

4th Sunday after Trinity. 5 July 2020

Welcome & Gathering

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

All **And also with you**

Hello and welcome. God gathers us from the scattered places of our lives and joins us together in worship, to pray and to receive his word.

Leader: O Lord, open our lips

All: **And our mouths shall proclaim your praise**

Leader: Let us worship the Lord

All: **All praise to his name**

Leader: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

All: **As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.**

Loving Lord, fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving, peace-giving presence, that we may praise you now with our lips and all the day long with our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As our morning prayer rises before you, O God, so may your mercy come down upon us to cleanse our hearts and set us free to sing your praise now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn: King of Glory King of Peace

Introduction

In our worship today we continue with our 'called to be...' series, reflecting ironically on the calling to be the church scattered.

When we're talking about the church scattered we could be talking about the people of God who have moved elsewhere out of the locality, perhaps very far away. These days in our nation, this might happen because of a new job, meeting a partner or other circumstances. But there are of course more sinister circumstances that lead to people being scattered. Chapter 8 of the book of Acts describes how Saul, who eventually became St Paul, headed up the persecution of the early Christians in Jerusalem. The people of God were scattered far and wide. We are now scattered as a result of coronavirus.

SO there is that kind of scattering to 'elsewhere' and in this worship we will hear where some of our former church members have ended up as they have grown up and been scattered into new places and situations.

The other kind of church scattering we are going to focus on today is what happens after we have gathered together to worship. The beginning of our worship times are often referred to as the gathering as we recognise our coming together. We gather together to worship, to pray, to hear God's word, to receive Holy Communion and to minister to one another, to have Zoom meetings! Through our gathering together we are hopefully empowered and encouraged in our faith.

Then at the end of our worship we are usually dismissed or sent out! **"Go** in peace to love and serve the Lord."

After 1 or 2 hours (usually) gathered together for worship and fellowship we are then scattered again into our daily lives.

Before his Ascension into heaven Jesus commissioned his disciples to "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." Jesus commissioned them and sent them out and he commissions us and sends us out to share the love of God in deed and word in the everyday hours and tasks and interactions of our day and week.

And it is in this time that we are called to put into practice our faith by living it out! It's Adele Owen living out her faith as she leads the work of GARAS, that's the Gloucester Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. It's Marion Evans living out her faith working as a major player in the NHS in Gloucestershire. It's James Parsons living out his faith as a bridge engineer. It is the time you spend working, socialising, helping, parenting, volunteering, caring, shopping and playing... etc... etc...

As George Herbert hymn says, 'Seven whole days not one in 7, I will praise thee.' Our Christian faith is a Monday-Saturday plus Sunday faith and not just a one day a week faith!

As we've been saying over several weeks now God calls us to all kind of tasks, situations and relationships in our lives. One of the most fulfilling human experiences is when we end up doing a job that we have always dreamt of, although it doesn't always work out in quite the way we would have hoped, and that can be a hurt that needs much healing.

As a very young child I wanted to be two things. Firstly, I wanted to be a medical doctor... and I guess I'm quite involved in healing ministry and wellbeing so that kind of fits. The second thing I wanted to be was a bin man. Why? Because I thought they only worked one day a week! Now being a Vicar I would call that irony!! Then when I was in my teens the school had a computer programme that identified possible future careers that might be suited to. One of the top results for me was, jockey! I still don't know why... I don't think I submitted my height and weight!

Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Talk

Called to be the church scattered. Jesus is calling us to be salt and light, to show something of the good things of God in and through our lives day by day.

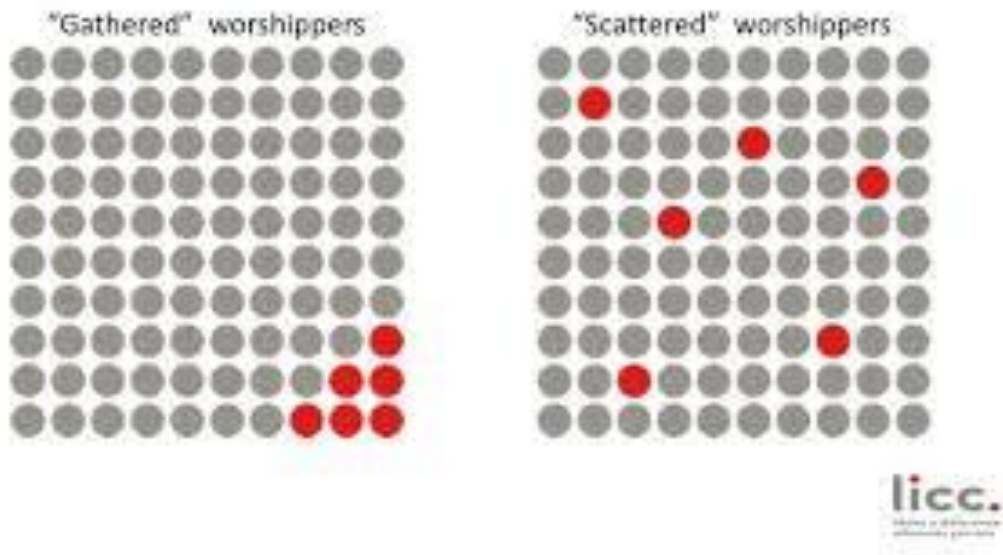
We've all gotten used to hearing about the R rate with coronavirus. As most of us now know the R stands for reproduction, and the number determines how many people that a single infected person will go on to infect. A good friend of ours was sharing how when it comes to the virus we obviously want the rate to be as low as possible so that less and less people are infected and the virus scales back. However, as Christians, we want to see a reproduction rate that's higher than 1, not for the coronavirus, but of faith in Christ Jesus... the spread of the kingdom.

I think it's a helpful picture of spreading to help contrast the ghastly images of the virus spreading; to instead see the love and goodness and grace and beauty of God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ spreading from person to person, community to community.

Jesus Christ has chosen **us** (you and me) to be agents of the transfer of his love and peace, mercy and forgiveness.

One of the ways we can be this do this is by seeing our scattered lives as really important times for God to use us in wonderful ways.

On the screen you will see two squares of dots... which some of you will have come across before on many occasions through the work of London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC)



The 6 dots represent the percentage of the UK population who gather in church each week. 6% might not seem much but it is actually a large number of people... millions!

When we gather together (the red dots together in the corner of the left square) that's a special time for us as Christians as we join together, and we long for the time when we can do that face to face again. It's an important time, but it's only a small percentage of a week.

The rest of the time the 6%, those millions of people of which we are a part are scattered into other various places and spaces. If we remain together we don't have the same effect on those around us... the grey dots.

The reality is that most church members will not be able to spend more than, let's say more 10 hours in a 168 hour week directly engaged in church activities and doing wonderfully important churchy things. The other 158 hours of the week are spent elsewhere. Take out sleep hours and most church folks are left with 110 hours... at home, at work, with friends and neighbours etc...

We need a fresh grasp of the 10 hours in church and the 110 elsewhere. How can what we do in the 10 or even 2 hours of gathered time help people to live well as Christians in the other 110 hours? And how can the 110 hours be lived well for God and inform what we do when we gather for the 10 or 2 hours?

The sad reality and criticism of church and Christians is that we do not easily connect the 10 with the 110 or the 110 with the 10. Many Christians do not know how to share their faith in everyday situations, or perhaps don't see what they do day by day as part of faith and important to God.

Equally we who are leaders in church gatherings have sometimes been very guilty of portraying the gathered bit as the only important godly bit, not fully acknowledging the rest of people's lives as Christian witness and service, and have not been proactive enough in helping people to make the connections between faith and daily life, and equipping church goers to be witnesses for Christ each day in whatever job, task or relationship they are engaged in.

Confession & Absolution

So now, in the silence of our hearts, let us pray to the Lord, bringing our individual and corporate failures to respond to God's call and live to his praise and glory.

Lord our God, in our sin we have avoided your call. Our love for you is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Have mercy on us; deliver us from judgement; bind up our wounds and revive us; in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let me say loud and clear, God is really interested in what we do when we gather for 1 or 10 hours a week, but he is just as interested in what you are doing in the rest the week and the rest of your life. When you are parenting you are on the front line of mission. When you are volunteering you are on the front line of mission. When you are at your sports club, gardening club, quiz evening or at school, college, rotary or WI, or on zoom you are on the front line of mission. Whether you are dealing with spreadsheets, interviews, phone calls, machinery, people, nappies, food or toilets you are on the front line of mission... called to be salt and light, witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ. It's called being a whole life disciple... 7 whole days, not 1 in 7!

Let us have confidence to live out our faith, and may we find ways to be salt and light and stay Christ like, when we are scattered about during the course of week!

Finally, part of the disconnect between faith and daily life can come because deep down we struggle to believe that Christian faith is relevant to daily reality and other people's lives. I leave you with part of a reflection I received this week from LICC...

The gospel, amazing as it is, true as it is, sounded like complete nonsense in Paul's day. It sounded like Jesus was scratching a non-existent itch. 'We want someone powerful, someone clever, and you're telling us to pin our hopes on a crucified carpenter-cum-rabbi. Next!'

Perhaps you recognise something like this in our times. Generation Z look for authenticity, millennials look for affordable houses, and boomers look at their pensions hoping they'll be enough to go on a cruise, but we preach Christ crucified. It can feel like nobody we know will turn to Jesus.

The truth is, just like in Paul's day, the gospel sounds like nonsense in ours. Yet it remains good, and true. In pointing our friends, neighbours, and colleagues to Christ, we are not trying to convince them to purchase a product they neither need nor want. We are pointing them to the one of ultimate relevance; the one who answers their biggest questions, and fulfils their deepest longings.

But for them to embrace Christ involves a 180° turn with a triple pike. It would require such a radical change of worldview and lifestyle that it would be like being born again! This is where we need to be encouraged that the Holy Spirit is alive, well, and at work.

Whilst our words and deeds play a vital role we need to trust God to do his thing in and through us, and in others' lives.

Notices

You may well be aware that the Government's gradual lifting of lockdown restrictions means that our church buildings are once again able to be used for public worship. As I have said in the weekly briefing this week PCC's are having to process the guidance from the Government, the Church of England and the Diocese, and we will keep you informed of developments in the Parishes here. It may take a few weeks to have gatherings in the buildings, and please just be aware that even when we return to our buildings things will inevitably going be different. Online worship provision is also likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future alongside any return. In the meantime if you would like to receive Holy Communion I will be offering simple socially distanced and safe smallish group celebrations of the Eucharist on a Wednesday at 12noon and 1pm. Please book with Clare if you would like to come along. Her contact is on the website and weekly briefing.

Blessing

May Christ draw us to humility and worship, And as we are scattered to the different parts of our lives may Christ bring us to see God at work in the ordinary and everyday; And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be amongst you and those you love and remain with you always.

Now we go into the world to walk in God's light, to rejoice in God's love and to reflect God's glory. **AMEN**