

## The Annual Service.

This was held on October 1<sup>st</sup> at St. James Garlickhythe. Although not everyone could attend in person 34 joined the congregation via You Tube. It was a delight to welcome back Father Tim Handley who was not able to be present at our Carol Service as he was in hospital.

There was an uplifting sermon from Bishop Christopher and a delight to hear Sir Andrew Parmley play the organ and Cheryl Enever's voice. The words of the Second Lesson that evening from St Paul to the Church at Philippi offer great wisdom in challenging and anxious times and were chosen by the Master who planned to construct his speech around them had the Installation Dinner gone ahead.

The service and the Clothing can be viewed by clicking on the link below. We are aware that the written word is important and so have attached The Right Reverend Christopher Chessun's sermon.

<https://youtu.be/NZro4x02DUw>

### **Needlemakers' Annual Service: St James, Garlickhythe 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 *Philippians 4. 1-2, 4-9***

The words of our Second Lesson this evening from St Paul to the Church at Philippi offer great wisdom in challenging and anxious times and were chosen by the Master who planned to construct his speech around them had the Installation Dinner gone ahead. But the best laid plans like so much else in recent months have had to change around the impact of a global pandemic which has been unprecedented in any of our lifetimes. We have been rather forcibly reminded that our lives are bound together with each other's wellbeing – for better or for worse as well as in sickness and in health. Yet our Annual Service is underway and for the first time ever is being broadcast so that a much greater company of Needlemakers than would otherwise be possible can tune in and we can worship together. I give heartfelt thanks for this and it has inspired me to reflect on those words which we have just heard and are so familiar to many of us:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say: Rejoice” (Philippians 4.2) and two verses later perhaps even more tellingly in our current context:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4.6)

Like much in the Christian tradition, this wisdom is counterintuitive because the starting-place is not our perspective on the world – as if we are always limited to looking out on the world as an observer. Instead we start with God's regard of us – from the perspective of

eternity – so that we are freed to see ourselves as participants and actors. And this wisdom is eminently practical, whether we are attempting to reframe our personal priorities, manage friendships, or leading a complex project or organisation.

St Paul's first piece of advice is to rejoice. In fact, it's not advice but an injunction. Rejoice in the Lord *always*. Not simply when we are happy; not just when things are comfortable and we are content. Rather, we ought to rejoice *always*. This is a challenge for there are many good reasons not to rejoice. Many are suffering in body and mind; many suffer uncertainty; many will endure considerable hardship in the coming months and years as a result of this public health crisis. And yet – we are to rejoice.

St Paul's insight here is that rejoicing requires us to find something for which to be thankful, something – or someone -- to rejoice *in*. Those who rejoice develop habits of thanksgiving and attentiveness. They see the particular play of light at evening; they see a formation of clouds and recall the imagination of childhood; they can see the race of raindrops down a windowpane and feel the energy of each drop. They are not just hopeless romantics but because they look – because they *see* – they have noticed something to delight in, and in which they can rejoice.

How many times do we fail to rejoice because we simply fail to see? But when we attend to what we find around us, we begin to discover ourselves in a proper relationship to it. We are free to see ourselves as one part of something larger through which we – and the joyful thing we observe – have a proper and lifegiving relationship. There will be many challenges for us in the immediate and near future. Do not forget to give yourself time to observe – time to see – what is around you. Take up St Paul's discipline of rejoicing! For if you look, you will find something beautiful that causes you to rejoice.

St Paul's next instruction is to be gentle. There are times when our happiness can mean we are forgetful of those around us. It is eminently possible that our rejoicing might occur even at the expense of others, whether we mean that to happen or not. But one way to avoid this is always to be gentle. We know instinctively to do this when we are with those we love, or with those who need help. But if we make gentleness a habit, we see that it is closely related to the disciplines of thanksgiving and attentiveness that keep us rejoicing. You see, it is necessary to be close to things to be truly attentive – to really see what is next to you. And this requires gentleness. We cannot see what is in front of us if we handle something or someone roughly, or dismissively. That is why St Paul follows the command to be gentle

with 'The Lord is near'. The God who sees us from eternity is also near, always gentle with us, always seeing us as we are – and as we might be - if we draw near to Him.

St Paul's last injunction is not to be anxious. "Do not worry about anything", he says, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4. 6). In other words do not let what you do not know trouble you. This is because worry erodes our capacities – because worry wastes our resources, and makes us less able to act appropriately and resolutely. It inhibits our care for others, and for ourselves.

For St Paul, worry is better replaced with something else, something that allows you to act, to participate, to live in a healthy relationship with what is around and ahead of you. And that is thanksgiving. We are therefore being encouraged by St Paul to replace worry with thanksgiving. If you feel anxious because of the challenges ahead, give yourself the time to look around you. Find something near that you can attend to, gently – and give thanks for it. Rejoice in it and – little by little – you will come to learn with how much gentleness and delight God rejoices to be near you – now and always.

So my friends, amid all that we are enduring and whatever may come to us, may this wisdom help us to hold fast to faith, hope and love, knowing not just that these three last forever, but being attentive to those small acts of kindness which attest to them and being willing to do likewise.

I can do no better than let St Paul have the last word:

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

(Philippians 4. 8-9)

**Amen.**