



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

21st JUNE 2020

TRINITY 2

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>	PARISH OFFICE: Closed until further notice. TEL: 01252 331161; e-mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – 01252 321517 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
Jeremiah 20 v 7 - 13 Romans 6 v 1b - 11 Matthew 10 v 24 - 39	

BIBLE STUDY



Carol and I are starting Bible study on 'Great Prayers of the Bible'. There will be seven weekly sessions, online, using Zoom, starting on Tuesday 7th July 7 – 30 pm to 8 – 30 pm. Numbers will be limited to 12 participants, first come first served. If there is greater demand we will look into having other sessions. We will be using a course book priced at £3 - 20 available from Carol – please e-mail her or phone her on 313239.

If you haven't got internet access you can still do the course using the book by yourself – or, with one socially distanced visitor outside, perhaps.

We need to have orders for books by **TOMORROW Monday 22nd June.**

ST PETER'S CENTRE

Little Fishes, are now welcoming more children back. This means that, in accordance with Church of England and Diocesan guidelines, our Centre is out of bounds to everyone else (except for cleaning, necessary maintenance etc). No other events can happen there at present. Please keep our pre-school staff, children and parents in your prayers at this challenging time.

COLLECT FOR TRINITY 2

Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth: send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

There is a free national phone line 'Daily Hope' that offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services. Available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TREASURER SHEILA TAYLOR

I have had many questions about the "envelope" giving, what should you do with it? If you would like to make payment to the PCC, bank details are as follows:

Bank: Natwest Bank Plc. 30 Wellington Street, Aldershot. GU11 1AE
Account Name: PCC of St Peter's, Ash
Account Number: 50140256
Sort Code: 60 01 08

Please make sure you include your name.

Or you could write a cheque and send it to me, enclosing one of the weekly envelopes. Send your cheque to: Father Keith, The Rectory, Ash Church Road, Ash, Surrey. GU12 6LU Thank you on behalf of the PCC and keep safe and keep well.

CHURCH BUILDING RE-OPENING

New Government guidelines mean that we are able to open our church building for **INDIVIDUAL PRIVATE PRAYER ONLY**. Social distancing, hygiene and cleaning of the building have to be carefully followed. Those at risk because of underlying health conditions or age are still urged to stay at home. We will be using only the Lady Chapel and limiting entry to no more than 6 people at a time. We will open on Saturdays from 9 – 30 am to 11 am & Tuesdays 2 – 30 pm to 4 pm. This will be supervised with two volunteers each time. We are still not permitted to have regular worship services, until further notice.

ANY LOCKDOWN STORIES TO SHARE?

We would love to hear some of your stories, experiences, thoughts, insights during lockdown. If you have something you would like to share please send to Fr Keith and it will appear on this weekly sheet. From this experience I know we all have a lot to learn about ourselves and each other.

Morning Prayer to share at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

All: All the earth, shout and sing for joy
for great in your midst is the Holy One.

- 1 'Behold, God is my salvation; ♦
I will trust and will not be afraid;
- 2 'For the Lord God is my strength and my song, ♦
and has become my salvation.'
- 3 With joy you will draw water ♦
from the wells of salvation.
- 4 On that day you will say, ♦
'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name;
- 5 'Make known his deeds among the nations, ♦
proclaim that his name is exalted.
- 6 'Sing God's praises, who has triumphed gloriously; ♦
let this be known in all the world.
- 7 'Shout and sing for joy, you that dwell in Zion, ♦
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All All the earth, shout and sing for joy,
for great in your midst is the Holy One.

This hymn is said or sung:

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for he is kind:
*For his mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.*

Let us blaze his Name abroad,
For of gods he is the God:
Chorus

He with all commanding might
Filled the new-made world with light:
Chorus

He the golden-tressed sun
Caused all day his course to run:
Chorus

And the moon to shine by night,
'Mid her starry sisters bright:
Chorus

All things living he doth feed,
His full hand supplies their need:
Chorus

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for he is kind:
Chorus

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

Pause to call to mind our sins and confess them to God:

(L) Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

All O King enthroned on high,
filling the earth with your glory:
holy is your name,
Lord God almighty.
In our sinfulness we cry to you
to take our guilt away,
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Trinity 2 (see previous page)

*Read Jeremiah 20 v 7 – 13 followed by Psalm 69 v 8 - 20
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Romans 6 v 1b - 11

All: Alleluia, alleluia. Speak, Lord, for your servant is
listening. You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 10 v 24 – 39 Here are some thoughts from
Revd. Carol on today's readings:*

When I first read through the passage from Jeremiah set for this morning, I was left feeling, well, a little dry of thoughts and a bit unenthusiastic. However, as is often the case, once taking all three readings as a whole, and leaving it a couple of days to mull them over in my mind, before returning for a second read through, verse 10 from Jeremiah stood out: 'For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble.' It reminded me of the persecution of Job, when his three 'friends' went along to support him and ended up telling him that he must have done something really bad to upset God, and all that he was going through was his own fault! Job would have felt let down by his friends, for he knew within himself that, despite what he was undergoing, God was with him and he would not have anything bad said against Him.

Jeremiah had spent around 40 years prophesying of the difficulties God's chosen people would face. There would be some good years, but most of the time would be lived under the leadership of bad and weak kings. People would be pushed out, with many being deported, until only the dregs of society were left. For this Jeremiah was not popular, he was shunned, even threatened, becoming isolated from the very people God had called him to serve. Jeremiah must

have thought at times that God had deserted him, or at least wondered what the point of it all was, nevertheless, like Job, he did not turn his back on God - he is driven by what He wants of him – this is Jeremiah’s calling, a calling to speak the truth come what may.

In the Romans reading Paul is doing the same in that he is speaking the truth. He is telling people what being a follower of Christ really means. This is as relevant to us today as it was to the early followers, which is that we can’t go on living our lives the way we always have. Paul sees that the Romans are going with the flow of society, rather than proclaiming the risen Christ as Saviour. He says it how it is. There is no point in salvation if we do not live it! And Jesus also warns of how uncomfortable it is to speak of truth that comes from Him.

In some ways the Coronavirus has given us, as Christians, an opportunity to speak God’s truth, by living in a way that shows tolerance – tolerance of each other, tolerance of the restrictions on our lives and tolerance of what is out of our control, and of course living in His love – again love for others, especially those who are on the margins of society, love for what God has given us, despite the challenges that we each face.

I don’t know about you, but, despite being in tight lockdown (shielding), (so not venturing out further than a walk with the dog or to pick up a prescription and a visit to the dentist in the last 12 weeks or so,) I have had the opportunity to chat to many of my neighbours over the garden gate at the required 6ft (2Mtr) distance. People who I would only rarely see in ‘normal’ times, because they would either be at work, school or I would be off busying myself with ministry in the parish. These chats have been insightful and, without fail, the conversation has turned to faith, albeit in a roundabout way. This has been a wonderful opportunity to speak about my faith and even offers of prayer for people in their own individual circumstance. Now, you are probably thinking it is easier for me, as most of my neighbours will be aware of my involvement with church (black shirt and collar being a bit of a giveaway!). But I think in some respects that could be a barrier under normal circumstances, in that people would have preconceived ideas on how I would/should react to what they have to say.

We know, from the readings today, that living a life that talks of the truth of Christ is not going to be easy. We may get shunned, even by those who call themselves ‘friends’. We may even become like Jeremiah, and feel isolated – even more so in this current time. But, I would say that it is during the more difficult and trying times that we can feel God’s presence with us, so long as we continue to live in His truth and we are willing to speak of it to others in our actions and our words. I would encourage you to use every conversation, every interaction you have with others to share the truth of what salvation in Jesus Christ means to you, and what it can mean for those who have not yet experienced it. AMEN.

Pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

We now say together:

All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

Our prayers today are written by Fr Keith. Let us pray:

Loving God, you have called us to be your witnesses in the world, as you called Jeremiah long ago. Support us, as you supported him, when we get mocked for our faith, when people turn against us, and we feel downcast. Help us to continue to speak the truth and share the Gospel of Salvation.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God, be with all who are in positions of leadership at this time. Give them wisdom and courage to do what is right. Help them to make the hard decisions they need to make. May they always work for others not just themselves. Strengthen them, and enable them to guide us through these difficult times, ever conscious of the needs of all, and especially those of the weak and vulnerable.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God, you created human beings to be diverse and yet equal in your sight. Remind us not to anger you by discriminating against our sisters and brothers because they are different from us. Help us to love one another regardless of race, colour, gender or sexual orientation. Enable us to set a good example as we strive to eliminate prejudice and hatred from your world, that all may live in safety, and enjoy the freedom and opportunities that you want for all of your children.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God, we give thanks for all in our local community who have volunteered to help those who are struggling to get food and medicines, and who are feeling isolated and afraid. May they know that in what they are doing for their neighbours they are doing also for you.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God, we pray for the recovery of all who are suffering at this time, especially those with the Covid-19 virus. May they know your healing, strength and peace. Be with all carers and medical teams, give them the skills and energy they need, and may the families and friends of the sick and suffering know too your loving presence with them.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God, by the death and resurrection of our Son, you have opened to all the faithful, the gate to eternal life. Receive into your Kingdom, the souls of all those who have died recently, and remember all those whose anniversary of death occurs at this time. May they all, in your mercy, rest in peace.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Loving God be with us in the coming week that we may reflect your love and compassion to those around us. Help us to hasten the day when your will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Loving God, accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

We have a Gospel to proclaim
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name,
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Tell of His birth at Bethlehem,
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of His death at Calvary,
Hated by those He came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all He loved His life He gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn,
Empty the tomb, for He was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share His victory.

Tell of His reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified,
He sends His Spirit on His Church,
To live for Him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name Him King,
Jesus is Lord of all the earth,
This gospel message we proclaim,
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Let us pray:

Faithful Creator, whose mercy never fails:
deepen our faithfulness to you and to your living Word,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of
God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the grace
of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us and all who we
love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY
DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY: CALEB PERFECT; JOHNY
JONES; AWAIS ALI; TERRY RIGBY**

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY 3

Jeremiah 28 v 5 - 9; Romans 6 v 12 - end;
Matthew 10 v 40 - end

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK TO:

**CHRISTOPHER POVEY (TODAY); LUCY HURST (22ND);
ADAM HARRISON (27TH)**

THE HYMN – WE HAVE A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

Edward Joseph Burns (1938-) wrote it in 1968 for the Chorley Deanery of the Blackburn Diocese when he was vicar of St Peter's, Chorley. It was written for a 'Call to Mission', and is a dignified and central response to such an occasion. During the 'Call' there were four meetings, each one expounding a theme: Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Pentecost. Stanzas 2 to 5 record these subjects. The hymn has since been included in almost every major British hymn book. The hymn was written to be sung to the tune 'FULDA' by William Gardiner.

THE HUNDRED CLUB

Thank you to everyone who has continued to support our hundred club during the time of lockdown. We have three months of draws to catch up on! These have been carried out by Fr Keith and witnessed. Cheques, as they say, are in the post! First prize £79 – 50, second prize £33 – 13, third prize £19 – 98. The winners are:

March: First – Claire Boud; Second – Tony Beckton;
Third – Val & Andrew Crow

April: First – Barbara Rose; Second - Gladys
Mitchener; Third – Jessica Povey

May: First – Paulene West; Second – Maria Luff;
Third – Ann Cobb

You can still join the 100 Club even in lockdown – please contact Fr Keith.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

- 1 O God, will you not give us life again, ♦
that your people may rejoice in you?
- 2 Show us your mercy, O Lord, ♦
and grant us your salvation.
- 3 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 4 Mercy and truth are met together, ♦
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;
- 5 Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦
and righteousness look down from heaven.
- 6 Righteousness shall go before him ♦
and direct his steps in the way.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like,
No cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking,
And give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,
At the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours,
And give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord,
At the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome,
Your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing,
And give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord,
At the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment,
Whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping,
And give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,
At the end of the day.

A Psalm is said: Mon 47; Tue 50; Wed (Birth of John the Baptist) 80 & 82; Thurs 62; Fri 38; Sat 66, ending with:

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between the two readings we say:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away
and the sea was no more.

- 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down
out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a great voice from the throne saying,
'Behold, the dwelling of God is among mortals.
- 4 'He will dwell with them and they shall be his
peoples, and God himself will be with them.
- 5 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes,
and death shall be no more.
- 6 'Neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain
any more, for the former things have passed away.'
- 7 And the One who sat upon the throne said,
'Behold, I make all things new.'

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might, for
ever and ever. Amen.

Readings:

Monday: Job 19; Romans 9 v 1 - 18
Tuesday: Job 21; Romans 9 v 19 - end
Wednesday: Malachi 4; Matthew 11 v 2 - 19
Thursday: Job 23; Romans 10 v 11 - end
Friday: Job 24; Romans 11 v 1 - 12
Saturday: Job 25 & 26; Romans 11 v 13 - 24

Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

My spirit rejoices in you, O God, my soul proclaims your
greatness.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

My spirit rejoices in you, O God, my soul proclaims your
greatness.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is
ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world
and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for Trinity 2 (see first page)

Kindle in our hearts, O God,
the flame of love which never ceases,

that it may burn in us, giving light to others.
May we shine for ever in your temple,
set on fire with your eternal light,
even your Son Jesus Christ,
our Saviour and our Redeemer.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

COLLECT FOR THE BIRTH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

(WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE)

Almighty God,
by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born,
and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour by the preaching of repentance:
lead us to repent according to his preaching
and, after his example,
constantly to speak the truth, boldly to rebuke vice,
and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Who's in Your Bubble?

Bishop Andrew's Lockdown Sermon, 21.6.20

(Jeremiah 20:7-13), Romans 6:1b-11, Matthew 10:24-39

'Single adult households can form a 'support bubble' with one other household. All those in a support bubble will be able to spend time together inside each others' homes, including overnight, without needing to stay 2 metres apart'.

Well the latest government advice has been hugely welcomed by those who live alone. After many weeks of isolation, the 'support bubble' offers the chance for the elderly to be reunited with their children and grandchildren, and for single people and single parents to return to some kind of normality. The physical distancing which has outlawed even the simple reassurance of a hug for so many, has been partially lifted. The psychological pressures of single parenting or of spending far too long in one's own company have been marginally eased.

So who's in your bubble?

In more ordinary times, I guess, our support comes from a variety of places: from our spouses, perhaps, our grandparents and parents, our children or grandchildren, our neighbours or closest friends. They are our support bubble, and when we pray – as I hope we do – they are the ones for whom we pray most often, probably every day. In particular the natural bonds of family hold many of us together, and – provided the family is a relatively happy one – we appreciate those bonds more and more as the years go by. So what if someone were to come along and burst the bubble? I suspect our response would be

outrage, not least at a time like this when we've seldom been more conscious of our need of support.

'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth', says Jesus in today's Gospel reading. 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and one's foes will be the members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me'.

At first sight it seems outrageous: Jesus bursting every kind of support bubble not even delicately with a pin but forcefully with a sword. We're reminded perhaps of cult leaders who make it their mission to tear people away from their natural families; or of painful experiences in our own lives when our closest relationships have been undermined or even torn apart by someone else. And combine that with Jesus' teaching in a parallel passage in Luke's Gospel about *hating* our father and mother, our wife and our children, and we really start to wonder what on earth is going on.

Is this the same Jesus, we ask, whom we proclaim as the 'Prince of Peace' every Christmastime? Is this the same Jesus who taught us to love our neighbours and, far more radically, to love our enemies: love your neighbours, love your enemies, but hate your parents and your children? Is this the same Jesus who took care of the needs of Mary his mother even as he hung upon a cross, with just minutes to go before his death? It really doesn't seem to make any sense at all.

If we've studied these difficult passages we will already have discovered that the Jewish idiom for 'hating' someone can simply mean to love them less than we love someone else – and that's explicit in today's gospel, where Jesus speaks of not loving our father or mother more than we love him. If we've ever reflected on the glorious idea of the 'family of God', Jesus' teaching is a revolutionary challenge to too cosy a notion of support bubbles, which so prioritises my nuclear family, my nearest and dearest, that it leaves everyone else – especially the widowed and the orphaned and the divorced and the single and the gay out in the cold. In that sense Jesus is talking about radically *extending* our support bubble rather than bursting it. But let's face it – this passage remains pretty troubling.

And in response to that trouble, I'd like to talk about mother-in-laws, whose relevance will soon become clear: because although I have a very nice mother-in-law myself, they tend to get a rather bad press. I think of one mother-in-law I know of, for example, visiting the home of her son and his wife when they were away on holiday, and writing in the dust on top of the TV, 'Mother was here!' – a rather pointed criticism of the standards of her son and daughter-in-law when it came to cleaning!

But behind all the jokes, of course, is a serious point (and for fathers-in-law too), and one that is very apposite to my wife and I right now: that one by one our children have been leaving the family nest and

forming new homes and relationships of their own, with one of them married and the rest of them on their way; and with that marriage in particular, things have changed, with Hannah forming a new allegiance to Peter which has naturally and rightly altered her allegiance to us: that's what the language of 'leaving and cleaving' in the wedding service is all about. If everyone manages that change well (as by God's grace we all seem to have done so far), there'll be no problem at all: in fact we will all be enriched in the process. If we manage it badly, it'll spell real trouble.

So here is Jesus calling his hearers into a new and glorious allegiance, into a living relationship with God their Heavenly Father and with he himself as their Lord and Master. Here is Jesus saying 'Follow me'. In some cases whole families would heed that summons: we read of a number of them in the book of Acts. But in others, some would and some wouldn't. And so Jesus was being brutally realistic here and elsewhere. Quoting the prophet Micah he spoke of how families would be divided against each other, three against two and two against three; of how sons would be set against fathers and daughters against mothers and daughters-in-law against mothers-in-law. It's not what Jesus wanted, of course, but it's what he foresaw, reassuring his followers that if and when it happened, it wasn't necessarily their fault. Just as parents sometimes find it hard to let go of their grown-up children, to release them into new allegiances and maybe new values and even a new worldview, so the same would be true in the families of those who chose to follow Christ.

St. Paul puts it even more strongly in our reading from Romans chapter 6, using the image not of singleness and marriage but of death and resurrection, as symbolised by Christian baptism: dying to one way of life and rising to another. Both he and Jesus were at pains to point out that that didn't mean that we could turn our backs on our previous relationships: Jesus was highly critical, for example, of the Pharisees for the way they failed to look after their parents, and Paul instructed those who were married when they became Christians to remain married – in fact to be a better spouse than they were before, unless tragically their partner chose to desert them. But there can be nothing more important than the decision to follow Christ wherever he would lead us: and there are times when that simple choice will cause misunderstanding, pain and conflict within our families, straining those support bubbles to (and sometimes beyond) the limit.

I think of one friend, who moved from a highly-paid job to become a priest. The tithe that he used to pay when he was a banker was more than the stipend that he got as a clergyman. And having been brought up in a family culture where money was highly prized, that decision rocked his relationships with his mother and father and siblings, all of whom thought he'd gone completely bonkers, though blessedly his wife was right behind him.

I think of another friend – a father of six, no less, who determined with his wife that they were being called to live and work on a really tough council estate on the outskirts of Liverpool, causing understandable anxiety among their closest family members about the effects his decision would have on his children. But

the call came first, and the children, I'd have to say, have grown up into some of the most impressive, well-adjusted young adults I've ever been privileged to meet.

Most painfully of all, I think of those I know who've become Christians from other faiths – or who've been baptised in the context of state-promoted atheism: Magdalena, for example, whom I met in East Germany in 1983, before the Berlin wall came down: a young woman whose family had been visited by the Stasi, the secret police, when she refused to go through the Young Communist *Jugendweihe* ceremony because it would have involved her proclaiming, 'There is no God'. Despite the Stasi's intimidation, and the urging of her teachers and some members of her family, Magdalena stuck to her guns and was baptised and confirmed in the Lutheran Church instead. As a result, she was later debarred from going to university and ended up working as a cleaner in a hospital where she could have been a surgeon.

And what of us? We don't want to court persecution, of course. We don't want to suffer more than we need to. But there is a kind of cosy Christianity, a suburban Christianity, which happily embraces the comfort that Jesus brings without truly facing up to his challenge. It's famously said that the work of the Holy Spirit is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable: and quite understandably it's the latter part of that saying that we often shy away from.

But the problem of living too comfortably within too cosy a support bubble – the problem of embracing a cut-price Christianity, where we keep our heads down and our mouths shut and seek to live as risk-free a Christian life as possible, is this: that our lives become mundane and fruitless, and that all sense of adventure in following Christ is squeezed out of us. If religion is simply a sedative, designed to give us calm and peaceful feelings, then we're short-changing God, short-changing the world He loves so much and even, ultimately, short-changing ourselves; which is perhaps why we need the unsettling, troubling words of Jesus from time to time to wake us up from our spiritual lethargy and get us going once again.

And having focussed on the toughest part of our gospel reading today, let's close with an earlier part and a wonderful promise for the week ahead:

'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?', said Jesus. 'Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows'.
