

St David's with St Michael's and All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter Newsletter for Sunday 5 September 2021 – Trinity 14

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this week's newsletter.

At our recent Standing Committee we reviewed our current Covid precautions. Given the relatively high number of cases in Devon we feel that we should keep our current guidance about social distancing and face coverings.

So please wear a face covering in church if you can and be mindful of keeping a safe distance from others indoors. Please 'mingle' outside church after the service rather than inside.

However, along with many churches, we agreed that congregational singing should resume. We won't be going back to the same amount of singing as before the pandemic just yet. Especially at St David's where there is a larger congregation we will start by having a few shorter hymns. At St Michael's with fewer people we can afford to allow more singing.

Please be mindful not only of your own wellbeing (especially if you're not vaccinated) but also of your neighbours' safety and make sure that you are not sitting directly behind other people especially if you would like to sing.

Remember: "space, face, grace"! Thank you for your consideration.

Our services today are:

9.30am Parish Communion (live streamed on St David's Church Exeter's Facebook Page) with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Ash Leighton Plom

11am Mass at St Michael's with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Ash Leighton Plom

4pm Thrive on Zoom: back by popular demand! We launched Thrive during lockdown last year as a space for peace and growth, to explore life's big questions, spirituality, and more, with presentations on each week's themes and conversation in breakout groups. It is for you, and has people who are regulars at church, new to

church, and everything in between. Why not try it out this Sunday as we review the last year's sessions and look forward together to what we have ahead?

Join Zoom Meeting:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?
pwd=WEh1dINCY3NRQTIcCXFjK2ZlejR0UT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?pwd=WEh1dINCY3NRQTIcCXFjK2ZlejR0UT09)

Meeting ID: 886 8573 8289 Passcode: 159821

Services in church and online this week

Tuesday 7 August, 9.30 Morning Prayer on Zoom. Please join us using this code:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09>

Meeting ID: 660 226 1392

Passcode: 196651

(prayers are from Common Worship Book or Daily Prayer app which can be downloaded

here: [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?
id=com.aimermedia.dailyprayer&hl=en_GB&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.aimermedia.dailyprayer&hl=en_GB&gl=US))

Wednesday 8 September, Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 9.30am Mattins and 10am Mass (also live streamed on St Michael's Facebook page) at St Michael's Church

Thursday 9 September, 10.30 Holy Communion at St David's Church

6pm Sung Vespers at St Michael's Church (also live streamed on Friends of St Michael's Facebook Page)

Friday 10 September, Gregory the Great, 9.30 Morning Prayer at St David's Church (also live streamed on St David's Facebook Page)

Sunday 12 September – Trinity 15

9.30am Parish Communion at St David's with celebrant Belinda Speed-Andrews and preacher Bill Pattinson (live streamed on St David's Exeter Facebook page)

11am Mass at St Michael's with celebrant and preacher, Robin Eastoe

4pm Thrive on Zoom

Covid-19 Safe for Public Worship

Please avoid touching door handles – Thank you.

Please use hand sanitizer on entering and leaving church.

Please wear a face covering in church unless you are exempt.

At St David's we are encouraging people to wear face coverings to come forward to receive Holy Communion and then to consume the host after moving away from the altar rail.

At St Michael's the priest will distribute Holy Communion to people in their seats.

Seating will be distanced to approximately 2 metres. Please sit on the seats where service books are placed. Seating is also marked by white labels at St Michael's.

Services should be 'no longer than necessary'; congregational singing will be gradually re-introduced.

Toilet facilities will be available and please follow the instructions for use.

Please avoid mingling inside church before or after services.

Please do not attend church if you are feeling ill or are shielding. Although we will do all we can to make the church safe you attend at your own risk.

Food for the Vulnerably housed in Exeter

Working through St Petrock's we are providing 16 packed suppers each week for people who are in transitional accommodation at the Crescent. Thank you to the small team which has convened to buy and make them. We don't need any additional support at the moment as there is a significant amount in our 'Soup Evening' kitty which can fund this for the time being.

Help with Churchwarden tasks

Often Churchwardens pick up tasks which could be done by others. We have already had some kind offers but there are a number of jobs which we will advertise in the coming weeks.

Would you be willing to help with one of these, please, even if you can't do every week?

Opening and closing the church on Sunday (weekly)

Clearing up (if needed) the churchyard on Sunday mornings before the service (equipment provided). Thank you!

Men's Breakfast

The next Men's Breakfast will be Saturday 25th September at 10am at the Farmers' Union. We may have to be on two separate tables depending on numbers on the day. Please contact Nigel if you would like to be on a mailing list reminder for this.

The next 5 years - who are we and where are we going?

Belinda is leading a study group based on the book 'A Future that's bigger than the past' (https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07YNTLDKB/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1) as we think and discern what God is calling us to for the next 5 years.

If you are interested in joining in the conversation please do email her directly at bspeedandrews@gmail.com

The dates for the meetings at 7.30pm are: Thursday 23 September and Thursday 14 October, before a parish meeting with Archdeacon Andrew Beane on Saturday October 16th. It would be good to have as many people as possible from both churches at that meeting when Andrew will outline possibilities for the future organisation of ministry in Exeter city and listen to our hopes and plans.

Grow Courses

The Diocese of Exeter offers courses to help *you* grow in prayer, make new disciples, and serve the people of Devon with joy. Sessions coming up include 'Sharing Our Faith', 'Stewardship Advocates', and 'Pastoral Care'. For more information or to sign up, please see <https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/lay-ministry/lay-learning/>

Chaplaincy

Volunteer mentors wanted to help people leaving prison

South West Community Chaplaincy have produced a new video, recruiting volunteer mentors in Exeter for prison leavers, here: <https://youtu.be/etTmRiFQXyE>

Can you provide support for men and women leaving prison to overcome whatever challenges they face to make a fresh start and build a positive future for themselves? SWCC are looking for new volunteer mentors to join our team in Devon and are offering full training for the role in September. If you are interested, please contact Managing Community Chaplain Cathy Jerrard on cathy@southwestcc.org.uk or 01392 284285 / 07816 428 470.

No experience needed, full training provided.

Parent and Toddler Group

We are looking at the possibility of setting up a weekly drop-in session at St Michael's Church for parents and toddlers associated with St David's School. If you could help regularly or on a more occasional basis please have a word with Ash. It would be great to open up St Michael's and welcome families associated with our parish school. Thank you for considering this.

Help with Traidcraft Stall

Could you help Richard Featherstone with the Traidcraft stall at St David's this month please? The stall is planned for 9.30am 26th September. Please have a word with Richard if you can help.

Heritage Open Days at St Michael's

Saturday 11th September: St Michael's will be open from 9am – 6pm

Refreshments served all day

2pm Guided Tour of the Church by Dr Richard Parker

3pm Informal Organ Recital by Dr Lorna Cowdry

Sunday 12th September: St Michael's will be open 10am – 6pm

11am Sunday Service

Refreshments will be served from 12.30pm

3 – 5pm Cream Tea with singing from Boys of the Old Brigade

We plan to run a bookstall at these days so please hold on to your books so that they can be sold in aid of church! We can store them in church if it would help.

Green Team

Thank you to those who have filled in the Survey on sustainable forms of transport.

We will publish the results in due course!

Green Event: Ideas for how we can live more sustainably

Saturday 11th September 2021, 10am to 2pm

Local produce vegetarian Lunch £5 (tickets available)

With:

Co Cars and Bikes, Wildlife talk, Eco church, Churchyard tours

Mending & making things, Tea, coffee, cake

Traidcraft stall, Harvest produce

Participation table - bring your own ideas, Children's activities... and much more

The team would like to invite volunteers to staff stalls at the event especially for 'home and handicrafts' and 'harvest'. If you have green photos of local wildlife and plants or environmental projects that could be part of display on the day please send them to Neil: mrpragnell@gmail.com

Fruit trees for the churchyard

We are going to be working with the YMCA further to improve diversity and interest in the churchyard and we would like to raise money for a few more fruit trees, hopefully to plant this autumn. If you would like to donate a fruit tree for the churchyard would you make your offer to Clive Wilson please? We estimate that they will cost in the range of £20-£30 each.

Ordination of Ash Leighton Plom

Ash will be ordained along with three other candidates by the Bishop of Crediton on Sunday 26th September at 3pm. Unfortunately there will only be a small number of places available for members of each of the four parishes but we will organise a list to sign up if you would like to come. We plan to buy a stole for Ash to celebrate his ordination and if you would like to contribute would you give your contribution to Glynis Harflett or Stephanie Aplin, please. Any excess money will be given to Ash as a gift for books or anything else that will enhance his ministry. Ash will celebrate his first communion on Michaelmas, Wednesday 29th September at 7.30pm at St Michael's when we plan to provide drinks, cake and a presentation.

Parish Magazine – New Leaves

Please pick up your magazine for September. Thank you to our magazine team and distributors, especially Richard Barnes who has moved to Scotland this week having given great support to the magazine team.

Phone Networks

If would like to be phoned by someone from the church community or would just like to talk, please let Nigel know at nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com or by ringing him on 01392 660226 or Ash on 07855305519.

St Michael's services and prayers

If you would like to access the service details and prayer list for St Michael's please contact Oliver Nicholson at virtualsaintmichaels@gmail.com and he can add you to that weekly mailing.

Your Prayers are asked for...

Joshua and Hannah married yesterday at St David's

Please remember those who have died recently including:

Sylvia Pritchard

In the **Parish Cycle of Prayer:** Please pray for TicToc Nursery, St David's School, St Wilfred's School, Avanti Hall School, Globe Language School, Exeter College

Please also pray for:

the people of USA in the wake of storm Ida;

the people of Afghanistan;

the humane and generous treatment of migrants and refugees arriving in this country;

the worldwide Covid vaccination programme, giving thanks for all those who have enabled a rapid roll-out in this country;

those preparing for a new term at school, college and university;

the Heritage Weekend next week at St Michael's;

the Green Event next Saturday at St David's;

those seeking direction and employment at this time;

those working in care homes, hospitals and hospices;

those suffering from Covid around the world;

those working towards a more sustainable world.

With every blessing,

First Reading – Isaiah 35: 4-7a

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;

Gospel Reading – Mark 7: 24-37

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Address for 5 September by Ash Leighton Plom

“Jesus sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’”

Living Lord Jesus, open our ears to hear, and our hearts and minds to truly listen, to your Word and Spirit before we share in your Sacrament today. Ephphatha. Amen.

Thank you everyone, and for those of you who don't yet know me, perhaps new or joining us online, my name's Ash, one of the ministry team here at St David's church Exeter with St Michael's Mt Dinham.

Today I want to confront these miracles reported in that Gospel reading head on, as well as the prophecies in the reading we had before, from Isaiah, as the readings presage one another.

Let me start with this word “ephphatha”, which is from the Aramaic ‘p̄thāḥ’, ‘to open’. St Mark’s gospel was originally written in Greek, so this Aramaic word would have sounded foreign or unfamiliar to most of his original audience, as much as it does to non-Aramaic audiences today.

The inclusion of words like “ephphatha” suggest that the incarnate Jesus' first language was Aramaic. Sure, he probably spoke Greek to Gentiles as it was the 'common tongue' of his area in those days, and he knew Hebrew from the Old Testament readings and prayers in the Synagogue, but St Mark especially chose to include this Aramaic word in his gospel, which tantalisingly hints at the sound of Jesus' native tongue. Just maybe marvel at that for a moment, that here we have the sound of Jesus' own voice.

Scholars debate St Mark's reasons for including this detail in his otherwise very pacy and briefest of gospels. Some say St Mark is just being thorough and accurate, but I'd personally look for thoroughness more from, say, St Luke, who tends to include extra historical facts, whereas St Mark is sometimes said to be writing an action movie version of the life of Jesus, and is usually circumspect and not really prone to including things he didn't need to.

I almost wonder if, rather, St Mark knew what we see today – that ‘foreign religions’ are interesting to some people, and so including unfamiliar words can intrigue them: compare for example “namaste”, originally from Hindu Sanskrit. I know several people who are not members of any related religion, but who use “namaste”. Similarly, I think there were some people in St Mark’s day, hungry for spiritual satisfaction outside their pagan pantheons and philosophies, allured by Eastern ‘mystery religions’ and who would have been attracted to St Mark’s use of “ephphatha” in our gospel reading today. I actually had a conversation with someone

in the parish only recently who told me strongly that she doesn't like Christianity, but prefers “eastern religions”, and so I pointed out to her that Christianity is an eastern religion, and she was then suddenly much more interested than she had been a mere moment before! So, possibly, St Mark included the word “ephphatha” for this sort of reason.

On another level, though, I think it operates as something like a magic word. Compare for example “abracadabra”, which may also be from Aramaic “avra kehdabra”, or “I will create as I speak”. And this is what I really want to get into today, because Christian magic and miracle healings can feel a little uncomfortable for some of us in our secular culture, but that’s exactly why they need talking about. So: I hope to encourage you to believe the miracles if you don't already, to perceive the miraculous in your own life, and to share this exciting hope of God's supernatural gracious activity in the real world with people in your life.

So, our Old Testament reading, written about 700 years before Christ, prophesies a time when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped... the lame shall leap like a deer, and the mute tongue sing for joy”. The Gospel reading records some fulfilment of these prophecies in the miracles of Jesus, and I wonder how you feel when you hear these sorts of claims today?

I’ve been rereading Hegel recently, who was an 18th Century ‘Enlightenment’ philosopher, and one of the most influential thinkers in Western history. As some of you will know, Hegel was preoccupied with explaining away the miraculous in the Bible and in religion in general. Hegel taught that religion was an outdated step in humanity’s development, which he believed had been made unnecessary because of what he saw as the victory of 'Reason'. Hegel conceded that Jesus could be revered as a good moral teacher, but he was so embarrassed by miracles that he argued they only *seemed* to be miracles to the ignorant people of the past, whereas, in Hegel’s opinion, enlightened, scientifically-minded modern people should believe that miracles are impossible, and so he just disregarded any evidence in the gospels that he felt weren't compatible with his own pre-conceived worldview.

However, I want to challenge Hegel and say that I don’t think his is an intellectually responsible or sustainable interpretation. Firstly, it’s a colonialist derision of the past, propelled by his *a priori* assumptions about his own ‘enlightened’ rightness. In fact, people in the 1st Century were no less human than we are today, and perfectly capable of reason and scepticism. Remember ‘doubting’ Thomas, who didn’t believe in the resurrection until he was persuaded by evidence? The writers of the Bible reported on miracles not because they’re absurdly credulous primitives, but rather precisely because they're reasonable people who witnessed astonishing events in the real world, and wanted to record the facts of these for posterity.

Contrasting with Hegel, C. S. Lewis helpfully set out that “it is a foolish thing that people often say about Jesus”, that he was just a “good moral teacher”, but that the miracles must have been misunderstandings or later fabrications. In the actual credible evidence, Lewis argues, you can’t separate out the teachings from the miracles, because the miracles are there precisely to evidence Jesus’ authority to teach, and they were recorded by honest witnesses who were as stunned by the miracles as anyone would be.

So, Lewis' point is that you can't have a congruent Christian faith while also having a worldview like Hegel's that denies the supernatural. Lewis actually calls Hegel's position, “patronising nonsense”, and says the evidence and miracles overwhelmingly show Jesus to be God in the flesh. Kierkegaard, a contemporary philosopher of Hegel, rightly noted in his response to Hegel, that Christianity is rather *defined* by miracles, including the incarnation, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus. The miracles in Christianity aren't just a few weird supernatural incidents that you can set aside and still responsibly be a Christian – Christianity itself inherently testifies to great miracles as having happened.

For myself, as an historian and a convert from atheism, as I researched the evidence for the incarnation, death, and particularly the resurrection of Jesus, I found it reliable. I therefore realised I had to grow my assumptions as to what is possible, instead of just irresponsibly dismissing evidence that didn't fit my pre-existing worldview, like Hegel had done.

So, to sum up so far: we've seen that the Old Testament prophesies miracles, hundreds of years in advance, which the New Testament then records Jesus miraculously fulfilling. And I want to encourage you to believe the miracle of the prophecies and of the fulfilments, and to share the news of these with the people in your life. The first disciples were stunned to witness these miracles, and they recorded them for us precisely to build our faith in Jesus as someone who does fulfil miracles, and to give us a record of these miracles to pass on to others.

We often say, “I wish we had more young people in church,” or more children, more families, more students. But this is on each of us to warmly invite people we know. I mean, think of the benefit they're missing out on, musically, pastorally, eternally... uplifting worship, warm fellowship, hope for their future. We have incredibly good news to share - that God intervenes wonderfully in real people's lives - and we have great evidence collected by witnesses to substantiate our claims.

Jesus said that “greater things” than the miracles he performed would occur in and through the lives of his believers after his death, resurrection, and ascension, after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This means we inhabit a world where, according to the word of Jesus himself, the extraordinary is possible, as God's Kingdom breaks in to real people's lives in tangible demonstrable ways today.

Let's expect miracles, let's be praying for them, and let's share this hope with others. Invite them to church online or onsite, on Sundays and throughout the week – if you're unsure when our times are, check the notices, get in touch with a service leader, or see our websites or social media. For example, as well as Sunday morning worship, we've got a course starting online next month, which will be a great thing to invite people to. I want to meet your invitees, in person or online, soon.

However, I want to land with a final word about the greatest miracle - of God with us. In our looking for miracles in our lives, let's not lose sight of the beautiful miracle we always have at hand: Jesus with us, especially when we come together for communion.

Kierkegaard pointed to the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension as some of the definitive Christian miracles – God come from heaven to earth *in person* to teach and to heal and to die and rise again as an assurance of our future resurrection to abide with him in glory... great news indeed, attested by great witnesses. But Jesus also gave us the eucharist, communion, the mass, as the memorial and sign of his abiding presence with us.

The great Anglo-Catholic theologian Lionel Thornton once asserted that as we receive the sacrament, we become miraculously "members of Christ's body which was nailed to the cross, laid in the tomb, and raised to life on the third day". This remains perhaps the greatest miracle in Christianity: Christ is with us by his Spirit, the awesome presence of God indwells us now as we gather for communion.

So, friends, open yourself to the flow of the Spirit in the prayers, in the sacrament and in the week ahead. "Water will gush forth", in the words of Isaiah, streams even in the desert. God in his grace is miraculously present, even in this present moment. Pray, be expectant, and share the good news of God's activity in normal people's lives with folk around you, bring them to encounter him, too, as you yourself deepen your encounter with his presence. Ephphatha - be opened. Flow. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do join us next week for our services in church and online!

Prebendary Nigel Guthrie
St David's Vicarage
95 Howell Road
Exeter
EX4 4HL
01392 660226
rev.guthrie@btinternet.com