



St Mary the Virgin Baldock



“Building with Christ”

Rector's Blog – day 51

Dear Friends

Philippians 2: 19 - 22

I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance. 20It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. 21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer.

This Sunday will be the tenth Sunday we have been locked out of the church. For some of you, you will have been isolating at home for a couple of weeks longer than that. For many people the delight of lockdown has begun to pall and it is seeming more like imprisonment. I'm hearing of more and more frustrations and arguments and relationships under tension as people are thrown together for longer than ever before with few means of escape. Others of you will be missing close family and especially physical contact. I still have not had a hug with my 2 year old grandson. Still more will have the spectre of the threat of job loss to cope with and worry about how to pay the bills.

St Paul knew a bit about waiting. He wrote the letter to the Church in Philippi when he was in prison, and he was almost certainly imprisoned for several periods during his missionary work around the Mediterranean. Read the passage again and imagine him writing it in a prison cell, aching to see the sunlight, to see his friends, to be delivered and set free. His was an extraordinary faith but it is not surprising that he starts talking about death being an escape! His hope in heaven as the reality of the fullness of Kingdom of God comes to the fore and sustains him even as he knows his calling, as is all our callings, to proclaim the love of Christ here on earth. He clearly saw his future as truly a win-win situation. But leaving prison in a foreign country, penniless, weakened and with lots of zealous Jews and competitive Christians baying for his blood, he could be forgiven if he didn't see it like that.

There are two other things that come to me from the first half line of this passage. *I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance.* The first is that he knows he is loved. Loved by God, yes, but also loved by the people he is writing to. He is buoyed up by their prayers, and that encourages him that in what have been some very dark moments, he is doing the right thing and following Christ in the way God intends. A major bonus of being part of a Christian community is that we understand we are not alone! We really do pray for each other, check up on each other, meet each other on Sunday mornings. We are all in it together.

The second is that we have the Spirit of Jesus Christ. I wonder what St Paul thought the Holy Spirit was doing when he was thrown into prison? And I wonder what difference it made for him trusting that the Spirit was with him in prison? Do you agree that on reading the short passage again there is a clear sense not so much that the Spirit will bring him to freedom, (although that is almost what he says in verse 19)? No, for me, it seems that his greater belief is that the Spirit will enable him to keep following the calling of following Jesus wherever that might take him.

So if isolation for you is a dragging or a difficult or a dark experience and you wonder where God might be in all this, ponder these verses! Identify with St Paul waiting in his prison cell. Remember that the very fact you are reading this means you are being prayed for by the Church community, and let that solidarity strengthen you. And if you can, share your frustration by speaking to some of them. And as we approach Pentecost, pray for trust that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to live out your calling of following Christ. For by doing that, like St Paul, you are proclaiming the Good News.

Conversely, if lockdown is still for you a haven, then give thanks for your many blessings, and pray doubly hard for those who are not so fortunate! And once again pray for trust that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to live out your calling of following Christ. For by doing that, like St Paul, you also are proclaiming the Good News.



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A prayer from the Iona Community

You keep us waiting.
You, the God of all time;
Want us to wait
For the right time in which to discover
Who we are, where we must go
Who will be with us, and what we must do.

So, thank you . . . for the waiting time.

You keep us looking.
You, the God of all space,
Want us to look in the right and wrong places
For signs of hope,
For people who are hopeless,
For visions of a better world which will appear,
Among the disappointments of the world we know.

So, thank you . . . for the looking time.

You keep us loving.
You, the God whose name is love,
Want us to be like you -

To love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;
To love without jealousy or design or threat;
And, most difficult of all,
To love ourselves.

So, thank you . . . for the loving time.

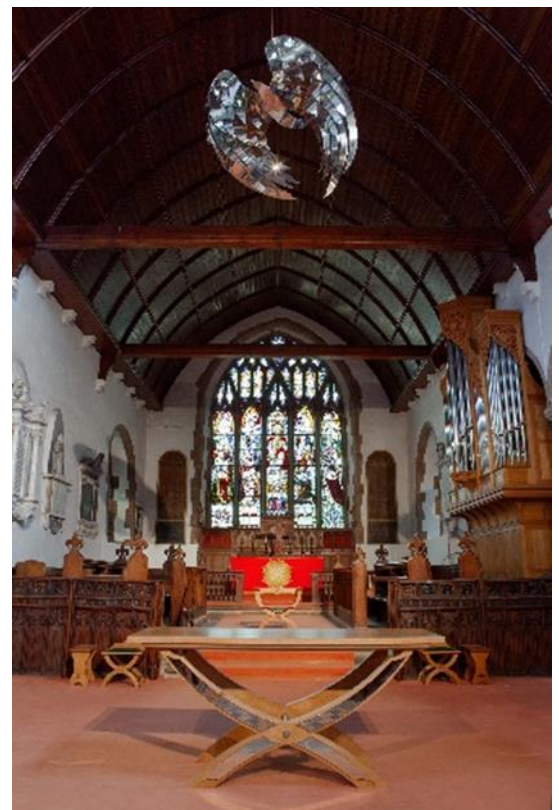
And in all this,
You keep us.
Through hard questions with no easy answers;
Through failing where we hoped to succeed and making
an impact when we felt we were useless;
Through the patience and the dreams and the love of
others;
And through Jesus Christ and his Spirit,
You
Keep us.

So, thank you . . . for the keeping time.

*And for now,
and for ever. Amen*

Here is a photo from St Dunstan's Mayfield in East Sussex

The image of the Holy Spirit above the altar was created by Maggi Hambling, another contemporary Christian artist, and unveiled in 2013. For Maggi Hambling herself it is very much about the human spirit being able to soar. I like the positioning above the altar and the sense of freedom and release it gives.



Every blessing

Andrew



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If you would like to join us for evening Prayer today (Friday) it is at 5.00pm

Topic: Zoom Evening Prayer on Friday
Time: May 29, 2020 05:00 PM London
Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89069939855?pwd=Q1A2c0dFNkJTdkhkZDBiN3BWVXBOUT09>

Meeting ID: 890 6993 9855

Password: 804216

If you would like to join us for evening Prayer on Saturday it is also at 5.00pm

The times for Evening Prayer for the rest of the week are
Sunday Morning Worship and 9.30am and Evening Prayer at 6.00pm (Details of how to join are in the pewsheets coming out on Saturday)