

Sermon 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018

My sermon today will be part one of my report to the APCM. Both parts will be available in written form at the APCM and on the website.

Over the past few years the PCC has developed and worked with a mission statement. It is worded broadly so as not to be a constraint but hopefully helps us to see everything we do as a church in the context of our service of God in this place. I hope it also encourages those who lead and support the various groups in the church and all those whose hard work contributes to the life of the church to see their work as hugely important and valued service.

The mission statement is displayed at the back of church, appears on our website and also forms the framework of the annual report.

Why are we here? Why do people of different backgrounds, political views, ages, gender etc. come together each Sunday and during the week to worship and work together? To this question and many other questions of faith and mission there are numerous answers. Our common faith in Jesus Christ is the starting point of course. The simplest and most helpful I have found is from an article I found online by Tim Challies.

“The local church was founded by God for the purposes of God and the glory of God. Our task is not to define it according to our own desires or anyone else’s, but to learn how God defines it, then to follow him in obedience.”

In other words – it is not our church but Gods church

The church is described as the body of Christ and so it is my belief that a mission statement should reflect the ministry and mission of Christ. After Jesus had read from Isaiah in the synagogue he used Isaiah’s words as his mission statement (Luke Ch 4) t. He even referred to it when asking Johns disciples to report back to him – Ch 7. Let’s look at our mission statement and reflect on what we currently are doing and what we should be looking to do in the future.

**Reaching up** – “glorifying God in our worship and providing a welcoming and sacred space where everyone can be helped to worship God in the beauty of holiness” Jesus never stopped worshipping his heavenly father and glorifying his name. He taught about the importance of prayer and practiced what he preached. He gave his disciples a simple prayer which starts with honouring as holy the name of God while at the same time acknowledging the intimate way we can approach God.

At the moment our view of heaven is as through clouded glass and it is foolish to speculate on what is prepared for us except that it will be wonderful because God loves us and, seeing face to face, must surely bring forth our worship. It is possible that the only thing we do now as a church which we will continue to do in eternity is to worship God. So we try and metaphorically “reach up”, giving God our best. While we can worship God at any time (and hopefully do) there is something special about coming together. As we prepare and plan our worship we (I’m not using royal we here) – it is done as a team, we look to balance our understanding of a God who is transcendent - a God who is holy and a God who is immanent – who knows us better than we know ourselves; (Choir) we balance our well-loved traditions and hymns with the importance of having a service which will be accessible and contemporary for those who may be new to church - particularly the younger generation. We sing familiar hymns and new hymns; we have special services sometimes in the Celtic style. We have been using our common worship seasonal books for over five years now. Some are looking a bit the worse for wear. When we reprint we will review the liturgy and see whether any small changes are needed to make sure that the service

runs smoothly and that we are allowing ourselves some space to reflect on what is said and sung.

The fabric furnishings, cleanliness and decorations of the church are also very important in creating an environment which stimulates and encourages worship. (*Pictures of inside church – flowers etc.*). As is the warmth and ability to hear what is being said. All those who help with these things have a crucial and valued role in making this space a sacred space. We now have a special area where people can sit down to read, reflect and pray – develop this. Prayer table

But although everything I have mentioned is important what matter most is not “what can the church building and the act of worship do to help your worship” but “what can your worship do to help and encourage the church.” When we come to church we bring our whole selves – our talents and our weaknesses. We offer them to God and pray that our openness and willingness to seek him will be a transforming process. This time together is one of fellowship but it also has the potential to be life changing. So it is with both familiarity and awe that we come each Sunday. And I would suggest that worship begins as soon as we set foot in the church.

**Reaching out** – “serving our community and sharing the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ by word and action.”

Jesus did not sit in some cave somewhere dispensing wisdom to all who made the pilgrimage to him. He went out to people – people of all backgrounds – poor and wealthy, men and women, healthy and sick, righteous and unrighteous, Jews and Samaritans. He talked to them, ate with them and healed them in body and spirit. We cannot be a holy huddle. Our faith may be strengthened and energised by a couple of hours on Sunday but it then has to be worked out in the remaining six and half days of the week. As a church we share in Christ’s healing ministry through our support of the Charities Committee fundraising events as well as our support of the Shoebox appeal, Children’s society, Christian aid, Salvation army, Wellspring and Chelwood foodbank.

We are the church and we are trusted with its future. We once again have to balance our knowledge of the fact that we can do nothing in our own strength with the understanding that we all have a part to play in the growth of the church. Growth for me means more people knowing they are loved by God, and that through Christ’s death and resurrection they are forgiven and reconciled to God. The freedom and joy in knowing this brings a desire for discipleship – a longing to belong. Faith is a journey and we are called to help people on that journey. That may mean making the most of opportunities or creating opportunities. Last year our mainly music and messy church sessions with children and families have created closer relationships. This year we hope to offer a form of worship – perhaps as part of the messy church sessions on Saturdays which will be helpful to parents and children. It has been good to see parents bring their children to our all age services and receive the feedback on how much these are enjoyed. There are so many opportunities for our church to create links with our community. The local schools are welcoming and visits to and by the schools continue. The transfer of the parish rooms to the church will hopefully take place in a seamless way which will mean business as usual for everyone using the rooms but also open up opportunities for the church in its mission. It is a valuable resource.

Communication is vital and, although the digital age has brought problems the internet is a valuable resource. Last year we launched our new website and hopefully soon we will have a Facebook account. This the way most people find our information these days although I still maintain nothing can equal the personal approach.

**Reaches in** – providing a caring, inclusive and nurturing environment where we can help each other on our spiritual journey.

Reaching out is tremendously rewarding. It can also require much patience and strength. Jesus challenged injustice and hypocrisy but he knew human weakness. I love those words of Isaiah, writing about the suffering servant “A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish” Jesus didn’t beat people into submission or insist on them following a strict set of rules before they could belong and those of wavering faith he encouraged. He described himself as the good shepherd who knows, loves and cares for his sheep.

In order to be a faithful witness to Christ we are encouraged to have humility, to know our own weaknesses and rely on his strength. Our regular worship helps us as we feed on Christ by word and sacrament. Our prayer life is crucial – both personal and corporate. As is our commitment not to get so far and stop but to continue the journey as we learn more about our faith, discern how God is leading us and what we can learn from the scriptures concerning God’s love and will and guidance of his people. Throughout the year we offer opportunities to learn through the bible study groups and home group. These are not groups for those who just have an academic or intellectual interest but for those who also want to see how the bible, the church, the wisdom of others can help us in our discipleship and in our journey together as a church. We need each other and the other groups in the church provide the love, acceptance and fellowship that gives support and friendship to church members and also to those who may not yet be part of the church. It has been very rewarding to see how these groups have developed in their understanding of their important and much valued role in this.

Some aspects of our mission can be done with little or no expense in financial terms. But to maintain, heat and insure the building as well as paying our contribution to the Diocese for the overall cost of providing clergy and the support we need is expensive. Currently we are having to dip into our capital to the tune of £33,500 a year. Don’t be fooled by the figure in the accounts which looks as though we are sitting on pots of money. The accounts have to be presented in that way but, as donations and legacies cannot be guaranteed we are facing a problem which has been with us for over ten years and is now getting so serious that it is threatening the mission of the church. Our income is far less than our outgoings. Now, I can ask you to give more and I hope that you review your giving annually. We can also hope and pray that through growth and a sense of belonging new people will want to support the work of the church financially. The prime purpose for our mission and evangelism is not to get more bottoms on seats in order to boost our dwindling funds but it has to be said that those who are committed disciples of Christ have a desire to contribute to the work of his body, the church which is much appreciated.

I am greatly encouraged by the work and focus of all who are engaged in various ways in the mission of the church – through preaching, teaching, music, looking after the fabric and care of the church and making it a place of beauty, children’s work, communication, hospitality, nurturing, the list goes on. We have seen new people joining us and we have seen current members answering God’s call to licensed ministry – namely Clare and Linda who next year will become pastoral workers here. It is exciting and a cause for praise and thanksgiving. But, in order for this or any church to continue to thrive we need more resources – new disciples, more volunteers and we must be faithful in prayer.

Once again this year the archbishops of Canterbury and York are inviting the church to join in a focussed time of prayer between ascension and Pentecost. Please, join us as we look forward with hope and trust to a new year of worship and mission.