

THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

APRIL 2021

Rector: The Rev'd Brian Lacey

St Peter's Rectory, 17 Waterloo Park South, Belfast, BT15 5HX



*Noel and Annette Beattie
tending the garden at St Peter's.*

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

HAPPY EASTER!

Hopefully when you're reading this, there'll still be a few days until Easter. But I say Happy Easter now, in case I don't see you on the day itself.

This time last year, the churches (and society at large) were entering into lockdown, and we were merely tipping our toes into the water of what life has become in the subsequent year. Through highs and lows, we've walked this journey with our Lord Jesus constantly at our side. Let's celebrate his victory over death, and give continual thanks to him for all that he has done for us.

HOLY WEEK

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday (28th March) and ends on Holy Saturday (3rd April). David Cromie and I will broadcast services throughout the week from Monday to Friday at 7.30pm, including the traditional service of Compline on Fig Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Spy Wednesday; Holy Communion (Form One) on Maundy Thursday, and Tenebrae on Good Friday. Please note that there will not be a congregation in the church during these services.

On Good Friday, there will be short services every fifteen minutes from 12noon until 3pm, consisting of a Bible reading, short reflection, prayers, and silence. This is often referred to as The Three Hours. Although you are very welcome to stay for the entire three hours, it is more usual just to call in for perhaps fifteen minutes or half an hour, in order to have a few moments of meditation upon the final few hours of our Lord Jesus' earthly life. There is no order of service, and you are free to come and go quietly whenever you like.

CHURCH RE-OPENING

As the Bishops have given permission for churches to re-open on Good Friday, there may be a congregation in St Peter's on Easter Sunday for our 11am celebration of Holy Communion. I appreciate that some of you will be thrilled by this news, whilst others might be a little hesitant. Even if you have received the vaccinations, you still need to be careful. Remember that the vaccination is not a cure for Covid-19 and that there is still a possibility (albeit greatly reduced) that you might still get the virus and need significant medical care. I say this not to frighten you, but simply to alert you to the danger. If you do not feel 100% safe coming to church in person, then please do continue to stay at home. We will continue to broadcast the services online.

The usual Covid-19 rules will still apply if you choose to come to church: Maintain a safe distance between yourself and others at all times whilst on church property; wear a face mask from the moment you enter the building until you leave; do not have any physical interaction (no handshakes or hugging!); remain in your seat throughout the service and exit the building following the Churchwardens' instructions.

You might have heard the Prime Minister on the news talking about a potential Third Wave of the virus in the coming weeks. If this happens, then perhaps churches may have to close again. I will keep you informed of developments as they arise.

CHURCH CLOSURE

Dovetailing neatly with what I've just written, there is the possibility that our church building may be closed for a couple of weeks towards the end of April. There are several reasons for this, including urgent stonework repairs which will require scaffolding in some areas inside the church for at least a week. More exciting than that, however, is the potential of the church to be used as a film location. At the time of writing, this has not been finalised, so I mention it only as a possibility.

If the church itself is out-of-bounds, then we may need to move our Sunday services into the main hall for one or two Sundays.

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

I was originally going to entitle this section “Men’s Ministry” and my point would have been to recommend that the men in our parish come together for various events or activities in order to get to know each other and to deepen our Christian faith.

But I’m aware that there are quite a few women to whom that message is equally valid. All of us—whether men or women—should do our best to forge friendships with the Church. I mean, we are not individuals who happen to take an interest in St Peter’s. Rather, we are one big Christian family.

I urge you, therefore, to make a point of getting involved in any parish group (whether meeting in real life or online) that you think is relevant to you—and even some that you’re not sure about! Whilst each activity will always have a stated purpose, there will also be an underlying intention of bringing people together to get to know each other.

Congregations that seek to know and care for each other will grow. Congregations of complete strangers won’t.

So please do get involved in parish life in whatever way possible, and become friends with your fellow parishioners.

GARDENING

On the front cover, you’ll see Noel and Annette Beattie who continue to take care of our church grounds. I recently met Adam Alexander as he was tending the side garden, and I know that Colin and Moya Bell, Quintin Mulligan, and Anne Cromie, have been down doing some weeding or else picking up litter. There are probably others whom I don’t know about! Thank you to all of you who take such great care of our premises. It is noticed by parishioners, visitors, and passers-by, and much appreciated by all.

CHEMICAL DISINFECTANT

We've purchased a disinfectant spray which can prevent the transmission of the Covid-19 (and other viruses) through hard-surfaces for up to ten days. If used regularly, it will give us a little more peace of mind that St Peter's and our Halls will be safe for our congregation when we re-open. Of course, the virus can still spread from person to person through the air, so we will need to maintain social distancing and the wearing of face masks for a while yet.

HALLS REDEVELOPMENT

Our parish halls were opened fourteen years ago, and they provide us with two excellent multi-purpose rooms, plus kitchen, toilets, and some storage space.

If you've not been a member of the Select Vestry in the last decade, then you might not know that there is also a large basement underneath the toilets and the main hall. It has been used for the storage of lawnmowers and Christmas trees, but ideally it should be turned into a comfortable space which we can use for social events, organisations, and committees.

By doing so, we could increase the number of activities which are held on our premises (during normal circumstances) and give us a more relaxed, casual area which might better suit certain events. The Select Vestry has asked an architect to come up with ideas to develop the basement into a third hall, including considering how it might be accessed internally from the foyer of the halls (in addition to entry via the bottom of the carpark).

As you can imagine, this would likely cost tens of thousands of pounds, but we would hope to avail of grant funding in order to fully or partially cover the costs of this work.

I will keep you informed as we go through this process, but please do contact me if you have any particular ideas for what we could do to improve our facilities, and make them useful not just for ourselves but also the wider community.

DON'T BREAK THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (LITERALLY!)

Let me tell you about the reredos behind the Communion Table in the sanctuary in St Peter's. It's a beautiful work of art, carved out of a single block of stone. And at first glance you should be able to recognise a couple of angels because of their large wings, and a few people, one of whom is holding a small box. Now, whenever newcomers arrive in St Peter's, I always ask them what they think this image depicts. And it surprises me that they often get it wrong. The most common answer is that it is a scene from the nativity. And you can sort of forgive them for that mistake, because of course there are angels who speak with Mary, and Joseph, and the Shepherds, and there are also people who bring gifts—the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But as Roy Walker used to say on Catchphrase—“it's good but it's not right.”

What the reredos actually depicts, is the visit by the women to the tomb of Jesus after his resurrection, with the angels pointing heavenward and declaring “He is not here, he is risen.” Now, I don't know what bright spark decided over a hundred years ago, that this image was to be the centrepiece for this church building, but I have to say, I am very glad that they did. It is a scene which—if you spend time thinking about it—is very evocative. The women represent us as a congregation, coming here, wanting to see Jesus. The absence of Jesus from the tomb, represents our inability to see Jesus in the flesh. The angels represent the supernatural, the heavenly, the divine, and every part of creation that we cannot understand. And, of course, the fact that Jesus is Risen, reflects the fact that his promises were genuine; he is the Son of God; he has the power to save; and he is worthy of our praise.

We also have three other reredoses in this church. In our side chapel, we have a lovely little image of Jesus surrounded by his disciples, and depending on how you want to interpret it, he can either be ascending up on clouds, or else he could be distributing

bread to them (as in the feeding of the four and five thousand). This reflects the power and divinity of Christ, but also the spiritual nourishment that we receive from him—the bread of heaven.

Still in the south transept, we have the crucifix that was once the centrepiece of the grand reredos in the Chapel of the Resurrection. The unmistakeable meaning of which is of course “Christ died for us.”

And then in our St James’ side chapel, we have the beautiful reredos from that former church, which depicts Jesus as King, flanked on both sides by the four archangels. And this too is intended to express the power and glory and divinity of Christ.

Now, I want you to note that our Lord Jesus is central to each of these four pieces of art in this church. He is visibly depicted in three of them, and in the fourth (which is the one behind me here in the chancel) the glory of his absence is what is being highlighted. So any person coming into our church building, and looking at each reredos, and reflecting upon them, should be able to recognise that Jesus Christ: his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and his authority, is being proclaimed in this place. And this is important, because our salvation is dependent upon him. As Christians, we believe that we are saved by the grace of God, through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now let me explain why I’m talking about this: It has to do with what St Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans. He wrote “the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”

Righteousness of faith means “being made right with God, as a result of our faith in him”. What Paul’s talking about here is how a person can be saved. And he’s challenging the Romans to consider whether a person can be saved by the obedience to the Law (such as the Ten Commandments) or whether it is through faith. And in this particular passage from Romans, he’s using Abraham as an example of someone who was saved, prior to the

Israelites receiving all those laws that we find in the Old Testament. Indeed, Abraham lived nearly five hundred years before the Jewish law was given by God.

So the point Paul is making is that Abraham was saved by faith, not by obedience to the Law. Indeed, he says, "If it is the adherents of the law who are to be [saved], faith is null and the promise is void." In other words, if the only way to be saved is by obedience to the Old Testament Commandments, then there is no need to have faith in anyone or anything, because we can essentially work our way into heaven. And more than that, if salvation depends upon what we do, then there was no reason for Jesus to live, die, or be resurrected.

Now, let me bring this back to all these works of art in St Peter's. One way or another, they express the need for Christ to be the focal point of our Christianity. Of course, you might say to me, "But sure what else could be the focus?"

Well, I wonder have you ever looked at the artwork in other churches. In some places, you will see the Ten Commandments, either behind the Communion Table, or on the walls either side. Now, I can grasp the fact that these rules encapsulate the way that God wants us to be in relationship with him and with other people. And I understand their importance. Indeed, very often—usually during Lent and Advent—we will recite the Commandments as part of our service. But I would be very concerned about making them the visual focal point of a worshipping community.

What does it say to a person who joins the Church, to see the Commandments written out in large letters on a wall? Might it suggest that obedience to the Law is how we are saved? Does the Law, rather than Christ, become the focal point of Christianity? Are church buildings with the Ten Commandments on the walls more concerned with promoting how we must live, rather than proclaiming the person who has given us life?

Now, look, if you share the same concerns about this as I do, then please don't start a petition to have the Ten

Commandments taken down in whatever church you've seen them in. Because perhaps they do have one good function. They remind us that we will never be able to obey them all. We will never—through our own efforts—be good enough to work our way into heaven. So when you see them, don't think "If I can obey those rules, then I will live" because that's not possible. Rather remember that you won't keep those rules, and that you need a saviour, and that saviour is Jesus Christ.

GOD IS NOT CONFINED TO CHURCH BUILDINGS

I recently took a trip back in time. I was in the 1970s, observing life on the Antrim Road. And in particular, I witnessed the Church of Ireland at work. There was regular worship; there were discipleship groups and bible studies; there were social organisations for children and for adults, there were garden parties. There were births, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, celebrations, illness, death, and funerals. There was also vandalism, and leaks in the roof, and grass needing cut, and gutters needing cleaned. And—because it was during the Troubles—there were bombs.

I saw all of these things during my little adventure into the past. The doorway to that former world, were old documents from the Parish of St James. These include the monthly magazines, annual reports, photos of special events, and copies of the many letters to and from the Select Vestry, which were dutifully compiled over the years by diligent Honorary Secretaries.

Now, my reason for trawling through all of it, was for business rather than pleasure. I was searching it for specific information relevant to the work of the Church today. But as much as I enjoyed peering into the past, and seeing how vibrant the parish of St James once was, it is nonetheless very sad that it's all gone. St James has been closed now as a place of Anglican worship and ministry, for over a decade. And it joins the growing list of former churches in this area which now exist only as a name and a fond memory for those who once worshipped there.

And what makes it sad is that—because the buildings are closed, or even demolished—it feels as if God is no longer there. It's as if God has packed up his belongings from the former church building and travelled down the road where there are still some Anglicans and set up home in a neighbouring church. And the former parish has become pagan and ungodly—a no-go zone for Jesus and those who follow him.

Now, I said there that “that’s how it feels.” But feelings, as you probably know, are not always right.

Bearing in mind what I’ve just been talking about, let’s think about Matthew 21. It’s a familiar story—and perhaps even quite an unsettling one, if you’re under the impression that our Lord Jesus was always meek and mild and inoffensive.

Let me tell you a couple of verses from the passage. “In the temple, Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.”

If you can picture that scene in your mind, it’s quite violent. Imagine the scramble of the money-changers for all the coins that Jesus is spilling everywhere. Imagine the mayhem of tables being upturned. And imagine the horror of the people at seeing Jesus making “a whip” and chasing both them and their animals out of the temple.

It’s a very dramatic scene. But the bit that I want you to take note of, is the whip that Jesus used. Now, keep that in mind, and let’s look at the end of the passage.

After Jesus has calmed down, the Jewish leaders—quite understandably—are angry. In the NRSV translation of the Bible, they ask, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” That’s a strange sentence in John’s Gospel, but in the other three Gospels, it’s expressed as, “What authority do you have to do these things?” In other words, “Who do you think you are?!” is what they ask Jesus. And in response, he tells them, “Destroy this

temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” That then leads them to question whether Jesus would be able to reconstruct a ruined temple in three days, and then St John, the author of the Gospel, gives us the explanation that Jesus was “speaking of the temple of his body.”

So the challenge that Jesus is laying down to the Jewish leaders, isn’t about the physical building, it’s about himself. “Kill me,” he’s saying, “and I will rise again in three days.”

Now, I told you a minute ago to keep in mind the whip that Jesus made when he was driving out the money changers. Because, now that it has been explained that Jesus is using the temple in Jerusalem as an analogy for his own body, the whip takes on a new meaning. It now represents the whip, held in the hands of a Roman soldier, used to flog Jesus after his trial by Pontius Pilate, and before his Crucifixion. So in the same way that the temple is whipped, and then destroyed (note that the Romans destroyed the temple about 40 years later), so too was Jesus whipped, and then killed. The difference, of course, is that the temple in Jerusalem has never been rebuilt. It’s completely gone—erased from existence.

Jesus, however, lives.

And so, no longer do we believe that God lives in a particular place—contained by the four walls of the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, we believe that God is wherever Jesus is, and Jesus is wherever the Holy Spirit is, and the Holy Spirit works in the world in people, places, and events, according to his will.

Now let me bring you back to the beginning [of this sermon] when I told you about the closure of St James, and all those other former churches in this area. I told you that now they are gone (just like the temple in Jerusalem) it feels as if God has left those areas. But I also told you that feelings are not always right. Because we tend to think that a church building is a visible manifestation of the presence and work of God. Just ask the ancient Jews who considered the temple to be the place where God lived.

And yet the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem did not mean that God was gone. In fact, quite the opposite. The Spirit of God worked through people: Jews, gentiles, men, women, rich, poor, transforming the world, one person at a time, bringing peace, joy, and love.

He didn't need a building for that. All he needed were hearts open to receive him.

The same truth applies as much today as it did then. God is at work in every part of this city. In ways that we cannot see; in people whom we do not know; in places that we don't go into. He is still present. Those church buildings may be gone. But the power of God is always at work.



Due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, Christian Aid is uncertain about the possibility or even the advisability of running the door-to-door collection this year.

Last year we had a similar situation, so following lockdown and isolation rules I, as Christian Aid organiser, decided to do a Sponsored Walk of 20 miles over the course of the week as my daily exercise. I asked parishioners for sponsorship. As it turned out to be very successful, raising almost as much as the usual door-to-door collection, I'm suggesting a similar approach this year—not as a solo run but asking anyone else interested to join me—I'm sure the Ladies' Walking Group will be very eager! Of course it will depend on the situation regarding the pandemic whether we'll be able to walk as a group or on our own. We will have to work out the format nearer the time. As you probably won't be asked to contribute via a door-to-door collection this year, we're hoping that all parishioners will sponsor us as a group.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated interest and support!

Jill Bradley

Pause for Thought and a Prayer

Rosemary Johnston

Returning to Church—May we look forward to seeing all who are fit and well, and possibly ‘double-jabbed’, in church when that happy day comes when we are graciously permitted to open for worship. After all, the church is our spiritual home where we meet as a family in fellowship to worship our Saviour, Jesus Christ. After a year (with some public worship) of being individuals in our own little worlds/environments, won’t it be great to meet with our fellow parishioners for praise, and thanksgiving to Almighty God for helping us cope with this frightening pandemic. I am also looking forward to when it is safe to have a cup of tea or coffee after the morning service and to hear the happy buzz of conversation. As the song says—‘Welcome home to the place where you belong.’ By the way, can anyone tell me who sang the song?

May we also support, with prayers and, where possible, practical help, the outreach work of Sarah Coates, Laura Lacey and David Cromie. They are making a big contribution to alleviating some of the many concerns of our broken society and we don’t always realise or appreciate how much their invaluable work is needed and how much they are contributing to righting some of the wrongs.

Eye diseases—Have you ever got grit in your eye? Can you remember the pain and then the relief when it cleared? In some African countries such as Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, an eye disease—trachoma—is very prevalent. It thrives in places where there is poor sanitation and lack of access to clean water. If untreated it turns into trichiasis, an advanced stage of the disease, leading to scarring of the cornea and blindness. May we hold the sufferers and their families in our hearts and our prayers, and also the charities such as Sightsavers and World Vision for the amazing work they are doing to eradicate this devastating disease and to provide clean water and Lifebuoy soap to teach children about the importance of hand and face washing.



by Peter Gray

Kids4School is a multifaceted evangelical, non-denominational Christian Ministry which primarily enables children to go to school.

Tragically, 75 million primary school-age children are not in school. The reason? Without the money for basic education supplies like pencils and paper, children from developing countries, like Tanzania, are often turned away from school because they can't participate fully. Kids4School runs a sponsorship programme whereby anyone or any organisation can pledge money to support a child at school. Children who are registered on the sponsorship programme get uniforms and books that are necessary for school attendance. They are also provided with a daily meal.

Through the sponsorship programme, Kids4School currently has 1650 children registered and attending school. The children attend local government primary schools, often in remote villages where there is extreme poverty. However, many of these schools have benefitted greatly by the wider work of the charity and its sponsors, for example, classrooms have been renovated, toilet blocks built and water storage tanks constructed to provide clean and safe water. As part of the programme, Kids4School is also investing on an academic level by employing and training classroom assistants. This is part of the ongoing and expanding strategy to increase the pass rate of the Standard 7 National Examinations. This in turn is a contributing factor to many of their sponsored children being able to move on to Secondary Schools.

Kids4School also helps children that will not, for various reasons, succeed academically by providing vocational courses such as carpentry, bricklaying, electrical, plumbing, etc, that will help children not only support themselves but their respective families.

If you would like to support Kids4School, then you may give cash, or write a cheque payable to "The Parish of St Peter and St James, Belfast", and post it to the Parish Office, marking clearly that your donation is intended for Kids4School.

CHURCH GARDEN

Last year a number of Parishioners volunteered their time to help keep the church grounds in pristine condition. Those who volunteered last year have indicated that they are willing to assist again this year. However, we could do with additional help. So if you would be willing to devote an hour or two every fortnight we would love to hear from you. There is no set time or having to arrange to work alongside others, everything is very flexible. You would be surprised at the number of passers-by who comment very favourably on the way the grounds are kept.

All you need is a trowel, a bucket and garden shears.

Please contact either of us by ringing 90 778 428 or emailing noel_innisfayle@msn.com to discuss this further or to offer your services.

Thank you for giving this some thought.

Annette and Noel Beattie

Parish Notes On-line

There are full colour versions of Parish Notes on our website. Visit www.stpeters.connor.anglican.org and click on "Parish Notes".

PARISHIONER CONTACT DETAILS

For speed of communication and to keep our records up to date please send your email address to the Parish Office at:

annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org

Also please don't forget to let us know if you move house, change any of your telephone numbers or your email address. Thank you.

*Please send material for the May issue of Parish Notes to:
Anne Cromie, Parish Administrator, St Peter's Church,
Fortwilliam Drive, Belfast BT15 4EB
or email: annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org
by Monday 19th April. Thank you.*