



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 31st January 2021



NEWS UPDATE

Vaccinations at Blackburn Cathedral

I have found it heart-warming to hear about some of the vaccinations that have now taken place. I asked Mary Price to describe her experience of going to Blackburn Cathedral for her jab.

Mary Price

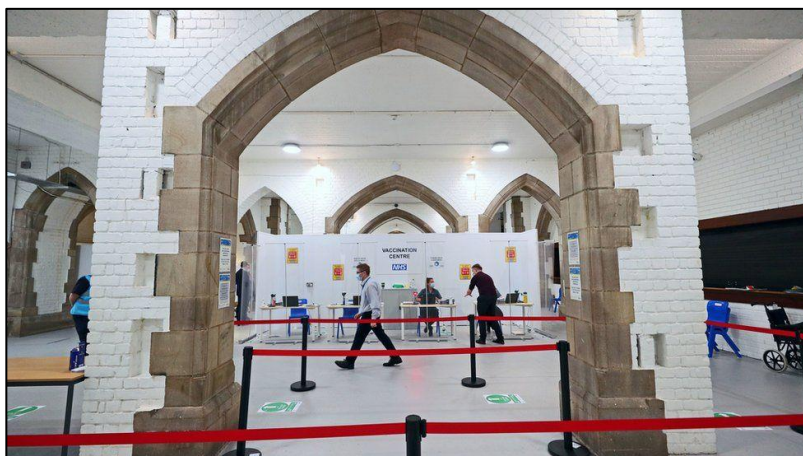


I received a letter from the Health Department to have a vaccination injection. I had my vaccine injection at Blackburn Cathedral in the Crypt. I was met at my car by a security man with a large umbrella. I was asked to sanitize my hands, and take a new mask from the table, then another man took me over to a table where a lady took down my particulars and checked my warfarin.

I was taken to the nurse, who happened to be in the RAF at Coningsby, Lincoln. She gave me my jab, held my arm for two

minutes, then passed me over to another man who escorted me to my car under a large brolly as it was pouring with rain.

The attention and treatment was wonderful, there must have been twenty security men and lots of ladies, it was so quiet and peaceful – a wonderful place to receive the vaccine.



Ash Wednesday on Zoom



It will be difficult to mark the beginning of Lent in the usual way this year due to the restrictions. Ashing someone with the mark of the cross on their forehead will definitely be out, as it involves close social contact.

What we will do is rearrange the Tuesday evening Zoom gathering to a Wednesday for this week, the date being **Wednesday 17th February at 8pm.**

Those who join in will mark themselves with ash, whilst another member of the group speaks the traditional words over them. This will require us to deliver little pots of ready-mixed ash in advance to those who wish to take part. So please let me know if you intend to join in, and we will arrange for your free delivery of ash!

Review of Church Services Suspension

The PCC met on Wednesday of last week (27th Jan), and amongst other things we reviewed the current suspension of services. We felt it was right to continue with closure for the time being, until we are confident that virus cases are going down and the risks of gathering are reduced. We will review it again in a few weeks.

BIBLE READING – Philippians 1: 27-30

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

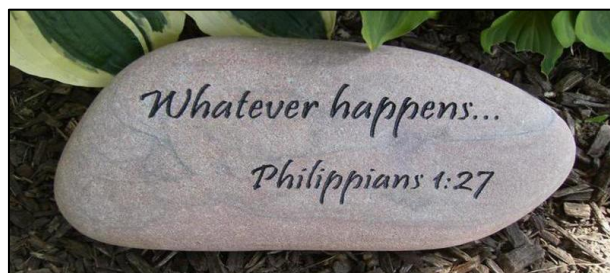
THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

This message is the same as the video that has been made and broadcast by the Blackburn Diocese this week. The video can be viewed on our Facebook Page, and St Christopher's Lea YouTube channel.

Whatever happens

Paul doesn't know whether he will live or die, whether he will be released from prison or remain in chains, whether he will ever see the Philippians again – of whom he was so fond – or just hear about them. But he says that *whatever happens*, the Philippians should:

- *Live their lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel*
- *Stand firm in the one Spirit*
- *Strive together as one for the Gospel*
- *Suffer Together*



We're going to cover these four topics – in the wrong order!

Standing firm in one Spirit

I am sure most of us have had moments since this pandemic began when we have wobbled. If you were to tell me that you haven't, I wouldn't believe you! Paul and the Philippians also endured some great trials, and yet it was a joy and blessing to them that they didn't have to struggle on their own. There was a deep fellowship that existed between them, and this enabled them to support each other and *stand firm together* in the face of opposition and struggles.

For us at St Christopher's relationships within the church have also proved to be a real source of comfort and strength over these difficult months. I've asked a couple of people to talk about their experience of gaining strength through their faith and their relationship with the church. This is Samantha, who works at the hospital as a mental health nurse, and then Aiden – one of our young people.

Samantha Ferguson



When did Church become a part of my life? I guess it's always been there. My mum was in the Mother's Union and was an engaged member of the congregation. My brother and I attended Sunday School weekly, sang in the church choir – had the ruffles, all the business.

When I left school, sadly, church did take a back seat for a long time, really, until Thomas arrived. He has his moments! He brings good things too. I guess with Thomas came the invitation, once he started school, to become part of St. Christopher's Church and here we are-years later.

My faith, the church family and Peter in lots of ways have carried me through some really tricky times, some that some people know about, some that some people don't know about. But, knowing that they were always there unjudging, arms open, is all that was needed. Without this, my life, things today, would be very different.

In the short time I've been part of St. Christopher's, I feel lots has been achieved. Pre-Covid, I loved singing in the church, loved helping out with the Food Bank, being engaged in all the socials. There was the light party which Isaac loved, and I absolutely loved as well and can't wait for the next one. I became more fulfilled, even more so, following the Alpha Course.



Over the past twelve months, certainly during this pandemic, everybody's lives I know have been affected in various different ways. Some positives have come out of it, but it's been a really tough time. I have to say in particular for me work has been really hard and pressured. There have been some very distressing days, staff morale has been at its lowest and exhaustion and burnout levels at their highest.

The weekly Zoom meetings on a Tuesday have really been my saving grace. Sometimes it's the only thing that keeps you going through the week, so the light at the end of the tunnel, I guess. I sometimes engage fully, I sometimes sit back and observe, but always at the end, despite how down I feel at the beginning, I always come out at the other end feeling revitalized, refreshed, and ready to go again. It's wonderful to feel the support from others, but also to give that to the rest of the group as well, with the added bonus that God's word is throughout. It's something that we always link in with, and always feel that warmth of God's love surrounding and reassuring everybody that it's going to be OK.

I particularly recall one Tuesday Zoom meeting where I felt very bruised and down; but I still linked into the Zoom, because why not? I was so glad that I had, Peter always asks at the beginning for a general chat – of how people are and how things have been, and then we pray for each other. That week people had prayed for my resilience and my colleagues' resilience, and for God's strength to bring us

through the other end. I took those words, felt more empowered and enriched, into work the next day and could feel that strength from other people. That helped me to work with other people, support other people and to give that positivity, and let God's love flow through me for other people as well. Immediately, just with that change of mindset and to know that God's love was working through me had an impact not just on me, but them as well. We continued to work together and recharge each other through this really difficult time.

It was just so important that the power of faith for me and the impact on others has just helped me to think that we need to continue believing that God has a plan, and things will be OK. Keep the faith, remain strong, and stand firm in believing that we'll all get there in the end.

Aiden Moffat



Hi! My name is Aiden and I go to St. Christopher's Church and I was baptized at 15 months old. From then I have been to church for most Sundays since 2015. I usually attend the Junior Church and I've learnt lots about Christianity and the Bible as well as my influence from a Church of England School. I recently volunteered to help out in the paper round during the lockdown crisis. I try to be a better person every day and show kindness towards others. It teaches me right from wrong and I hope in my adult life I follow the Christian path to become a better person.

Striving together as one for the Gospel

It's easier *standing firm* in life together with others, than it is on our own, and I'm grateful to Sam and Aiden for the way they've brought this message home. Our next theme is '*Striving Together as one for the Gospel*,' and I'm going to reflect on this in relation to our own churches here in Preston.

Emmanuel

It would be fair to say that Emmanuel Church has endured some major struggles, and we are still striving hard together for the faith of the Gospel. It'll be seven years next weekend since the church building was closed due to a major dry rot problem.

We could have packed up shop when the church building closed in 2014, but we didn't. There was a sense then as there is now that *whatever happens* we will stand firm in one spirit, and we'll continue to strive together as one for the Gospel in this place. We're acting out of conviction that this area of Preston needs the love of Jesus, and for that it needs an active Christian community. The parish suffers from a lot of brokenness, with unemployment, addictions, crime, and anti-social behaviour, and this matters to us as well as to God.



God deeply loves the lost sheep, and so do we, and there are plenty of them around. God wants them to turn to him in repentance, to come home to their creator, and find new life. It is a tough missionary context, in which many have no previous contact with the church or any exposure to the Christian message. Paul tells us to strive *together* in the work of proclaiming Christ, which we do through loving action, through prayer, and proclamation.

We have a beautiful ministry here at Emmanuel in many ways – a closely knit church family, a thriving messy church, a lovely relationship with the local primary schools where we deliver Open the Book. We support asylum seekers, we arrange litter picks, we run socials and concerts in the community centre – we just try and shine the light of Jesus in whatever way we can.



When you go inside the church building, it's in a pretty bad way. There is now a scaffold tower in the chancel because one of the main timbers holding up the roof has rotted away. There is fallen plaster and paintwork, and places where the floorboards have rotted through. But we

have a wonderful hope for this building, to redevelop it into a new smaller church space at the east end, two floors of flats beyond, and a community room on the top floor.

We know that these new facilities would be a massive boost to our ministry in the Emmanuel parish, and yet the battle for this building is long and hard, and at the moment we can't seem to get past the Town Planners. It's such a long and winding road – you're up one moment, your down the next – and it's not obvious how it's going to end. We know how we would like it to end, but we've just got to the point where we say that "*whatever happens...* we will continue to live our lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel." Whatever happens, we will continue proclaiming the faith of the Gospel together – the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ. If we do this as one, then we need not be frightened or intimidated by any opposition. That was Paul's message to the Philippians, and it rings true for us as well.

St Christopher's

We have a lovely All-Age community here, and we are very much a church of the local area with 86% of the Electoral Roll living in the parish.

St Christopher's is as much a community centre as it is a



church, with the hall and community room in use seven days a week prior to the pandemic. We see this as part of our service to the area, with the varied use of the building bringing us into contact with lots of people.

But we have our challenges here as well. A sizeable portion of our copper roof has been stolen by thieves over the last couple of years. We've replaced sections of it through our fundraising, but we don't have enough money to replace all of it, so there are buckets in various locations to catch the drips, and our roof now looks like a green and black patchwork quilt from the outside.

Doesn't every church have its challenges? There will always be problems of one kind or another. Will we simply say that, "*whatever happens* we will continue striving as one for the faith of the Gospel?" It's easy for issues around fabric and finance to become the focus for any church – and it's not like they don't matter, they do – they just don't matter as much as the Gospel! So whatever church we belong to, it is important remember the real calling, to strive together as one for the faith of the Gospel. And isn't it a joy and a privilege to work alongside others in proclaiming Christ, in word and action? Paul felt such joy in his Gospel partnership with the Philippians, and we can experience joy too as we serve alongside others in this amazing calling that God has given us. If anything, the challenges we face actually increase our sense of partnership and unity, as it forces us to strive together as one.

Suffering Together – Joyce Willacy



At the end of Philippians one Paul says:

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Something I've found in my own life is that suffering, even though it's so very painful, has given me something that the good things in my life never could – that it's brought such benefits, such treasures. Looking back suffering is actually a privilege, even though it doesn't feel like it at the time. For it's been in those darkest times that I've experienced not only a comfort and connection with God, but also with other people. And it's in those times of suffering, somehow because of the pain, because of the bad things, that I've met the most special people in my life and found and grown my most treasured friendships. The friendships I value most are those where, at different times, we've shared each other's darkest places, where we've carried one another.

For it's because we experience pain, that it makes us able to recognise and feel the pain in someone else, and to really be there for them in their darkest times. For there, you connect in a different way, at a deeper level. And it creates a special bond, a bond that's unbreakable – that lasts for ever.

When we suffer together, it brings unity with Christ and strengthens our fellowship with each other. I've found this to be true in my relationships with other members of the church at Emmanuel, whether it's in our individual pains, or our struggles as a parish. There's a strong sense of community, where we do share both our joys and our sorrows together. And the real fellowship and friendship we have brings a very tangible sense of support, something that you can feel really deep inside.

I know it probably sounds a strange thing to say – but I actually feel very lucky in the bad things that have happened in my life. Not that I'd have said this at the time, because they were some of the worst moments of my life. But without that suffering, there's no doubt that the quality of my life would have been so much poorer.

Pain happens. And it's hard. But pain also has a power. And through the pain, I believe that God has a purpose. Suffering together creates and makes possible a deep bond and connection with others that joy and pleasure never could.

Living our lives in a manner Worthy of the Gospel – Debra Foster



Paul says in his letter to the Philippians that *'whatever happens we should live our lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel.'* What does that mean? I am sure it has been debated for many years by many minds better informed than mine. I have seen it described as:

- Demonstrating the worth of the Gospel in our lives
- Living in a manner that honours Christ and his sacrifice
- Making our aim and focus to reflect our citizenship in heaven

None of these give me any practical guidance, but my understanding of Paul's letters is that we should resist temptation to compromise our belief and lifestyle to escape difficulty or persecution. We should be true to the word of God and believe and trust him in everything.

This can be hard in practise. I find in difficult times I can easily get caught up in finding a solution to the problem that is facing me. I worry and get upset if things are not improving or resolving in the way I want. I read recently that this could be interpreted as arrogance, as I am trying to force my will on a problem instead of offering it up and letting God's will be done.

Sometimes things can get horribly out of control before I remember that I need help and I should be asking God to help me to work through the situation. Just handing the problem over can itself provide great relief to 'let go and let God'. The outcome may not be what I want but will be what I need.

So for me living my life in a manner worthy of the Gospel means trusting God to support me and teach me how to develop morally, spiritually and humbly – whatever happens. To treat others the way I would like to be treated and to share my knowledge, understanding and techniques when called upon to do so.

Prayers – Written by Jim Berry

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the good news of Jesus Christ; for his life, death and resurrection,
which is the good news that sets us free to know you as Father,
to live in hope, to be full of joy and to be at peace.

We praise you that there is a story to tell, a message to proclaim.

We praise you for the truth of the Gospel,
and for the way it has touched, changed and renewed people's lives all down the centuries.

We praise you that in Christ we have proof of your love for each one of us,
and that there is no limit to what you can do in and through us.

We praise you for every time the Gospel is preached and made known,
and for every person whose words and deeds make it real.

Father, we praise you for all you have done for us and for the ways you use us as channels of your love.

We ask that, by your Holy Spirit, we may be equipped and empowered
to make known the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the Church, the one Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world,
the Church that reaches all the way back through two thousand years and all across the world today.

Let us pray for guidance encouragement, and a genuine awareness
of the immense privilege of belonging to the people of God.

Let us ask God to fill his Church with the Holy Spirit,
that we may be equipped to worship him in the way he deserves.

We pray for our Churches, Clergy and people as we serve our communities at this time.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Father we pray that whatever happens in our lives be it good or bad,
you will help us as Christians, to conduct ourselves in the manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

We thank you for Paul's example and for his message to the people of Philippia.

Lord when suffering comes, give us courage, help us to be brave and help us to stick together as your people
and remain faithful to the Gospel message.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Whatever we face, we do not face it alone.

Wherever we go, we do not journey alone.

However we suffer, we do not bare it alone.

Whoever we are, and wherever we go, and however we journey, we go in hope and faith,
for we go with Christ, who always goes with us.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**