

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



All Change!

Dear Friends,

The guard's whistle blows, everyone has to get out; some stay waiting for another train, others dash off to work, to shop or to meet a friend. At Reading station, the major station and transport hub close to where I used to live, I would leave the Waterloo to Reading train and could not help but notice the many exciting destinations one could go to.

The West Country and Cornwall always seemed terribly inviting with its promise of sea, sand and relaxation, or Oxford and its 'dreaming spires', the North - Newcastle and Stoke on Trent – or even to Gatwick to jet off to exotic places. I never did follow that sudden impulse but somehow the feeling of extraordinary freedom and excitement was there.

Easter is a real "All Change" situation. For the first disciples, it was almost shockingly so. They had been warned by Jesus, but the event of the cross had traumatised them. Their great Teacher and Leader, the Man of Love, had been brutally murdered and they had been powerless to defend him. What on earth were they to do now, having left everything to follow him? It was a terrible loss to cope with. It would be a terrible change to live with, as is the case for us all when a person we love dies, perhaps even more so in sudden and tragic circumstances.

And yet – and yet..... there was further news, almost unbelievable, that something had happened at the tomb in which his lifeless body had been laid. And when it dawned on them that Jesus had risen from death their lives were changed forever. They began to see more clearly that God

was at work in Jesus to overcome death and bring new life for all people.

The Good News of Easter changed the disciples' lives totally, giving them a mission to share this glorious truth with all they met. And they proclaimed that it really was All Change – the age-long fear of death had been overcome and people can share in God's New Creation. We have eternal life, there is hope beyond the grave. This is what we believe and celebrate at Easter, and at all times: Jesus died for us and has been raised.

Our life's destination is also changed by this wonderful event, for we know that this world is not all there is. We believe that there is a place with God when we pass from this world to the next. It is virtually unimaginable, but what matters is that it is a place where there is love and peace, and the utter joy of knowing our Creator.

It is All Change in another sense also, for Easter calls us not to live for ourselves but for He who laid down his life for us. When we turn away from sin to follow Christ we choose the way of true life, the way God intends for us, free from fear and full of love.

Today we don't hear a guard's whistle, or a Tannoy announcement, to All Change. We hear God calling us to open our hearts and lives to his love in Jesus and to share in the new, resurrection life which Jesus has won for us through his willing suffering for our good.

Happy Easter!
Love,
Jo

Mothering Sunday – (and more Beatling.....)

Our Family Eucharist on Mothering Sunday was a joyful one, well-attended by a wide variety of people – young families, grown families, older people – all praising God and giving thanks for our mothers.

After coming up for communion or a blessing, many people went through the Memorial chapel where Wendell had prepared a beautiful double table of Remembrance, where we could light candles to remember and give thanks for our mothers. The sermon encouraged us to think about our hands, how they can be used for good or ill, how mothers use their hands for caring, how we can serve God in using our abilities in loving and caring ways.

We traced round our hands onto bright paper, and they are all hung together around the church as a sign of our togetherness in living God's way. Not only that, there were bouquets of flowers prepared lovingly by the Mothers Union and distributed, and Rosie Dean led an after-service activity for the youngsters in making "heart" window-hangings.

At the end of the service, Martin Penny – our Director of Music – played Paul Ayres' arrangement of the Beatles' "All you need is love" which many of us listened to. The very title seems to say it all, and Ayres' version of the song focussed on the lovely fanfare from the repeated word sung before the verse – "Love, love, love, Love, love, Love, Love, love, love, love".

If you don't already know the song, check it out – and can listen to Ayres' own playing of the piece too at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnRb5oythOY&feature=youtu.be> . It was a good ending to a great service which had begun by singing "All are welcome", about our church and our homes.

Afterwards, a number of people said how joyful it was to share in a ceremony with young and old together, and the variety of music and personal involvement, and the

lovely sense of togetherness. I was encouraged, and want us to hold closely to that vision of welcoming and including everyone in the name of the Lord.

We have a situation where we need to balance the varying needs and expectations of our church members and visitors, and we will continue to work hard to offer that welcome which Christian love and worshipping together naturally implies. Love is, indeed, all you need.

How did it go for you?

With Lent observed, we move into Easter. From sadness to joy. From death to life. We rejoice. Ah, but how did Lent go? Did we rise to its challenges, ignore it or minimise it?

In our March issue, I wrote about the Ash Wednesday reflection on health warnings. This has turned out to be even more contemporary than expected, as the Government has since issued further recommendations about our diet. The spiritual point which I offer is that if we just accept all that the world around us presents we are likely to encounter serious physical and spiritual problems. Being able to resist a "bargain" or an easier way is very important if it will not be healthy for us. Short cuts are not always good for us – Jesus was offered those in the wilderness and he resisted the temptation.

The experience of going into a supermarket to buy unprocessed food was disconcerting. Many of the things we might normally choose were off-limits. Happily the fruit and vegetable aisles tend to come first, so you can stock up on those. After that there are so many aisles of ready-made meals that it was hard to know where to look. Some of the fish and meat was fairly natural, so we could select carefully (although bacon seems to contain cancer-inducing sulphates and sulphites, so we avoided it).

It did mean that one needed to chop and cook as well as use new recipes or imagination; but it worked. We enjoyed fresh flavours and felt good about it.

Hopefully it has made a permanent change. We will see. However, I must confess, we gave in on a number of occasions, to foods that were tempting in taste or convenience. We don't actually feel guilty about that, but we vow to do better in future.

The point about nutrition and religion is that it is about self-discipline; can we regulate our own lives for good? Can we choose things that are good for us, or do we just accept what comes our way? There is so much that is good in the world, but alas not everything.

The Christian faith tells us to take up our cross and follow Christ. That implies making a decision to choose the life which Jesus offers, even if it may be hard sometimes, and disciplining ourselves under God to overcome sin and evil in the world and in our own lives. Yes, Jesus' cross is difficult to bear in all senses of the word, but the Easter message is that He is the Way to true life in this world and the next. Following him means – as we recall at Baptism – turning from evil and submitting to Christ.

It is a life-changing experience, which affects all areas of our lives, and it is a good and wonderful thing. We live more closely to God's way in this world and we believe that our relationship with Him will continue eternally through the death and resurrection of Jesus who offers us forgiveness and salvation.

Welcome back!

It's great to welcome Geoff Oates back from his sabbatical. We have missed his great preaching and his personal presence (although he has continued a number of other roles). He will return to preach on Easter Day, and we look forward to his revitalised message!

He and Kath have been visiting other churches, with a particular interest in reaching families and all age worship. They have gained lots of ideas about good practice and inspirational, imaginative worship but have also seen some of the

challenges which are common to all of our churches.

Kath is also studying to become a Mission-Shaped Minister, an exciting course, which is part of the Diocese of St Albans' Fresh Expressions initiative, looking creatively at new ways in which we can share God's love. Our Messy Church is just one of these ways. Please do pop in one third Sunday as Kath, Geoff, Nick, the helpers and all the families would really love to show you what it's all about.

Annual Meetings

Our Annual Vestry Meeting and Annual Parish Church Meeting will be held after the Morning Service on Sunday 29th April.

As well as electing new Officers (see below), this is your chance to hear what has been done over the last, to consider various plans and ideas.

Please do come and bring your thoughts, questions and ideas.

Could it be you?

We are looking for a new church warden as Richard Toyn is stepping down at the end of the month. This vital role enables the family and church building of All Saints to flourish.

It would be good to have someone who can give a fresh perspective, as, in many ways we are a very stable community at All Saints but we do need to grow and we need to think about how we serve God and reach out sharing the good news of God's love in imaginative and new ways with all ages.

Please have an informal chat with Jo and/or Colin if you would like to know more about the role. We are really keen to hear from you.

We also need new people on our PCC, your voice and perspective is vital as we serve God and the community at this exciting time.