

Wyre Forest West Churches

Diocese of Worcester
Mamble with Bayton, Rock with Heightington and Far Forest

Sunday 17th January 2021 – 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

10.00 a.m.	Morning Prayer	On-Line with Zoom
10.45 a.m.	Virtual Get-Together	On-Line with Zoom

Dear Friends,

I hope that this finds you all well and surviving our current lockdown. There is a mixed picture within our area of the numbers of cases rising in some places but falling in others, but it is great to hear about how many people are now receiving their vaccinations.

We are currently 'meeting' on-line (or by telephone) for morning worship on a Sunday and it's great to see so many people joining us. It is so important for us to remember that God is everywhere. We might find it easier to pray in a church building and with other people, but we can worship and pray anywhere. God is so much bigger than we can imagine, in all sorts of ways, and he cannot be 'contained' within a church building.

Yes, we look forward to a time when we can come together to worship, particularly when we can come together in larger groups and be able to sing, but for now we need to be patient and in the words of the Dean of Worcester Cathedral announcing the closure of the Cathedral for worship "We need to keep everyone safe, support the national effort to stop the spread, and protect the NHS."

There are a wide range of opportunities for worship on-line, television and radio, and a huge range of styles. Perhaps try something a little different to your usual style. If you discover something that you particularly like, then please let me know and when we are able to resume our 'normal' services then we might be able to try it ourselves. There are so many ways in which we can worship God and it might be nice to try something different occasionally.

Lent is now only 4½ weeks away and I'm currently putting together some resources that can be used for prayer and reflection throughout the season. These will all be contained in a bag - 'Lent in a Bag'. It would be hugely helpful to know how many people would like a bag, which we will arrange to deliver to you or leave at the churches for you to collect. If you would like to receive a bag, please can you let me know. There will also be some new resources for children coming out so please look out for them on our website, Facebook page and with our weekly pew sheets.

May God Bless you and all those you love.

Lord Jesus Christ, you taught us to love our neighbour, and to care for those in need as if we were caring for you. In this time of anxiety, give us strength to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick, and to assure the isolated of our love, and your love, for your name's sake. Amen.

Rev Sallie

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Bible Readings for today – 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

1 Samuel 3.1-10(11-20), Psalm 139.1-5,12-18, Revelation 5.1-10, John 1.43-51

Collect for this week

Eternal Lord, our beginning and our end: bring us with the whole creation to your glory, hidden through past ages and made known in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Requests for Prayer

Please continue to pray for all those who are ill, especially Annie Round, Paul Mills, Sylvia Jenkins, Susan Godwin, Edna Mills, Mary McGrath, Pearl Green, Margaret Wright, Polly, Maureen Boswell, Peter Cotterill, Gladys Bradley, Sandra, Stella Jones, Sheila Whitelaw, Pat Priest, and Dorothy Hughes. We pray for all those suffering with, and affected by, Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Pray for the family and friends of Audrey (Pearl) Coles, Sheila Ward and David Sargent, and all those who have recently died, and for all those who mourn.

Intercessions

We pray to Jesus, our Saviour and Friend, laying our concerns and needs before him, and saying:

Lord, in the stillness of our hearts; **may we hear you speaking.**

Lord Jesus, you call all Christians to live in unity and show your love in the world. We pray for your Church, in war and hardship, or in peace and prosperity. Give us the will to overcome minor differences and work together for peace and justice.

Lord, in the stillness of our hearts; **may we hear you speaking.**

Lord Jesus, you call all peoples and nations to deal fairly and justly with each other. We pray for all who influence decisions and actions, most of all in places where fear and want overshadow people's lives. Show us how to bring your compassion to the marginalised and unjustly treated.

Lord, in the stillness of our hearts; **may we hear you speaking.**

Lord Jesus, you invite all who are burdened with suffering and cares to come to you and find rest. We pray for those we know going through difficult times. Help us to be agents of your healing love.

Lord, in the stillness of our hearts; **may we hear you speaking.**

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you in our daily living, in our relationships, in activity and at leisure.

Lord, in the stillness of our hearts; **may we hear you speaking, listen to your words and follow where you lead.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Some thoughts on today's Bible readings:

We tend to think about Epiphany just as the day when we celebrate the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus. But Epiphany is actually a whole season and runs for the 4 Sundays between the visit of the wisemen all the way through to Candlemas, when we remember Jesus being presented in the Temple. These 4 Sundays of Epiphany are all about revelation, God being revealed. In today's old Testament reading we hear God revealing something of his thoughts to the young child Samuel - someone still innocent of life's ethical complications which can sometimes cloud our spiritual vision. Samuel becomes an intermediary between God and Eli, whose short sight is not only physical, but also seems to affect him recognising God.

Last week we saw Jesus being revealed as the Son of God to Israel at his baptism, to be an intermediary between God and the people, and today in the reading from St John's gospel he is revealed to Philip and then in turn to Nathanael, to individual's, perhaps the most important revelation because we must all recognise Jesus as our personal connection with God.

But how can we do this? We are given no information about what led Philip to conclude that Jesus was the prophet promised by Moses, or Nathanael to get much closer to the truth that he was "the Son of God, the King of Israel". They were both gripped and fascinated by Jesus and struggled to describe how they felt and why they felt drawn to follow him. This is at the heart of all true faith. In the midst of our confusion and uncertainty there grows a conviction of something solid, lasting and deeply true in the person of Jesus - not just a figure of the past, but alive to be encountered today. There is a saying about faith that goes - What your brain doesn't know your heart fills in.

Although this is very true, it doesn't mean that we do not need to try to see Jesus more clearly as our personal intermediary to God and to develop a living experience of Jesus for ourselves. He is there all the time calling to us but, just like Eli, sometimes we cannot hear him or do not recognise his call. There is an exercise that you may have been asked to do at some time that requires you to draw out your lifeline. Then

either in pictures or words you mark the significant moments in your life - I was asked to do this both in terms of my working life as part of my career planning but also when I first started training as a Reader and then again when I began my ordination training. We were asked to record highs and lows in our lives and then to try and see where God was at those times and whether we had been able to discern his presence. I am sure that you are all familiar with the story known as "Footprints" but in case you are not here it is.

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

The message of this is that He is always there but sometimes we don't recognise him or hear him above the cacophony of life.

So, how can we try and improve this situation how can we tune ourselves into God's wavelength, how can we have him revealed to us more clearly. We can read the Bible, discuss our faith with others, weigh up all the information, try it out and perhaps the most important we can practice listening to God. From personal experience I can tell that this is not easy, but the rewards are enormous.

During the difficult times that we are currently having to go through, when many of us are having to spend more time at home and more time on our own perhaps we can use this time to our advantage. Try spending just a few extra minutes each day just listening out for the voice of God. I'm not suggesting that you will hear a big booming voice appearing from the heavens, but you may 'hear' him in the sounds of nature, in words from the Bible, in the silence, or even, like Nathanael, in words from a friend.

In the Bible, time and time again, we see people discover Jesus as he is revealed to them through their friends - Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, and in today's passage, Philip seeks out his friend Nathanael, eagerly telling him that Jesus of Nazareth is the long awaited Messiah. Nathanael comes to faith through his friend. Philip didn't need to urge him or cajole him into following Jesus, but merely shared his own excitement, and in so doing Nathanael 'heard' God. Philip didn't need to do anything dramatic, he just left it to God, through Jesus, and as soon as Nathanael met God through Jesus himself, he believed.

As Christians, we are all called upon to reveal our God to thers. We need to share our excitement about Jesus and invite our friends to come with us. Once they meet Jesus for themselves, they too may 'see' him and believe.

So, let's make the most of this 'lockdown' time and use it to 'see' God revealed to us, and then in turn, 2000 years after Jesus birth, let us all try to reveal him afresh to all that we meet.

Amen