray for the Cranmer Group of Parishes. We thank you that our churches have been able to open again in a limited way and we are once again able to meet together and worship you. We thank you that the digital services Tim has produced have sustained us through the past months. We thank you for Tim, Clare and Esther and pray that as things return to normal the ministry of the church can expand. Lord we thank you for our Church Wardens, our Treasurers, our PCCs and all who guide the outreach of your churches in our community. We also pray for our schools in Aslockton and Orston, may your witness touch the children in these schools.

We pray that our parishes may grow in our awareness and caring for social issues in our community. We pray that as part of our walk in Christ we can recognise and speak out against social or racial injustice. You have given us the resources in this world to feed all if they are fairly shared, you have given us eyes to see the good in others and not feel prejudice, you have given us great minds to help find cures to disease. We pray to you for strength, determination and willpower to do instead of simply pray and wish.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

Let us pray for Comfort and healing all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Let us pause for a moment to think of those we know who have passed away or are suffering at this time. Give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

Finally Lord we ask that you direct and guide our hearts and bodies over the coming week that we might live better, more fruitful lives following Christ. All these things we pray in Jesus name, **Amen**

 **Father, I Place into Your Hands**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

Father, I place into Your hands
The things that I can’t do,
Father, I place Into Your hands
The times that I’ve been through.
Father, I place into Your hands
The way that I should go,
For I know I always can trust You.

Father, I place into Your hands
My friends and family.
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that trouble me.
Father, I place into Your hands
The person I would be,
For I know I always can trust You.

Father, we love to seek Your face,
We love to hear Your voice.
Father, we love to sing Your praise
And in Your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with You
And in Your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust You.

Father, I want to be with You
And do the things You do.
Father, I want to speak the words
That You are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
that You will draw to You,
for I know that I am one with You.

**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.**

**Be Thou My Vision**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, the first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven’s bright sun,
O grant me the joys after vict’ry is won!
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

**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.**

**Sep 20th – The 15th Sunday after Trinity**

**St. Thomas’s, Aslockton**

**‘Called to be… Worshipful’**

**(1 Corinthians 3:10-17 and John 4:19-26)**

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

**The Collect for The 15th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

Lord God,
defend your Church from all false teaching
and give to your people knowledge of your truth,
that we may enjoy eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Here I Am to Worship**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**
Light of the world,You stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see.Beauty that made this heart adore You,Hope of a life spent with You.

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.

King of all days,
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above;
Humbly You came
to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.

I'll never know how much it cost,
To see my sin upon that cross.
I'll never know how much it cost,
To see my sin upon that cross…

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.

**Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (New International Version)**

**Read by Sarah Hadfield**

*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

**Gospel Reading: John 4:19-26 (New International Version)**

**Read by Amy Taylor**

***Jesus and the Samaritan Woman***

*“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”*

*“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

*The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”*

*Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”*

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

If I were to ask you, “What does ‘worship’ look like to you?” what would you think of?

Might it be this? [charismatic worship image]

Or this? [cathedral choir image]

Perhaps this? [African worshippers image]

Or this? [worshiper on a mountain top]

Maybe even, for some of you, this?! [Picture of the City Ground!]

[Move onto image of Whatton service two weeks ago]

Joking apart, I think it’s safe to say that pretty much everyone here will have different ideas about what, for us, worship is. We will place different emphases on the various aspects of what could be considered worship. We will find that there are particular elements of worship that have a special resonance for us – although these may shift and change at different times of our lives, and also how we may be psychologically, emotionally, physically or spiritually at any given time too. And we will find that we each have different places in which we feel particularly attuned to worship.

But I think there are a number of themes that’ll be common to all of us when we consider what it is to be “called to worship” -which we’re looking at in this Sunday’s part of our sermon series, considering what it means to be “called to be church”.

As I’ve said in previous weeks - when we’ve looked at being called to be ‘scriptural’ and ‘prayerful’ - these last six months, and especially those in which we were in complete lockdown, have perhaps given us a unique opportunity, as we’ve missed terribly the opportunity to meet together in our church buildings, to consider what it is that we’re missing so much. It’s perhaps only when something is no longer there for us – rather like it’d be for a small child when their favourite toy’s taken away – that we can objectively reflect on what it is that makes it so precious.

So what are we called to do, when we are “called to worship”?

At its most basic, Christian worship is the offering of praise to God, in whatever form that may take – we’ll come on to that in a bit. Worship is about placing ourselves in a particular posture before God; helping us to recognise who He really is; and catching us up into the transformative life of His Kingdom. It’s something we’re called to, each and every day of our lives.

Abp. William Temple, increasingly one of my ‘spiritual heroes’, said “The fundamental business of life is worship. At the root of all your being, your intellectual studies, the games you play, whatever it is, the impulse to do them well is and ought to be understood as being an impulse towards God, the source of all that is excellent. All life ought to be worship; and we know quite well there is no chance it will be worship unless we have times when we have worship and nothing else.”

On the one hand, “The fundamental business of life is worship.” As human beings, your and my primary purpose in life, is to bring glory to God; to offer praise to God; to worship God. And, to this end, continues Temple, “All life ought to be worship”.

There’s a tendency, if we’re not careful, to think that what we do on Sundays only, when we come into a church building, is worship God - we go into some sort of ‘special place’, or ‘special frame of mind’. But then, as soon as we go out the door afterwards, it’s as if we leave our worship of God with our service books on our seats, and carry on with “our normal lives” for the other six and a half days of the week. Nothing - Temple says - could be further from the truth: in the (rather more contemporary!) words of Sam and Sara Hargreaves, in their excellent book, ‘Whole Life Worship’, “Worship is more than just music; it’s a lifestyle”.

You and I - each one of us - is called not just to worship God in a building that looks like this one, and only on a Sunday, but to take our worship of God to wherever we go, and whatever we do – to live a whole life of worship. Think back a few moments to the image of the figure on the mountaintop, arms spread wide, praising God for the glories of His creation. I might be rather more English in the way I show it, but one of the places I find myself most in touch with God, & most full of praise to Him, is on exactly that sort of airy mountaintop, surrounded by the wonders of Creation. And yet, too, as Temple goes on to say, “we know quite well there is no chance [all life] will be worship, unless we have times when we have worship and nothing else.” And that’s where times like this morning; times of gathered worship, when we pause the rest of our lives and come together with those who, like us, desire to come before our God and praise Him; why these times are so important to our faith.

In our Gospel this morning - the second part of the meeting between Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well - Jesus speaks to her of the people of Israel going up to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple at the heart of that city, as opposed to the Samaritans like her, whose worship took a different form, in different places. At that time, it was the belief of the People of God (contained in the Jewish Law) that they met with Him in the Temple alone [slide of model of the Temple, in modern Jerusalem], although this encounter was mediated through the priests who, in particular, administered sacrifices on behalf of the believers. The people therefore had to pay frequent visits to Jerusalem in order to worship the Lord; to make offerings to Him; to pray; and so on.

But the consequence of Jesus’s fulfilment of the Law in his person - crucified and resurrected - was that the Lord’s people no longer had to go to Jerusalem to meet with God. At the moment of Christ’s death on the cross, the curtain of the Temple, which separated the presence of God from those who came to worship Him there, was torn in two. The Law was fulfilled in the person of Jesus himself, and so it’s through relationship with him, Jesus Christ – and not via any priests of the Temple – that we are able, here, today, to encounter the full presence of God.

St. Paul, in our reading from his first letter to the Corinthians , perhaps goes even further. Paul says that, since God dwells - through the presence of His Holy Spirit in these early Christians - then it is as if these men & women believers have themselves become the Temple; as if they themselves have taken on the sacredness of the presence of the Spirit amongst them; and especially that they “together” are that temple.

So, for all that we’re called to worship God throughout the whole of our lives, there is something extraordinarily special about coming together as the Body of Christ, in one place, at one time, to worship Him: we “together” are that same temple.

This worship, of course, takes many forms. There can be a temptation to think of ‘worship’ as being only sung worship, rather than thinking of the act of worship in its entirety. When we come into a posture & place of worship, such as in a service like this, our chief purpose is to encounter the presence of God.

It’s not that, over the period of Lockdown, we were unable to come into the presence of God, or worship at all. Indeed some of you, I know, in fact found that the very space of Lockdown, and the release from the relentlessness of daily routines, pressures and obligations, resulted a profoundly positive shift in your relationship with God, deepening your awareness of His presence in your lives. And – I hope! – our ability to come together at times using the wonders of technology was a really positive way in which to keep alive our connections with one another and with God. In some cases, like the extraordinary worship song, The Blessing, sung by worship leaders from churches of all denominations from all over the UK [if you missed it first time around, look it up online - it’s deeply moving!], an opportunity was created for God to move amongst us in a way that would never normally have been possible, or even thought of in the first place.

But those of us who decide to follow him, are the Body of Christ, and as one Body we’re called to unity and fellowship with one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ – both of which happen more deeply when we’re physically together in worship, each made in God’s image & reflecting something of his glory.

And when we come together in this way - in an act of worship such as this morning - we encounter God in, I suggest, 5 ways:

In FELLOWSHIP. In fellowship with one another, we encounter something of God’s image in our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is partly why sharing the Peace is so precious to us – we’re each acknowledging the presence of God’s image in each other (even when we can only see each others’ eyes!).

In SUNG WORSHIP - our expressions of praise and thanksgiving directed to God, modelled for us in the Psalms.

It’s a form of prayer; a drawing near to Our Heavenly Father, in the hope and expectation that He will draw near to us…

In attending to GOD SPEAKING THROUGH HIS WORD to us. As we looked at a fortnight ago, we read and explore the Bible together in services because it’s one of the principal ways God reveals his presence to us afresh. Through the truth of Biblical witness, and the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, we can become the “kind of [true] worshipers the Father seeks” in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman.

In our PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD & FOR ONE ANOTHER.

What we pray for, shapes the very character of our faith. It’s often said that we become like what we worship. Similarly, what & whom we pray for - whether we’re outward- or inward-looking; whether what we pray reflects the heart of God, the rule of his Kingdom, or the Church’s mission, can shape our faith & lives.

And, lastly, we encounter God in our acts of worship as He gives himself to us in SACRAMENT, in the bread and wine of Holy Communion - the substantial presence of God’s grace in our lives.

In coming to church this morning, to worship, we come to give, not to get. We come first and foremost as an act of worship to God, to give our Lord thanks and praise, and it’s only from that place, that we receive from Him.

We come together to worship in this one place, that we might be sent out into the world, dispersed amongst our communities, workplaces, friends, families; scattered to continue in our worship, wherever our lives may take us, bearing the presence of God with us, carrying his Spirit and truth. “Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord”, as we will end the service later.

My prayer is that, giving your worship to God this morning in all these different ways, and in turn receiving His grace and blessing, you will carry the fullness of His presence with you wherever He may lead you.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Richard Marquiss**

 **By Your Side**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

By Your Side I Would Stay;
In Your Arms I Would Lay.
Jesus, Lover Of My Soul,
Nothing From You I Withhold.

Lord, I Love You, And Adore You;
What More Can I Say?
You Cause My Love To Grow Stronger
With Every Passing Day.

**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.**

**O Worship the King**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

O worship the King
All glorious above,
O gratefully sing
His power and his love:
Our shield and defender,
The Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour
And girded with praise.

O tell of his might
O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light,
Whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath
The deep thunder-clouds form,
And dark is his path
On the wings of the storm.

The earth, with its store
Of wonders untold,
Almighty, thy power
Hath founded of old;
Hath stablished it fast,
By a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast,
Like a mantle, the sea.

O measureless Might,
Ineffable Love,
While angels delight
To hymn thee above!
Thy humbler creation,
Though feeble their lays,
With true adoration
Shall sing to thy praise!

**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.**