

St David's and St Michael's and All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter

Newsletter for 6 September 2020

Dear Friends

Welcome to this weekly update for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Sunday Worship

This Sunday the 9.30am service from St David's will be live streamed on Facebook and Howard Friend will be preaching at St David's and St Michael's.

We welcome back a reduced voluntary choir at St Michael's Church today.

Churches Opening for public worship

This week opening times are:

St Michael and All Angels – Wednesday Morning Prayer at 9.30am followed by Mass at 10am and Sunday Mass at 11am

St David – Thursday 10.30am, Holy Communion, Sunday 9.30am Holy Communion

Covid-19 Safe

These are the provisions we are making to keep worshippers as safe as possible.

Hand sanitizer must be used on entering and leaving church.

We should now wear **face coverings** in church. There are important exemptions which can be found at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20face%20coverings%20v3.0.pdf>

and which include those with a hearing impairment.

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.

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, with notices on the pews that should be kept clear.

Please observe appropriate distancing from others at all times and the one-way systems through the churches.

Services should be 'no longer than necessary'; and congregational singing is not permitted.

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

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

Live Daily Prayers

Please join us, if you can, for our streamed prayer services during the week on our Facebook pages:

On 'St David's Church Exeter' page: Tuesday and Friday at 9am.

Thank you to Belinda for leading Saturday morning prayers and Bill for leading Monday evening Compline over the summer. These have finished for the time being.

On 'Friends of St Michael's' page: Wednesday Angelus and Mass at **10am**.

If you would like an order of service please let me know.

A Message from Alison Whiting

Thank you everyone so, so much for your kindness and support over the past 3 years. It's hard to believe how quickly the time has gone - which is definitely a good sign!

Thank you too, St David's, for such a generous cheque, the gorgeous flowers and your lovely messages in my card. I have not yet decided what to spend the cheque on, but I will earmark it for something special, by which I can remember you all. I feel I have learnt and gained so much from being at St David's - such a friendly, accepting community - it has been incredibly valuable - not to mention, enjoyable - and I'm feeling well-prepared for the new challenges 'across the river'. My only real concern at this stage, is learning and remembering peoples' names, wearing facemasks!

Ash Leighton Plom

After several Covid-related changes Ash will now be ordained Deacon on Sunday 13 September at 3pm in Exeter Cathedral. Unfortunately the service won't be open to the public but I will be attending as training incumbent to represent the parish. Hopefully the service will be live-streamed on the Cathedral's Facebook page. He will be on retreat this week from Wednesday this week. Please keep Ash in your prayers as he prepares for his ordination.

Heritage Weekend

Heritage Open Days 2020 are on September 11th – 20th, but in a different format to the usual St Michael's contribution. As it is not possible to organise 'in person' events this year, there are some exciting online offerings.

On Friday 11th September we will be posting links here on Friends of St Michaels Facebook to access our online events -

- Virtual guided tour of the church by Dr Richard Parker (1 hour)
- An organ recital by our organist Matt Clark.
- Peregrine Lecture by Nick Dixon (11mins)

- The Choir of St Michaels singing 'Hear My Prayer' by Graham Keitch
- The church will be open on Saturday 12th September 8am – 4pm
- There will be two organ recitals by Matt Clarke
10am – 11am and 2pm-3pm.

We hope you enjoy it!

Harvest at St David's Church

We will celebrate our Harvest Festival on September 20th at Parish Communion this year. Unfortunately we won't be able to hold a Harvest Supper but I have spoken to the Esther Community and they would really appreciate a collection of dried goods again. In fact Donna told me how useful last year's gifts had been, even helping out during lockdown. They would appreciate any tins, packets, noodles, tea, coffee, juice or breakfast cereals. But they don't really use soup – and expensive brands are not necessary. So it would be fantastic if we could have a really good collection for them. Do bring along what you can on Sunday 20th and we will dedicate your gifts during our service. Thank you.

We will celebrate Harvest at St Michael's on October 4th (also St Francis' Day) and goods for Exeter Foodbank would be most welcome.

Quiet Day – Wednesday 14th October

After some consultation we have decided to hold our Parish Quiet Morning online. Penny Warren from the Community of Aidan and Hilda will be speaking on the meaning and implications of Celtic Spirituality. There will be two reflections offered with time between for reflection and prayer. We are suggesting a £5 donation which will all go the Community of Aidan and Hilda of which Penny is Members' Guardian. Please let Howard Friend know if you would like to attend and give him your e-mail address and contribution. Nigel Guthrie will host the Zoom sessions and send out invitations just beforehand.

Reopening of Churches for public worship – a continuing process

Our churches are currently open for one midweek communion and one Sunday communion. This gives the chance for the churches to be 'quarantined' for 72 hours between times to minimize the risk of any infection. We are keeping this under review in accordance with national and diocesan guidelines. We would love to return to a fuller range of services but that is not yet feasible so please be patient as we need to do this as safely as possible! Thank you for keeping this process in your prayers.

The PCC has now agreed a Risk Assessment process to allow our buildings to be used by a small number of trusted groups. The Risk Assessment is available for scrutiny on the St David's Website.

Magazine

The September magazine is now available online and in print this week. Please collect your copies if you kindly deliver them to others. Thank you to our Magazine team for their hard work and creativity.

Phone Networks

I know that many of you have appreciated phone calls from other members of the church community. If you would like to be phoned by someone and haven't had any contact please let me know at nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com or by ringing me on 01392 660226 or Ash on 07855305519.

Your Prayers are asked for...

Charles Argall, Janine, Charles Speed-Andrews, Nicky Jarman and her husband Tim and their family, Jacqueline and her family, Joy and her family, Claude and Gillian Harbord, Elizabeth Hewitt, Anne Smith, Grace Tointon, Pam Smith and her family, James and Katy Tyler, Andrew Wakley, Rosemary Willcox and Maurice Wright. In the **Parish Cycle of Prayer** we pray for Exeter University Staff and Students preparing for the new academic year and for Hannah Alderson and the Chaplaincy Team.

We pray for those not yet able to return to church and all who are worshipping with us at home

Please also pray for:

the people of Lebanon and Belarus

those areas and countries suffering greatly from Covid-19, and those who are feeling lonely or isolated;

those who are facing unemployment;

Schools in Exeter and Exeter College - now reopening.

May God keep you in peace and good health, Nigel Guthrie

Collect, Readings and Address for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
St David's Service will be live streamed on our Facebook page

Collect

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

First Reading Romans 13: 8-end

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Gospel Reading Matthew 18: 15-20

'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

An Address by Howard Friend – 6th September 2020, 13th Sunday after Trinity

Dealing with Sin in the Church

That's the heading given to this bit of Matthew in my Bible.

Surely not – you say – Sin in the Church – whatever next.

Puts me in mind of Lady Macbeth's famous one liner, when King Duncan is discovered murdered

What – in our House?

Must be a difficult line to deliver that one – with a straight face. Much easier by far to wring one's hands and exclaim - out out damned spot. (Will not all the perfumes of Arabia sweeten this little hand. You'd never guess I did Macbeth for O level would you?)

But leaving aside Lady Macbeth's disingenuous words. This passage, with the heading – Dealing with Sin in the Church – is a Protocol of sorts, it's a step by step guide to solving a problem. If it were computerised we'd probably call it an algorithm.

Now, where've I heard that word recently?

I have to say the best story of that exam marking algorithm fiasco for me concerned a young A level student who wrote an essay, a sort of dystopian fiction of how it can all go wrong. She got it absolutely right – of course – spot on. The irony is she was one of those downgraded. I think St Andrews, her first choice, did give her a place. If I were the Head of English there I'd throw in a Bursary .

Protocols, algorithms have a place – but – and it's a big but – they are often misapplied. And then they're labelled mutant – as we know.

Let me tell you a true story to illustrate this.

When we first went to Malawi in 1983 we were part of a start-up church in the capital, Lilongwe. It was a very exciting venture combining many different expat nationals and Malawians. It is now totally Malawian led and goes from strength to strength.

In those early days a young unmarried woman called Madalo - who attended our house group - became pregnant. Problem – how to deal with sin in the Church.

Remember Malawi was and is a socially conservative country, and Aids was kicking off just then. Sexual sin always gets the headlines doesn't it. I wonder why?!

We weren't part of the leadership at that stage but were frankly horrified at the harsh way she was treated, particularly by our Malawian friends interestingly – In line with the scriptural protocol we've just read - she was asked to leave the church. To add insult to injury we subsequently discovered that the father was one of the deacons – he stayed.

The right way to deal with Sin in the Church. I don't think so. You might reasonably say that step one in any such algorithm should be 'Take the plank out of your own eye'

However there are socially and theologically conservative churches around the world, even in this country, who adopt a similarly rigid approach to church discipline and justify their actions with reference to this piece of Scripture.

Here's why I think they're misguided. Ironically it's because of not reading the Scripture properly. (Not reading enough of it). This passage is sandwiched between Jesus's story of the lost sheep who the Good Shepherd spends his time searching for,

leaving the other 99 behind. And Peter's question about how many times should I forgive someone who sins against me? He asks Up to 7 times? (obviously a protocol type) – Jesus answers 70 x 7. In other words it's not about protocols it's about, love, compassion and mercy. Prioritising the so-called Lost Sheep.

If our primary motive is not love in this or any situation - then we're heading down the wrong algorithm. Discipline must be tempered with mercy and forgiveness. That approach wasn't at all apparent in that Church's handling of Madalo. There is a Happy End to that story by the way. We always kept in contact with her and her daughter Kinaoue. The last time we saw them in 2016, both were married with children and thriving - in another church.

Now there is an equal and opposite error, another Protocol misapplication lesson which haunts our church communities though isn't there. The child sex-abuse scandal.

The irony – the tragedy - here is that we didn't apply the protocol rigidly enough with disastrous consequences for the victims – and the church's reputation.

Let's go back to the Scripture a moment. That chapter starts off with Jesus saying we must become like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven – he then goes on – in an almost eerily prescient way to warn that it would be better for those who cause children to sin to have a millstone hung around their necks and be drowned in the depths of the sea. Such things will happen he says but woe to them who perpetrate such sin.

The church's mistake in dealing with the child sex abuse scandal was in not applying the protocol - being too merciful to the perpetrators (partly through ignorance of the nature of such abuse) – but also most worryingly in ignoring the effect on the victims and attempting to limit reputational damage.

Dealing with sin in the Church. Not an easy subject. You may say but we're not the only institutions to have been affected by this particular sin. That's true – but - we had a protocol, an algorithm, a warning from our Lord himself in Holy Scripture – and we didn't apply it wisely.

Just a word about our attitude to such abuse. It's tempting to take some of the language of that passage: Millstone / bottom of the ocean and adopt a vengeful / vigilante approach. But our approach should primarily be one of love and compassion. Love combined with wisdom concerning protection of the vulnerable. There is a balance between Love and Mercy on one side and Justice on the other. Does a Protocol / an Algorithm help? – I would say yes - if applied with wisdom. In conclusion may I suggest a verse from the Old Testament Prophet Micah as a shortened guide in such matters. That is dealing with sin in the church

Micah 6 vs 8

What does the Lord require of us:

That we Act justly, Love mercy and Walk humbly with our God. Remembering always to take the plank from our own eye first.

Amen

Do join us next week for our services in church or on Facebook!

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