



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

27th SEPTEMBER 2020

HARVEST

READINGS FOR TODAY

Deuteronomy 8 v 7 - 18
2 Corinthians 9 v 6 - 15
Luke 12 v 16 - 30

PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am
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'ALL IS SAFELY GATHERED IN'

COLLECT FOR HARVEST

Eternal God,
you crown the year with your goodness
and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season:
grant that we may use them to your glory,
for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

HARVEST CELEBRATION

Donations of tins, packets etc will be used for our Care and Share outside church. Any fresh produce will be sold and the proceeds sent to Step by Step.

At 6 pm THIS EVENING there will be an online Taize Harvest service. Use this link and password to join:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73030861885?pwd=N2cxNFhxL2dhV2lCSUtRK3pOeFBTUT09>

Meeting ID: 730 3086 1885
Passcode: e5fzZF

THIS WEEK

WEDNESDAY HOLY COMMUNION 9 – 30 am

CARE AND SHARE

Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. The shelves are usually being emptied each day. If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. please bring it to church with you or leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING

This meeting, postponed from April, will now be on Sunday 18th October in church. We will be having a shorter service of Family Communion at 10 am and the meeting will follow immediately after. We hope to be finished by 11 – 15 am.

Nomination forms are in the middle of church for 4 PCC members and for one churchwarden, as Charles will be standing down.

SHOEBOX APPEAL

Shoobox time is here again! There are some ready to fold boxes and leaflets at the back of the church. NO toothpaste, sweets or 4 suit cards please, BUT homemade stuffed toys are allowed if stuffed with proper toy stuffing. Boxes can be made on line for £20, which includes the 'postage' and you can choose items from a limited list. There will be a box for donations in church but no big packing party this year, unless the rules change. Thank You. Barbara Rose

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOXES

Because banking is more difficult this year, if it is at all possible, please count the money in your box yourself, then give me a cheque – made out to 'The Children's Society'. I will give you a receipt in the form of a new label to seal your box for next year. Thank you for your help.

I will be selling Christmas cards again this year. Mary Lamont.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY 17

Isaiah 5 v 1 - 7; Philippians 3 v 4b - 14;
Matthew 21 v 33 - end

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

WYN LONG; RICHARD STOKES; EDNA PEARSON

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.

Harvest Morning Prayer 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.

The earth has yielded its harvest;
God, our God, has blessed us.

You visit the earth and water it;
you make it very plenteous.
You soften the ground with showers;
and bless the increase of it.
You crown the year with your goodness;
and your paths overflow with plenty.
The meadows are clothed with sheep;
the valleys stand so thick with corn,
they shout for joy and sing.

The earth has yielded its harvest;
God, our God, has blessed us.

This hymn is said or sung:

Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin:
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!

We ourselves are God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown
Unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Grant, O Harvest Lord, that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall purge away
All that doth offend that day:
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.

Then, thou Church triumphant, come,
Bring the song of harvest-home;
All are safely gathered in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, for ever purified,
In God's garner to abide;
Come, ten thousand angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home!

(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.

(L) At this Harvest time let us confess our forgetfulness of the needs of the poor and repent of the ways in which we waste the resources of the world.

A time of silence and self-examination is kept.

All We confess to you
our lack of care for the world you have given us.
Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you
our selfishness in not sharing the earth's bounty fairly.
Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you
our failure to protect resources for others.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, forgive us our sins, we pray, and bring us to everlasting life, 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 Harvest (see first page)

Read Deuteronomy 8 v 7 - 18 followed by Psalm 65 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 2 Corinthians 9 v 6 - end

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.
Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are ripe for harvesting. Gather the fruit for eternal life.

All: Alleluia.

Now read Luke 12 v 16 – 30 Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Revd. Carol:

Whilst musing over what I would 'talk' about this Sunday, I came across an article that had been published in The Times newspaper back in 2017. It was about how researchers, working with a behavioural psychologist from Goldsmiths University, London, interviewed 2000 people aged between 18 and 70, about what their biggest worries were. For one third of people, one of their biggest worries was 'avocado anxiety' - a terror of the fruit being either rock hard or not ripe. Another third of people said one of their biggest worries was the fear that there might be another Prosecco drought like the one in 2015/2016!

Oh, how things have changed in that short space of time! Today, of course, we have other worries and I am sure

since the advent of the Covid19 our concerns have shifted somewhat to things such as: Will I keep my job? Will the children be safe at school or college? Will I keep safe to ensure those around me are protected from the virus? When can I properly meet up with family and friends again? Will I ever get the chance to go abroad on holiday again? When can I hug those I love? And the list goes on and on. One, or all of these things have no doubt popped into our minds over the last few months and we have spent some time worrying about them too.

Back in Jesus's time people really did have something to worry about. There was no social care system, no health service and a doctor of any description was probably self-taught, or found that they had a gift in helping people who were sick. Indeed, St. Luke, from whose Gospel we read this morning, is known to have been a physician. If the crops failed, there were no tins or preserved foods like we have today, basically you went hungry and starved. And, sadly, we know this is still the case in some parts of the world today too.

Yet, in today's Gospel reading Jesus clearly says they're not to worry themselves about what they shall eat, or wear. Rather, they will be taken care of. They will be like the birds of the air and lilies of the field, God takes care of them, therefore, He will take care of the people too.

Now, we should remember here that Jesus isn't saying we should give up on doing things for ourselves, or indeed for others, no, He is quite clearly saying that worry doesn't help us, it can't make things better. Indeed, it has a negative impact. Just hear what He says: 'And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life'. By worrying about things we can't change things, it is only by taking action that we can ease the burden of what concerns us.

We also heard the parable of the rich man. How he planned to build bigger barns to store the excess grain he had for the future. He thought that by doing this he would get even richer and would be content - sorted for life. But God soon puts him straight on that by telling the man he has been a fool, because he can't take his 'treasures' with him when he dies.

So, what is really going on here? Is Jesus telling us that we perhaps shouldn't be thinking about ourselves, worrying about our own situation, but thinking more about those around us, those less fortunate than ourselves? Maybe He is saying if we are struggling financially, emotionally or practically, we should be looking around us to see what we can give thanks to God for. For instance, we still have a roof over our head despite struggling to pay bills, we did manage to pay the bill that we thought we would have to delay, or maybe someone gave you something that you were not expecting and it helped towards keeping the wolves from the door.

Personally, there have been times in my life when I have been grateful for an act of kindness. One occasion in particular it was the difference between having 49p left in the bank or going into an overdraft to pay for a new gas boiler! God definitely stepped in on that occasion - it's something that has never left me.

Today we celebrate harvest and give thanks to God for the blessings we receive from Him through the many gifts you have all given. We think about those who may be receiving them. The young people at Step by Step who otherwise would not have anywhere to live, don't have the care and

support of a loving home and appreciate every little thing they are given. You would not believe the excitement I was greeted with by them once when I dropped off some sandwiches and cakes after an event here. The food would otherwise have been thrown away. To them it was a treat to have something different for their tea, and it was the fact the people had even thought of them and showed some care. Think about those who take advantage of the Care and Share that's outside the church doors. It's well received, people are so grateful. It helps them manage through the week, whereas otherwise they would be missing meals.

So, today, at least, let's try not to worry about ourselves, what the future holds, but think about those around us who are in genuine need or despair. Let's not be selfish with the gifts that God has given us, for as Jesus infers: You can't take it with you! To help with this here's a reminder of what Paul's letter to the Corinthians, verse 7 says: 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.'. Isn't that great! God doesn't put pressure on us, He wants us to make our own minds up, so that when we give, we give with a kind and generous heart, to be cheerful about it.

May we all know that we are loved by God through our concern for others, by the gifts that we share with generosity of heart and kindness to those around us and always do so cheerfully! Amen

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L): We say together in faith:

*All Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.*

*We believe in God the Father,
who created all things:
for by his will they were created and have their being.*

*We believe in God the Son, who was slain:
for with his blood, he purchased us for God,
from every tribe and language,
from every people and nation.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit:
the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'
Even so come, Lord Jesus!
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 Ceri Hurcombe:

Blessed are you, Lord our God for you have given us a
good earth and a life full of beautiful things. May we use
the resources of the earth in the right way and respect all
creation. May we give what we don't need to others and
show your glory.

Creating and loving God we thank you for the beauty of the
world and we ask for your church to act as a witness that
the world belongs to you. We pray for all those who seek
to proclaim the Good News in areas of deprivation or
oppression. We ask your blessing upon all who preach the
word and all who share their faith with others.

Lord in your mercy . . . hear our prayer

Creating and loving God we ask you to bless with wisdom
all who are employers and all who direct multinational
companies, providing employment in the developing world.
We pray for all who seek to bring about fair trade, equal
opportunities and for those who reach out their hand to
refugees seeking employment.

We remember all those who are unemployed and those on
low incomes who don't have enough resources to live a
healthy life. We give thanks for the food bank and local
initiatives to help those who are struggling to feed their
families. This harvest and over the months to come, let us
all give what food donations we can to support others,
especially in our own community.

Lord in your mercy . . . hear our prayer

Creating and loving God, we thank you for our homes and
our loved ones. Help us to respect those who work to
supply us with all we need. During the pandemic we give
thanks for all those supplying our food. For the farmers,
the fruit pickers, the lorry drivers and the supermarket
staff, we are grateful for all you do.

Remind us to waste less and share more.

Creating and loving God, as well as providing for us you
also bless us with family, friends and neighbours to share
our lives with. We give thanks for those who have been
there for us during the past six months when life has been
more challenging than usual, for those who have
volunteered in our community to bring support to the
vulnerable and to all who offer the hand of friendship to
others in their time of need.

Lord in your mercy . . . hear our prayer

Creating and loving God we remember all who are ill in
body or mind and for all those suffering at this time. We
pray for all those who are hungry, for those living in places
around the world where farming is difficult due to weather
extremes and supply chain issues. We pray for all those
who are oppressed by war and violence.

We pray especially today for those struggling with their
mental health. At a time when anxiety is high and the future
is unclear, place your loving arms around those who are in
need and shine a light where they can only see darkness.

Lord in your mercy . . . hear our prayer

Creating and loving God you give us all we have and offer
us eternal life. We remember all those who have died
recently including Wyn Long, Richard Stokes, Edna
Pearson and anyone known to us personally.

We rejoice in the fellowship of the saints and we pray for
all our loved ones departed. We give thanks for the joy of
your creation and devote ourselves to your unfailing love.

Merciful Father: accept these prayers for the sake of your
Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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

This hymn may be said or sung:

We plough the fields and scatter
The good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered
By God's almighty hand:
He sends the snow in winter,
The warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes, and the sunshine,
And soft, refreshing rain.

Refrain:

*All good gifts around us
Are sent from heav'n above;
Then thank the Lord, oh, thank the Lord,
For all His love.*

He only is the Maker
Of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey Him,
By Him the birds are fed;
Much more to us, His children,
He gives our daily bread.

(Continued)

We thank Thee then, O Father,
For all things bright and good,
The seedtime and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food;
Accept the gifts we offer
For all Thy love imparts,
And what Thou most desirest—
Our humble, thankful hearts.

Let us pray:

Lord of the harvest, with joy we have offered
thanksgiving for your love in creation; by your grace
plant within us a reverence for all that you give us and
make us generous and wise stewards of the good things
we enjoy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The earth has yielded its harvest;
God, our God, has blessed us.

You visit the earth and water it;
you make it very plenteous.
You soften the ground with showers;
and bless the increase of it.
You crown the year with your goodness;
and your paths overflow with plenty.
The meadows are clothed with sheep;
the valleys stand so thick with corn,
they shout for joy and sing.

The earth has yielded its harvest;
God, our God, has blessed us.

All: May 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.

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.

A lamp or candle may be lit.

- 1 Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, ♦
you that by night stand in the house of the Lord.
- 2 Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary ♦
and bless the Lord.
- 3 The Lord who made heaven and earth ♦
give you blessing out of Zion.

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.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 47; Tue (St Michael) 138; Wed 59;
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:*

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

- 1 Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ♦
whose judgements are true and just.
- 2 Praise our God, all you his servants, ♦
all who fear him, both small and great.
- 3 The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns: ♦
let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.
- 4 For the marriage of the Lamb has come ♦
and his bride has made herself ready.
- 5 Blessed are those who are invited ♦
to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

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.

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

Readings:

Monday: 2 Chronicles 2 v 1 - 16; Mark 12 v 28 - 34
Tuesday (St Michael): Daniel 10 v 4 - end; Revelation 5
Wednesday: 2 Chronicles 5; Mark 13 v 1 - 13
Thursday: 2 Chronicles 6 v 1 - 21; Mark 13 v 14 - 23
Friday: 2 Chronicles 6 v 22 - end; Mark 13 v 24 - 31
Saturday: 2 Chronicles 7; Mark 11 v 32 - end

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All You have done great things, O God,
and holy is your name.

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.

All You have done great things, O God,
and holy is your name.

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 this week (see first page)

(On Tuesday – the collect for St Michael and All Angels:

*Everlasting God,
you have ordained and constituted
the ministries of angels and mortals in a wonderful order:
grant that as your holy angels always serve you in
heaven, so, at your command,
they may help and defend us on earth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.)*

This hymn may be said or sung:

Praise to the holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise;
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways!

O loving wisdom of our God!
when all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive, and should prevail;

And that the highest gift of grace
should flesh and blood refine:
God's presence and his very self,
and essence all-divine.

O generous love! that he who came
as man to smite our foe,
the double agony for us
as man should undergo:

And in the garden secretly,
and on the cross on high,
should teach his brethren, and inspire
to suffer and to die.

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise;
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways!

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.

Bishop's Sermon

By what authority?

Sermon preached by Bishop Jo for the diocese of
Guildford Sunday 27th September 2020

Matthew 21:23-32 Philippians 2:1-13

'By what authority are you doing all this?' Jesus is asked.

We're now at the end of chapter 21. Since last week Jesus has crossed a threshold in the gospel. He's entered the gate of Jerusalem. We call it the Triumphal Entry. He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people go wild. They're waving palm branches and shouting out "Hosanna!" It's the peak of Jesus' popularity.

And then he goes to the temple and sees tables where temple leaders are selling animals to pilgrims who've come to town for the festival. They're extorting the poor and profiting from their devotion.

Jesus get mad - turning over their tables because they've turned his father's house into a den of thieves and robbers.

And then Jesus shows what God's people are *supposed* to be about. He reminds the leaders of Israel that this is *supposed* to be a house of prayer and shows them what it looks like to be God's people – by reaching out and touching the untouchable. He reminds them God is less interested in religious ceremony than in reaching out to people in need.

And that's where the leaders confront him with their question, "by what authority are you doing this?" in other words, "Who do you think you are?"

I have to admit, if Jesus came in and did that in Guildford diocese, I'd probably react the same way. Who is this upstart?

Or imagine you're CEO of a big company. You've earned the right to be in this position. You've got an MBA, you worked your way up. Then one day some low-ranked office clerk starts spouting off around the office about how she thinks the corporation should be run...and people listen. Before long you're made to look like some kind of dinosaur.

What do you do?

That's the story of IBM in the early 90's. The young employee had been tuned into a new-fangled idea called the internet and started telling people that if IBM doesn't get their act together that you'll be left in the dust. That's where the execs at IBM found themselves. They were faced with a choice. Do they protect their authority and power, or do they listen to

this low-ranking nobody and change their perspective?

They listened, and changed, and IBM transitioned into the new world of cyberspace.

When we think about the church and about trying to be the community of God, how often do we run into this issue of authority and power struggle?

Have you heard the seven last words of the church? 'We've never done it that way before'. We think, "this is MY church, this is how I like it. Don't change anything here."

We don't like change, we don't like people challenging our ideas or ways of doing things. And of course we'll tell you they're not just our ways, consider the weight of history and tradition.

How do we stop ourselves falling into the same trap that Israel did? So caught up with their own place of authority and their own perception of what they thought God was like, that they were no longer able to see what God was actually doing right in front of them.

If we're going to be the community of God, we must be willing to look for the ways God is at work in the world around us. It's likely to be uncomfortable: just as with the radical Jesus causing a ruckus in the streets of Jerusalem. Whatever God is doing, it pushes the boundaries.

And as soon as something gets uncomfortable, we jump to query the authority behind it.

But here's the thing about authority. We have to remember, it's not our church, it's not our agenda, it's not our will. It's God's authority, it's God's will, on earth as in Heaven.

And if we're going to live together as God's community, then we need to learn how to let go of our sense of entitlement and reach out to people and ideas that might be a little outside the box.

Now, the leaders of Israel weren't too excited about this. So, Jesus goes on next to tell them a parable about two sons.

A father tells his son to go work in the field and the son says, "no!" In that culture that was a big no-no. Children didn't defy their fathers like that. So, the son was wrong.

But then it says "he changed his mind and went." Actually the Greek word is much more than changing your mind. It's deeper, more like a change of heart. He realized that he was wrong. The direction of his heart moved from doing what he wanted to do, to doing what his father wanted.

On the other hand, there's a second son. The father tells him to go work in the field and this son says, "yes, sir, right sir." But then doesn't do it. He pays lip-service.

And Jesus asks the leaders of Israel, "which one did the will of the father?"

I find this deeply challenging. I don't know about you, but superficial lipservice comes a whole lot more easily to me than deep down obedience. And when as Christians we're like the second son – saying one thing but doing another, and acting out of our own interests - we give the church a bad name.

It makes me realise that some of the most Christ-like people I've ever known are agnostics or atheists. They've said, "No" to God and to the church, and yet I see them caring for the poor, listening deeply to others, welcoming the stranger, and genuinely loving their neighbours. Meanwhile, in the church among those who profess Jesus as Lord and claim to know the grace of God in their lives, we may find behaviours that are anything but Christ-like.

Here's the thing about these two sons. They were both wrong. But what separates them is that the first one was willing to admit it and do something about it. He says those three most difficult of words, "I was wrong."

And so Jesus challenges assumptions about authority with an example of humility. Authority comes from humility, from submission to the will of the one we serve.

Which is where Philippians 2 comes in, where Paul urges that our attitude is like that of Jesus... *'who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped. But emptied himself, taking on the very nature of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.'*

Even though Jesus had all the authority of God, he did not exploit it, he didn't maximise its uses for pointless gains. Instead he emptied himself of divinity and took on our humanity. Not out of convenience but out of obedience.

And then comes the turning point: after the emptying comes the filling, after submitting to authority comes the bearing of authority, ultimate authority, after going down so there follows a rising up. *'Therefore God has highly exalted him... and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father.'*

If we are going to live together as the community of God, if we are going to bear the character of Christ, we need to not just pay lip-service to God, go through the churchy motions, and then go on with our self-centered lives.

We need to be willing to roll up our sleeves and get over ourselves. We need to get out into the fields where God is already at work. We need to stop grasping for authority and instead practice submission. We need to empty ourselves of our own 'stuff' and pour ourselves out for others.

I wonder if you caught the BBC news report last weekend of a Spanish triathlete who was approaching the final line in silver medal position when the British runner leading the way in front of him misread a sign at the bend and went the wrong way. In a split second, instead of lunging for the finish in a last moment surprise win, the Spanish guy slowed down, waited for the Brit to catch up and let him overtake - emptying himself in the conviction that the other deserved to win. He said it came automatically to do that, like he'd been taught from childhood.

Or another report –in the Guardian and the Sunday Times also last weekend – of a multi-billionaire, Chuck Feeney – who instead of owning property and cars and living like he deserved the wealth he'd earned, has given it all away, all \$8m of it, as secretly and anonymously as possible. Again, consciously emptying himself out for the sake of others – clear that others needed and deserved it much more than he did.

Both responses speak of the attitude of Jesus that we're urged to imitate: setting aside authority, letting go of opportunity, resisting entitlement, giving away wealth for the sake of others. Admitting if we've got it wrong and generally getting ourselves out of the way – the self-emptying – in order to maximise the space and scope for God's work in us and through us. The full-filling.

I don't know about you but I long for a humbler church. How might that look? It will be reflected in our bias to the poor, in an honesty over our mistakes, in a generosity with our resources, in a letting go of entitlement

And then we shall have an authority that needs no protecting or defending. 'By whose authority do you do these things?' others may ask. And we will answer, simply and boldly, 'In the name of Jesus, before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father.'
