Wootton Vicarage
Ascension Day
21st May 2020

Dear members of St Marys

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God Colossians 3:1

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 3:5-6

Today - Ascension Day - marks the triumph of the risen Christ, when he ascended into the heavenly realms to be seated in the place of all authority. As the first of these verses proclaims. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we discover - astonishingly and wonderfully - that he is head over everything 'for the church' (Ephesians 1:22). He reigns for his people.

What a reassurance for Christians in strange times like ours. No disease can undermine his rule. No disaster will loosen his loving grip. And no discouragement need silence his people. And so we read in the same chapter of Colossians: 'Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity'.

The global prayer movement Thy Kingdom Come connects with this. From Ascension to Pentecost, we are called to pray daily, for five friends to come to faith. For the Holy Spirit - who he ascended to pour out - to open their eyes to Jesus Christ.

It's one thing which is not much changed in lockdown. We can pray. Perhaps there is more time to pray. That doesn't mean its easy. To help me to pray, I need the help of resources and lists and alerts as well as my conscience and the Bible. And to know it is worth praying, I need to set my heart on things above. To know that my ascended Lord is at the right hand, where he loves to hear and answer our prayers. To realise that evangelism begins with God.

And yet - Colossians also calls us to be ready to speak. To our friends, about Jesus. So that the Holy Spirit can open their eyes to him. We might think that's near-impossible in lockdown. Not many of us are spending much time with others. But this week I was made to think again.

First, because we do have new opportunities. On walks around the village, or from the front garden, we say 'hello' to people we may never have spoken to. Sometimes - at a safe distance - conversations take place. Or perhaps we are helping a neighbour with shopping - and getting to know them. Pray for more opportunities like these!

Second, because there are kind questions we can now ask: is your family OK? Is there anything you need help with? Questions which lead to care. And questions which can lead to deeper care: how do you find hope? Even, how can I pray for you?

Third, as we get to know people, we will begin to see how the story of Jesus connects with their stories. And can pray again for kind conversations to become conversations 'seasoned with salt', which graciously point to Jesus as the one with the answers to our deepest need.

With love in Him

Peter

News this week

Thy Kingdom Come Praying for the Holy Spirit to be at work bringing five people you know to faith in Jesus.
A 'global wave of prayer' from Ascension Day (Thurs 21 May) to Pentecost (Sun 31 May).

TKC at St Marys:
- daily 20 minute prayer meetings online at 9am;
- daily prayer journal (attached, on the website and on an App) for use in your daily prayers eg at Prayer o'clock;
- activities for families and young people also on the website or from Emma Hearn.

Re-imagining Church When the church building is re-opened we will need a great deal of help to ensure we meet safely and continue to provide an online service (perhaps livestreamed) while restrictions on numbers and activity are in place. Please pray for the formation of teams which can help keep us 'COVID-19 Safe' and develop/deliver our online presence. And let me know this week if you would like to help - whether or not you think you have relevant expertise!

Christian giving Details of how to give regularly online to St Marys are available on the homepage of the website. For simple one-off gifts, we intend to have a 'donate' button available soon.

We realise that for some people, the coronavirus crisis means financial hardship. But if your income remains stable - and you may even be spending less than normal - please consider whether for a time you can increase your support for St Marys and other Christian charities and missions, all of whom are experiencing a fall in donations at present.

If your regular giving to St Marys was by way of cash on Sundays we can arrange to collect such offerings safely (in envelopes, sealed and clearly marked) from your home. Please let me or the Treasurer Phil Wainwright know if this would help. If you would like some yellow gift aid envelopes please let me know; there will also be some available on Sundays in a box in the church porch. These can be returned to churchwarden Hazel Sanders at 52A Church Rd.

Please pray:
- for five friends to come to faith in Jesus
- with thanks for falling rates of coronavirus infection and deaths
- for who have suffered bereavement over the last month, and especially for the family of Dot Smart
- for the Young family as Phillip is furloughed from ministry here from 2 June, and for staff and other leaders as arrangements for ministry over the coming weeks are altered
- for St Marys online services - that the Lord will use them to sustain his people in faith love and hope, and to reach people in Wootton Stewartby and beyond with the gospel; please give thanks and pray for all who help to put these services together, and that the technology which enables them will remain reliable week by week
- growth group leaders as they gather church members online and on social media, and maintain contact with isolated people over the phone
- all who are attending the online Christianity Explored group
- St Marys Mission Partners Alf and Hilary Cooper (CMS, Chile) as they support church plants and the ministry of La Trinidad Church, Las Condes, Santiago from isolation, and giving thanks for the survival and health of new born grand-daughter Jessie whose birth three weeks ago in Broxbourne was followed by two big haemorrhages

Regular services and other events during the coronavirus crisis

Sunday 24th May
From 8am Morning Service On the YouTube channel:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlOsYfZKLADo1u-Lyd089V5Li62Mz-KKK
Sermon over the phone : 01234 866195

11.30am Zoom Coffee Meet one another online - with break out groups so everyone can be heard
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88965219015?pwd=ZUF1RjUreTh5UStPVm1RcmpsTzkwUT09
Meeting ID: 889 6521 9015
Password: 031033

7.15pm Prayer Gathering
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87027408382?pwd=L1JUaVJLVkZYUlpMRllDYzBqWWY3UT09
Meeting ID: 870 2740 8382
Password: 087588

Daily
9am until Sat 30 May (except Monday) Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Meeting on Zoom
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89826364658?pwd=MVk3MU8yOFZtZnF6ajJWMWZLc0JhUT09
Meeting ID: 898 2636 4658
Password: 289721

8pm Prayer o'clock A daily pause for prayer in our homes, as near 8pm as you can make it

This Week
Mondays Tuesdays and Thursdays Growth Groups now meeting online, by phone, WhatsApp and text to share news, read the Bible, support on another and pray for people and the world. Details on the May-June sermon card here: https://9b68fd89-e6b7-4f5b-b79b-2b76c52eb06a.filesusr.com/ugd/1c3acf_dbf6a1945dd74730b5361fb90e5b1832.pdf

Monday 25th May
8pm Christianity Explored
Online version of this introduction to the Christian faith.
Contact Phillip Young: saintmaryscurate@gmail.com 01234 401462