

Sunday 7 July 2024. Trinity 6
Revd David Treharne: Final Sermon at Tutshill

Well, here we are. Goodness me, there have been some special moments:

- Whenever the presence of God has been thick, palpable.
- Our parish weekends away.
- When lives have been transformed... baptisms, confirmations, weddings, commissionings, licensings, ordinations, commitments.
- Seeing God's gifting emerge and people living life together in the flow of God's love.
- When there has been reconciliation after fall out. When we've done disagreement well. When we've invested in relationship and community and worked together
- Sharing in joy and laughter but also pain and tears.

There have been some very personal moments for us as a family...

- My father dying Nov 2014
- Roseanna growing up and having most of her childhood here
- Kathy's cancer diagnosis and that journey.
- Covid and my 18 months of brain problems.
- I've turned 40 and 50 here! I've lived all of my 40's, my best years, here... best balance of youthful energy and experience.
- It's been a special time but it's also been a costly time here. I can sincerely say that I've given my all!
- The privilege of knowing you folks, worshipping with you, sharing mission and ministry with you, sharing laughter and joy, tears and pain... living life together with you. What an honour and what a privilege to have been your vicar and to have been involved in so many life events! Thank you for being companions on the journey.

What can I leave you with? Well, we have been looking at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, so I thought I would leave you with a letter (not that I am placing my words on a par with sacred Scripture!!). I will be naming different groups of people and would ask that you stand if you are part of a grouping that I mention.

To the beloved in Christ in the Parish of Tidenham...

Tidenhamites, Tutshillites, Sedburyites, Chaseites, Stroaites, Woodcroftites, Boughspringites, Chepstowites, Beachleyites, Briavelites, Hewelsfieldites, Brockweirites, Severn and Wyevalleyites... and residents are anywhere else!

1. **To those of you who are new to faith and church, baptised and confirmed... since Covid:**
Thank you for joining the church family. Don't give up meeting together (Hebrews 10:25), keep praying, keep asking questions, know that the Lord is ALWAYS with you. He delights in you and wants you to know him more and more. Following Christ and being a part of his church/body ... it is like a relationship. It can be so wonderfully simple and beautiful to begin with. Then it can get complex. Then complexity can turn to perplexity. This is a challenge and it will call for you to trust him more and more. As you trust in him, even in the doubts... you will find new depths and peace and harmony... and a fresh simplicity... and your place in the Body of Christ.

2. **To those of you who were here before I arrived:** Thank you for your faithfulness, commitment for standing firm and keeping on keeping on as there has been change and newness... like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal. The Lord affirms those who stand firm to the end!
3. **To those of you on the PCC:** Thank you for serving the Lord and sharing responsibility for the oversight of this Parish. Look to God... walk humbly with him. Work together well. The work of the Parish comes out of the relationships of the Parish. Do disagreement well! Take your responsibilities seriously but perhaps don't take yourselves too seriously. Dream big. Get stuff done. Have fun! Look upwards (to the Lord) and look outwards (beyond the church walls). Remember that it is God's Church... and without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit it's a bit pointless!
4. **To those of you who are ordained:** Thank you for your collaboration in the Gospel. Thank you for daring to respond to the call of Christ. He knows your wounds and your scars only too well and you know his wounds and his scars. As you love and serve the Lord, in the secret place of your heart may you know his reward. Do not neglect the gift of God in you and others. Fan the flame of those gifts. As you shepherd God's people... always remember how the Good Shepherd did it and follow his example!
5. **To those of you who are churchwardens or have served as churchwardens:** Thank you for holding this responsibility. Like the ordained, your part to play is significant. You will need the help of God and the help and encouragement and participation of God's people. Look to the Lord and call out to him in all the tasks you undertake and look to others and rely on others in sharing in those responsibilities.
6. **To those of you who are involved in leading worship in the parish, including preachers and musicians:** Thank you for the part you play in the body of Christ. May the voice of the Lord be the voice that forms and shapes your life over and above the other voices that will demand your attention. May every word spoken or sung or played proclaim not yourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord. May you build up and encourage the Body of Christ... and may you find great pleasure as you serve the Lord and his people. Be a good example! Serve humbly, authentically, generously, collaboratively, faithfully and in the power of the Spirit.
7. **To those of you who are involved in pastoral care in the parish:** Thank you for this ministry. May you have hearts in tune with the beating of the heart of the Good Shepherd. Look out for the lonely and hurting and may you have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to respond appropriately in love and compassion and collaboration. But may I remind you... in your boundless enthusiasm to help others, that it is Jesus Christ who is Saviour and Lord and not yourselves.
8. **To those of you who are under 11: part of SPLASH:** Thank you for being part of the church family. You're not only the future of the church... you are the church now. We need you in church. We need to learn from you. We need your laughter, your questions and your faith... and even your sticky fingers! When you are not in church worshipping it's not the same. We want you to be the best you can be... to be the people God created you to be!

9. **To those of you who are 11+ YOUTH:** As Ethan used to say, God didn't make a mistake when he made you! You are precious and loved and God is really keen to be involved in all aspects of your life. Know he is always with you on your journey. Wherever life leads you... you can always turn to the Lord. He may be unseen and even unknown to you but he's there and he loves you. He has plans for your lives! It's well worth exploring what those plans are. Never be afraid to call out to the Lord Jesus and follow him... however silly it seems or unpopular it might be!
10. **To those of you who work with children and youth in and out of church:** What a privilege and what a kingdom responsibility. May the Lord give you insight, ideas, wisdom and patience in what you are doing. May you and your Christian faith be a catalyst for good things in those young lives. May your part inspire and comfort, encourage and bring wellbeing.
11. **To those of you who are parents with dependents:** The Bible has a lot to say about the joys and trials of being a parent. God gets it – he sent his Son, born of Mary! Don't only lean on him in the spare seconds you have in a day! If you look to him in all that you hold, he will lead you and guide your steps. Pray for your children. Pray with your children. Ask them to help you pray! Make sure the house bible doesn't have dust on it! Or if it does, just use a phone! When you are weary and carrying heavy burdens come to Jesus! He seems to give rest... unthreatened wellbeing... and that same truth goes to anyone carrying heavy burdens.
12. **To those of you who would say you are 'old.'** We honour you amongst us. Thank you for all you have done! Do not think your place in the church family is any less than anyone else, or that your task as part of the church is done. You have reached a stage of life when you may be able to pray more and your prayers are SOOOO necessary. Do not neglect that high calling. Your prayers are vital and your words of encouragement and support have weight. Instead of being like Victor Meldrew make each of your words build up the church and advance the kingdom of God in others.
13. **To those of you who are retired and active:** Well done for getting this far! Enjoy your retirement... but similarly you know there is still kingdom work for you. Those carrying responsibilities you once held need your support and encouragement, your wisdom, your support, your involvement and sometimes your resources. Thank you for your volunteering which is so necessary.
14. **To the many of you who serve our communities and are a part of God's mission to the world day to day in the workplace, thank you!**
15. **To all of you...**
- **Thank you** for being a part of the Parish of Tidenham!
 - **Many voices** clamour for our attention. Listen well to the Lord, to each other and the cry of the Lord in our communities. Do not let poisonous destructive voices set the narrative.
 - **Keep on praying.** Speak firmly against the spirit of apathy in your lives. Pray for one another. Pray in and for the vacancy! Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Without the Lord we flounder. With the Lord all things are possible!

- **Do not lose heart.** Remember that God's love and faithfulness is extraordinary and he is faithful. Jesus Christ is Lord of ALL!
- That whilst the world has changed a lot since 2012 (Olympic year), yet alone 2,000 years ago, **the Gospel is still sooo relevant.** It's power to transform lives is as fresh as ever! God and his love make go in and out of fashion... but his love, his presence, his justice, his truth, his mercy, his joy... is unchanging!!!
- **Faith in action**, lived out and shared authentically day to day can make a difference to people and our world. And that that faith needs to touch every part of life... not just Sunday! Faith is for the home, our communities, our work places, our retirement, our socialising, our finances, our relationships, our family dynamics, our politics and so on! And that's the conversion... remember... us orientating our decisions and our lives around Christ, rather than always expecting God to orientate himself around us
- **Play your part in the Body of Christ.** Each of us has a part to play. It is not right for people to have to play the parts others are called to play.
- **May you have a spirit of generosity**... towards one another in speech, in hospitality, in welcome, in the giving of your talents, your time and your financial giving!

- **Do relationship and community well!**

The challenges will comes from within... our own weaknesses, brokenness and sinfulness. And it will comes externally from others and unholy forces at work seeking to distort, damage and corrupt relationships.

Do not be unaware of the battle against sin, the flesh and the devil in the realm of relationship.

As St Paul says in 2 Cor 2:11... do not be outwitted by Satan (2:11) when it comes to these matters.

God's mission is all around relationship and community. As Trinity, he is relationship and community... and calls us into relationship and community.

Relationship and community is the area where God's reign is most clearly shown in hospitality, reconciliation, forgiveness, in working together in partnership, in listening and speaking well of each other, in attitudes and acts of kindness and generosity, in a smile, in encouragement and blessing, in conflict resolution, in patience and in humility, in genuineness and authenticity, in co-operating with the Holy Spirit, in peace and love... and it is the area which is most vulnerable and at risk of going wrong. **The Bible is FULL of relational destruction and the transformation of relationship through God's intervention in the world!!!**

To find harmony, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace when there has been disagreement, dispute, difference and division is a sign of the Kingdom and a sign to the world.

May you be the people of God he has called you to be in right relationship over the days to come.