

THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

MAY 2021

Rector: The Rev'd Brian Lacey

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

*Tree surgeon removing the tree
at the Lansdowne gate.*

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

IN MEMORIAM RENE BELL



**Rene celebrating
her 90th birthday
during the
summer of 2010**

On 19th April 2020, Rene Bell died at the age of ninety-nine, only a few months short of her one hundredth birthday which would have been on 22nd July. Very sadly, funeral arrangements were strictly curtailed at that early stage of the Lockdown, and we were unable to hold a funeral service for her. Nevertheless, parishioners did remember her and privately offered their own prayers during her final journey to Roselawn Crematorium on Thursday 23rd April. We give thanks for her long life, and continue to uphold in prayer her two sons, Alan and Colin, and their families.

Whenever appropriate throughout this year, we will include photos of members of our congregation who died during the Coronavirus Lockdown, to mark their anniversary.

RECTOR'S NOTES

SERVICES IN MAY

Throughout the month, we will continue to have Sunday services only at 11am.

Mid-week celebrations of Holy Communion will resume at 10.30am on Wednesday 19th May.

When I was a Churchwarden in St 'Thomas' on Eglantine Avenue, that church was closed for a year whilst major renovations were carried out. During that time, the congregation met in a long portacabin in the church grounds, which felt a bit like having a service in an aeroplane! It was, in many ways, a fun experience, but it did make everyone much more appreciative of the church building once we returned. In the same way, St Peter's church building has been closed for two weeks since Monday 19th April, meaning that Sunday services will be held in the Main Hall on 25th April and 2nd May. If all goes to plan, we'll be back in St Peter's for Sunday 9th May. Until then, please do join us in the Main Hall on Sunday mornings.

The **Ascension Day** is Thursday 13th May, and there will be a traditional celebration of Holy Communion at 7.30pm that day in the church.

Pentecost is Sunday 23rd May, and I invite you all to wear something red at our morning service.

Trinity Sunday is 30th May, and this is the first Sunday of Ordinary Time in the Church's calendar, which lasts until Advent.

EASTER VESTRY

Our meeting to receive the Annual Accounts for 2020, and to elect our senior officers and Select Vestry for the year ahead, will be held on Sunday 9th May. As in previous years, it will begin immediately after a shortened service at 11am.

At the meeting, the registered members of the parish will elect one Churchwarden, one Glebewarden, and twelve members of the Select Vestry. I will also appoint one Churchwarden and one Glebewarden.

The Select Vestry is responsible for the management of the parish's human, physical, and financial resources, in accordance with state and church law. The Churchwardens are responsible for ensuring the church is prepared for worship, and the Glebewardens are responsible for generally overseeing property-related matters, primarily the upkeep of the Rectory.

Although these positions are administrative in nature, the Church must be led by Christians, and therefore I invite you to put your name forward if you feel called by the Holy Spirit to do so.

TREE SURGERY

In mid-April, tree surgeons carried out remedial work in the grounds of St Peter's, St James', and the Rectory. This notably included the reduction in size of the very large trees at the corner of the Antrim Road and Cliftonville Road, and the removal of a tree at the pedestrian gate at St Peter's, close to the entrance to the Lansdowne Hotel. The trunk of that tree had actually split in half, and a large section was resting on smaller branches, posing a significant risk to people and cars on the Antrim Road. (The photo on the front cover shows one of the Tree Surgeons taking it down, branch by branch.) With its removal, the gate has actually become more of a feature, and in the near future we will look at having it restored.

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF FORGIVENESS

You might recall sometime in the recent past, I talked to you about the verse in the Bible which reads, “Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven”? A casual reading of that verse would give you the impression that we decide what to loose or to bind here on earth, and that heaven follows suit. If you can remember that sermon, then you’ll know that I told you that that is the entirely opposite meaning of that verse. The problem of interpretation arises because of English grammar when compared to the Greek. In the original Greek, the sentence could be much more accurately translated as “Whatever you loose on earth, will have been loosed in heaven.” The meaning being that the decision to loose or to bind is made in heaven, and then we here on earth follow suit.

In case you’ve forgotten what binding and loosing is all about, well, it has to do with permitting something, or prohibiting something. And specifically within a religious context, this refers to what behaviour is appropriate for us. What are we, as Christians, permitted by God to do and, conversely, what may we not do.

OK, so let’s think about John 20: 22–23, because there is a similar sentence construction. Jesus said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” What’s the implication here? That we here on earth get to decide whose sins are forgiven and whose sins aren’t? Well, that would be wrong. A better translation would be “If you forgive the sins of any, they will have been forgiven.” And if you want it even more clearly stated, we could say “If you forgive the sins of any, they will already have been forgiven.” Now, unlike the “binding and loosing” there is no mention of “in heaven”, but we can infer that it’s what Jesus meant. So, again, we could elaborate and say, “If you forgive the sins of any, they will already have been forgiven in heaven.”

So, in the same way as the “binding and loosing”, when we truly forgive someone, then we are implementing the forgiveness that has already been decided by God. It is not that we get to decide who can be forgiven, and then God goes along with it. Rather, he gets to decide, and then we go along with what he wants.

Now, I imagine that for some people, even if you have paid close attention to what I’ve just said, you might struggle to fully understand it. Because throughout the duration of the Christian Church’s existence, there has been a strong emphasis on two things which might go against what I’ve just said. The first is the authority of a Priest to absolve sins. You might immediately imagine a Roman Catholic Priest hearing someone’s confession. But as an Anglican Priest, I also absolve you every Sunday. The only difference is that I absolve all of you at the same time, rather than one-to-one. That authority to declare that sins are forgiven, comes largely from this gospel passage. And although today many churchgoers might not worry too much about it, there were times in the past (particular during the middle ages) when a Priest’s power to withhold absolution could lead to very serious consequences for the individual concerned. So, the Church has tended to understand, erroneously, what Jesus said here, as the giving of authority to the Church to forgive, or not to forgive.

The second thing that is prevalent amongst Christians which makes it difficult to understand the concept that God decides who to forgive, and then we simply follow suit, is that great importance has been attached to the need for Christians to be willing to forgive whenever we are wronged. It is seen almost as a reflex action: someone harms us, and we as Christians must forgive. And very often, if we’re truthful about it, such forgiveness is done through gritted teeth. We don’t really want to forgive; the pain is still too raw; and yet we say the words “I forgive you” because we have been taught that that is what we need to do.

What Jesus said to his disciples after the Resurrection, in this

gospel reading, is not either of those two things. It is not about giving power to the Church to forgive or not to forgive. And it is not about forcing people to go through the motions of forgiveness, especially if it's not genuine.

Instead, this is about Jesus telling us that when we do truly, genuinely, sincerely forgive someone, that spirit of forgiveness comes directly from God. It's God who desperately wants that forgiveness, and when we allow his Spirit to influence our thoughts and our behaviour, then that desire to forgive will flow from him, to us. He initiates, and we follow suit. And if you want Scriptural proof of this, just listen to the entire sentence: "He breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them."

These aren't two distinct things that Jesus is talking about. "Receive the Holy Spirit, and by the way, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." They are intertwined. The Holy Spirit brings the desire to forgive.

What this all means for us, then, is that when it comes to our interactions with other people in which we will inevitably be hurt at some point, by their actions or inactions, we should not put the burden upon ourselves to feel that—even though we don't want to—we must forgive. Because forgiveness is not our choice. Jesus says, it's God's choice. And rather than us deliberating "What do I want to do here? How should I respond to this person who has wronged me?" our response as Christians must be, "What is God saying about this situation?" "When he looks at me and the person who has hurt me, what does he think should happen?" And when we ask those sorts of questions, our focus shifts away from the hurt, away from the person who hurt us, and away from the burden of forcing ourselves to forgive; and instead we re-focus upon God, and his love, and his yearning to bring people together. And when we think about him, and how he sees us, then we open ourselves to receiving his wisdom, and his desire for forgiveness and reconciliation.

BELFAST BLITZ

The 15th April marked the 80th anniversary of the destruction of St James' Parish Church during the Belfast Blitz. This came just a few days after Easter Day celebrations. The alert was sounded about 11pm and shortly afterwards anti-aircraft guns opened fire and bombs began to drop.

Two bombs exploded, one in front of the pulpit and the other beside the font at the west end of the nave. Another bomb fell at the north east corner of the new parochial hall, and a land mine at the opposite side of the Antrim Road completed the wreckage of the building. Only the Bell Tower (dating from 1870) remained intact. Fortunately, the furniture and fittings of the chancel (such as the communion table and prayer desks) were salvaged, and in recent years these have been brought to St Peter's.

The first photo shows the west end side aisle after the Blitz. Notice the black curtains on either side of the window. These were installed in order to prevent interior lights revealing the location of the church at night-time.



The second photo shows the Rector's grandfather (also called Brian Lacey) on the far right alongside his workmates at Ford Car Mechanics on the Cliftonville Road, just opposite St James'. Notice the Bell Tower still standing, and the crane in the background rebuilding the church.



As I have now had it confirmed that there will not be a door-to-door collection again this year, the sponsored walk is definitely on—more fun than collecting I think!

My suggestion is that volunteers from the parish (everyone welcome) join me to undertake a twenty mile walk during Christian Aid Week (10th-16th) asking parishioners to sponsor us.

In order to keep as close to the parish as possible, I'm thinking we could start our walk at St Peter's on Monday 10th May at 10am (time is negotiable), walk to the Waterworks and do as many circuits as we feel up to. The walk does not have to be done in 'one go' but could be spread over the week—this would make it less daunting! The Rector has made the great suggestion of having a coffee break in nearby St James' kitchen. I think that would be very welcome.

As I have not worked out the mileage I suggest we calculate it by timing ourselves—at normal walking pace the average person can walk one mile in twenty minutes—but no need to be too exact!

Many of you sponsored me very generously last year so hopefully you will do so again. You can contribute using the enclosed Christian Aid envelope (also available at the back of the church) either with cash or a cheque made payable to The Parish of St Peter and St James, Belfast.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Jill Bradley (tel 9084 2998)

Pause for Thought and a Prayer

Rosemary Johnston

Easter Morn

The silence in the church is broken by the sound of voices, happy voices, as parishioners enter the church porch after a long lockdown. Of course, once inside there is reverent quietness and then the service of Holy Communion for Easter begins. It is so lovely to be back, and to take an active part in the worship. In these uncertain times, which will possibly continue for some time, we can treasure the times we are allowed to worship in church and appreciate the technology which enables us to worship at home should another lockdown occur—thanks to the Rector. Even the technologically backward can get the service on the 'phone. Also, as the Rector says, we can all keep in touch with each other, just like any family does.

The Duke of Edinburgh

Many of us will have watched the Queen sitting on her own in St George's Chapel, Windsor, during the funeral of her husband, Prince Philip. Anyone who has suffered a bereavement, even when the death has been expected, will know that nothing can prepare you for the void. Let us pray for her, as for all others who mourn the loss of a loved one.

Civil Unrest

In recent weeks we have again seen violence on our streets; those involved being mostly young people, some as young as ten. In the shadowy background can be seen adults encouraging them, a situation which, all too easily, could get out of control. It is very disturbing to read that 'adults were seen in cars dropping off teenagers to join the riot'. But also in the background are local clergy and community workers, mostly unseen and unsung, but doing their best to guide these young people to see that there is a better way to voice their frustrations; and to involve them in more productive activities. They have had some success but, at the time of writing we are again faced with unannounced protests and parades. May we pray for all those working so hard, and probably at the risk of their own safety, that they are safe and free from harm and that their valiant efforts bear fruit.



One of our churchwardens, Daphne McClements, has sewn another tapestry kneeler for use in church. This was designed by Noel Beattie, member of the parish choir. It depicts the hymn tune "St Peter".

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.

Parish Notes On-line

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

*Please send material for the June 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 24th May. Thank you.*