

Rector's Letter - June 2023

The Reverend Christopher Harrison



A few days ago, one Sunday morning, I was in the churchyard outside St Peter's church and saw a team of men erecting scaffolding on one of the buildings nearby. One of the men said to me, 'I wish I was in church rather than doing this work'. I sympathised with him. It reminded me of the time a few months ago when I was walking to St Peter's, again on a Sunday morning, and a man who was repairing a stone wall on the Derby Road said, 'Say a prayer for me in church, Father'. He told me he'd been doing the same kind of work for almost fifty years and was ready to retire. I wonder how many other people have to work on Sundays when they would rather be in church. Someone even told me recently that he had to get special permission to get time off work to attend church on Easter Sunday.

Over the last thirty or forty years the concept of Sunday as a special day has steadily been eroded. Of course in western society Jewish people have long had to contend with the reality that Saturday, their Sabbath, is not seen as particularly special to most other people; the same is true with regard to Muslims' observance of Friday as their holy day. But surely the growing number of pressures upon Christians which make it harder to attend church on Sundays must have contributed to the decline in church attendance in recent years. Such pressures include the expectation that many school children take part in extra-curricular activities on Sundays; the popularity of Sundays as a day for visiting friends and family; and the fact that many people are either just exhausted by the working week or catching up with all the household tasks which have accumulated during the previous days.

All the same, these factors should not be seen as excuses for the decline in church attendance. There does seem to be an increasingly widespread belief that we don't need God, that organised religion is unnecessary and all that matters is one's own personal spiritual preferences. The Church of England has traditionally been quite relaxed in the expectations it places upon church members, and maybe this has contributed to a sense that if going to church doesn't make you feel good, then you might as well not do so. How, then, can we encourage people to think beyond satisfying their own personal needs, and to see the Christian faith as something which inspires us to go beyond ourselves to reach out to the needs of others and to strive, with God's help, towards a vision of a better world?

If the Christian faith is seen as basically 'me-centred', while this may be superficially attractive to some, most people will soon see through it. We need to remember that our faith should challenge us to enable God to break down the barriers which often exist between each of us and other people, so that we are spiritually enriched and energised by the diversity of the human race. It can be hard to open ourselves to the needs of people very different from ourselves, but when we allow ourselves to be led by Christ to walk alongside others in their journeys through life, we usually end up gaining far more than we give.

These are some of the challenges faced by our parish as we embark upon a period of transition during the coming months. Those who will be involved in drawing up the parish profile and associated documents, in preparation for the appointment of my successor, will no doubt be reflecting upon the particular needs and context of both churches, bearing in mind all the challenges currently faced by the wider Church. While I am already feeling sad at the prospect of moving on, it will be an opportunity for everyone in the two churches to take stock and to renew our parish vision, working with diocesan leaders whilst also remaining true to our own ethos and values.

Finally, and more immediately, we are rapidly approaching our celebration of St Peter's patronal festival on 2nd July, when we give thanks for our patron saint St Peter. Please do support this service, at which our CMS mission partners will speak. We are also planning a bring and share lunch after the service; please do make every effort to bring something to share. Let's hope that the meal can be an opportunity for us to have a great social time together, and that the food which we share will reflect the diversity of our congregation.

Services in June

Sunday 11th	8.15 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
	9.45 am	Family Service	St Peter's
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	All Saints'
	10.45 am	Sung Eucharist	St Peter's
	3.00 pm	Service of celebration of love, life and inclusivity	St Peter's
	6.00 pm	Choral Evensong* Responses <i>Ayleward</i> Wood in E-flat Love is the key <i>Helen Williams</i>	All Saints'
Monday 12th	1.15 pm	Meditation	St Peter's
Tuesday 13th	11.00 am	Holy Communion	All Saints'
	1.15 pm	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Thursday 15th	11.00 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Sunday 18th	8.15 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	All Saints'
	10.45 am	Sung Eucharist* Holy Communion in C/F <i>Stanford</i> How beautiful are the feet <i>Stanford</i>	St Peter's
	5.00 pm	Taizé Service	St Peter's
Monday 19th	1.15 pm	Meditation	St Peter's
Tuesday 20th	11.00 am	Holy Communion	All Saints'
	1.15 pm	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Thursday 22nd	11.00 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Sunday 25th	8.15 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	All Saints'
	10.45 am	Sung Eucharist* Kyrie (Short Service) <i>Tallis</i> Missa Beata Maria Virgine <i>Sanders</i> Salvator mundi <i>Tallis</i>	St Peter's
	6.00 pm	Choral Compline*	All Saints'
Monday 26th	1.15 pm	Meditation	St Peter's
Tuesday 27th	11.00 am	Holy Communion	All Saints'
	1.15 pm	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Thursday 29th	11.00 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
Sunday 2nd July	8.15 am	Holy Communion	St Peter's
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	All Saints'
	10.45 am	Patronal Sung Eucharist* Tu es Petrus <i>Duruflé</i> Mass in four voices <i>Byrd</i> Locus iste <i>Bruckner</i>	St Peter's
	5.00 pm	Holy Communion with prayers for healing	St Peter's