

Lord God, help us to trust in Jesus through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

- P**
- This is a polo mint!
 - I quite like polo mints. They can either be quite long lasting or they can go quickly with a satisfying crunch. They quite predictable, you know what they are going to taste like, although you can also exhibit your right to personal choice and individuality by purchasing the fruit flavours. And they have that enigmatic hole in the middle.
 - The mint with the hole! What is it that makes them stand out? There's nothing of substance in the middle!
 - Too often over the last 18 months I've heard people expressing a hope that life will get better, that the pandemic will be beaten. But like a polo mint they don't seem to base this hope on anything other than a wish to see things change. Indeed a shopkeeper the other day expressed her firm belief that fairy dust was the thing that was going to make all our problems go away. And I'm not convinced she was joking!
 - On the other hand the disciples and the crowds in this morning's reading had one very strong focus in whom they put their trust. The light shines brightly on Jesus as the glue that draws them all together.
 - He was the focus, the central point, that made them journey to see him in deserted and out of the way places, and even change their whole lifestyle to follow him.
 - And he is the focus that has drawn you all here today as well. To get out of bed at some unearthly hour and dress Amelia up smartly and bring her to church.
 - The Christian contention is that Jesus is more reliable than fairy dust and not like a polo mind with no substance. Instead perhaps he's like a box of matches! In fact he is the centre that makes a difference. And if you look at the two passages you can see what he offers to those who are drawn mothlike to his shining light.
 - To the disciples he provided leadership and direction and was concerned for their welfare, He said to them *'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while'*.
 - To the crowds he felt *'compassion'* seeing them as *'sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.'*
 - And to those who were wounded or outcasts in whatever way, he offered healing and acceptance.
 - And if you look at the slightly more opaque language of Ephesians, our first reading, you'll discover three more gifts Jesus offers to those who keep him at the centre of their lives.
 - He *'came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near'*. Isn't it extraordinary how you can feel peaceful sometimes in the midst of turbulence because you know who you are and who's you are? Are we are Christ's!
 - He offered acceptance. He has *'broken down the dividing wall'* between people who are different and suspicious of each other.
 - And he offered the chance to be stably grounded into *'the household of God, ... with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.'*
 - Pretty stirring stuff, this is a great privilege and a great security for Christians to hold onto, and if we're going to live it, it provides great challenges as well. For instance, if we are really going to live the biblical promise which Jesus gives us that he has *'broken down the dividing wall'* between people who are different and suspicious of each other, it leads us to the challenge of how we react to the rising number of refugees and economic migrants as a result of climate change. Our grappling with that is just one way of how living a Christian life following Jesus really does impact on day to day local and global events.
 - So that's all pretty substantial and not just empty words and that's why we are delighted that Steve and Laura have brought Amelia today to be baptised and that's why we are delighted and hopeful that we will be able to share with you the joy of helping her to discover that for herself as she grows up.
 - Let's pray with them that Amelia will discover that the centre of life is not empty and meaningless like a packet of polos but rather dynamic and surprising and challenging following Jesus like a box of matches! Amen.