

**The First Sunday after Trinity**  
*Parish of Tidenham, via YouTube, 2020*

*Romans 5:1-8*

*Matthew 9:35-10:8*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

There are two main sections into which the year is divided, for those of us who worship in the Church of England. The first section, which ended last Sunday, takes us, each year, through the story of the life of Christ. We begin each advent thinking about the promise that the Messiah is coming. And then through Christmas and Epiphany we trace his birth, and childhood. Through Lent, into holy week, and through Easter we remember the heart of Christ's life: his suffering, death and resurrection, and then we remember his ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church.

The rest of the year, these 20 or so Sundays after Trinity, are all about how we make that story our own. How we allow Christ to make us different. How we allow the Holy Spirit to permeate and marinate our lives, so that, slowly, slowly we, as individuals and as communities, start to resemble that life of resurrection and hope, that life bubbling with the Holy Spirit.

That is what the work of the next 20 weeks or so is, before we find ourselves once again at another advent. And God willing, at some point during this green season of Sundays after Trinity we will meet again face-to-face in our churches.

There's a reason why we wear green for this bit of the year. Not just because it's pretty. But because green is the colour of growth. The living world around us, which has blossomed into

life during this lockdown, is growing, and vital, and alive, and that is what we need to be as well. We need to be growing Christians. Full of vitality, full of life.

I want to just point out a couple of things about how we might begin this journey of becoming more like the Christ whom we love, and whom we seek to follow, and they come from this morning's readings.

First of all: it's really important to remember that the victory has been won. Easter never stops. Our job as Christians is to live an everlasting Easter day. Is to live in the confidence that the power of death and darkness is broken, and that life has won the day.

Notice in the reading today that when Jesus begins his teaching ministry, Scripture tells us that he went about "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness." I think the order of those words is important. Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God. And because the kingdom of God is coming, is already arriving, as a result of that he is able to cure and bless and minister to people. And actually at the end of today's reading when he sends out the 12 Apostles, his instructions are in the same order: 'as you go, proclaim the good news, "the kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons'.

The works, the healings, the exorcisms, follow, because the kingdom of heaven has come near. The message of Christ, and the message that he asks his followers, his apostles, and then through them the disciples, and Christian people ever since; the message he asks them to proclaim above all is: the kingdom of heaven has come near.

That is an awesome message. What if that were true? That's the question that the church has put to the world in which it exists

ever since. That is the question that Jesus asks his own disciples to put, they go around the villages and towns of Galilee. If the kingdom of heaven has come near to you, what might that mean?

And that is the question that the Scripture is going to put to us over these next 20 or so weeks. If the kingdom of heaven is near to you, is near to me, how might that transform my life? Your life? Our society? Our church? Our world?

And we don't need to go very far, this week, to find so many places where transformation is desperately needed. Whether it is the challenge of institutional racism. Whether it is the destructive power of disease. Whether it is the desperate poverty that so many of our brothers and sisters exist in day by day. If the kingdom of heaven draws near to these places, to these situations - if the power of Easter is even now leaking into our world as the kingdom appears, what might that mean?

And then just briefly one other thought. There's something interesting in this gospel reading about names. We get the disciples' names. Names, as we know, are important in the Bible. And the author of Matthew's Gospel bothers to record the names of the apostles. And that's at least partly because everybody matters. We not a kind of ubiquitous army of slave drones that God uses to kind of squirt his kingdom all over the place. God chooses individuals. God uses individuals. God chooses you. By name. And as we hear the names of the 12 Apostles read of course we recognise that so many of them are basically going to turn out to be failures. Matthew will deny Jesus. Judas will betray him. James and John will get obsessed with status. And God uses them anyway.

But it works, because we're not proclaiming our own kingdom. My message to you is not that the kingdom of Tom is near. The

parish of Tidenham doesn't proclaim the kingdom of Vicar David, or the kingdom of Janice, or even the kingdom of Fiona! We proclaim the kingdom of heaven: where Christ is the king. We are heralds of God.

And last Sunday the vicar talked about how traditionally services begin with the sign of the cross, and with the words "in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit." And indeed that's exactly how I began this service.

When we meet to worship we lay down a marker at the very beginning that what we want to do is not in our own name, but in the name of the Trinity.

And actually, what are the last words that you will say at the end of the service? "In the name of Christ. Amen."

All of our worship is sandwiched between those two statements. We meet in the name, under the banner, looking for the kingdom, of God. And then we go out in peace to love and serve the Lord, again in his name. In the name of Christ. Amen.

And our worship mirrors our lives. Everything we do should be done in between those two statements. The ministry we offer, the way we try to be a decent husband, wife, son, daughter, grandparent, employee, boss, friend... Whatever. Our triumphs and failures as we live out the life of a Christian in the place where God has put us. It's all done in his name.

So welcome to the Sundays after Trinity. Take up that ministry to proclaim, wherever it is that God calls you to be, that the kingdom of heaven has come near. And who knows what God will do!

Amen.