Gratitude Sept 2020

Today is the day that we have been looking forward to for 21 long weeks. Our church, which to my knowledge has never missed a Sunday in its 500 year history, has a congregation again. A truly wonderful event that deserves us to give thanks to God and celebrate it.

So I turned to the gospel for today and was duly disappointed to the extent that I think God was having a laugh. So, looking around for a Gospel reading which talks of celebration I stumbled upon the story of the ten lepers. Leprosy is a chronic, progressive bacterial infection caused by the bacterium Mycobacterium leprae. It affects the nerves of the extremities, the skin, the lining of the nose, and the upper respiratory tract. People with the disease in Jesus’ time were ousted from the community, required to shout ‘unclean’ to warn others of their infection and they were also required to cover their faces with some form of face covering. We know what that is like don’t we?

Jesus obviously had great sympathy with the ten lepers that came to him. He cleansed them and sent them on their way to the synagogue where the priest would examine them and lift their lockdown allowing them to re-join the community and once again hug friends and family. You would think that they would be extremely grateful to Jesus because being excommunicated from the community is, as we know ourselves, a big thing. But, out of the ten, only one came back to express gratitude, and that person was a non-Jew from Samaritan. So once again, the dogs get to eat the crumbs from the master’s table, and by the way, since none of us are practicing Jews, we are also dogs under the table!

Jesus was more than a bit disappointed when only one of the ten came back to express thanks. The others presumably were either too engrossed in their new freedom or just took Jesus’ grace for granted. Are we grateful that, apart from being sat here today in our own Church, we are saved by the grace of God, cleansed through baptism and supported by God’s love and our Faith? Are we grateful to the people in our lives that nurtured and encouraged us, helped to bring us to Faith? Are we grateful for all those who put their lives on the line to nurse all those thousands of people in hospital and care homes recently, and those who kept working producing and delivering food to keep us alive (not to mention the toilet roll producers). We really have got so much to be grateful for and celebrate right now.

This turbulent time really is teaching us a thing or two. We see people interacting in ways that seven months ago would have seemed impossible. People checking up on their neighbours, taking food to those who may not have the time or means to cook for themselves. Dog walking, ringing friends and recognising loneliness. The list of positives goes on and on. It’s almost as if we have stopped judging people and we are somehow all equal. That is the great thing about CV 19 – it effects every one of us. No matter who you are or where you live or how rich or poor you are, what religion you are or are not, it can strike anyone so is a great reminder that in God’s eyes, we are all equal.

I think that God is talking to each one of us – religious or not religious. I think that he wants us to celebrate that fact, that, in his eyes, we are all equal. To use a church term, we are one body. So I really, really hope that when this is eventually over, we never ever, as a society, go back to our insular ways and our foolish ways of treating people who are not in our gang so to speak, or doing this like that because that’s how we’ve always done it without considering our fellow human beings that make up both our local and wider community. So let’s be grateful to God today for the reopening of our church and for the many good things that have unexpectedly come out of this pandemic.