



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

Christ in community....

Exodus 17. 1-17; Romans 5. 1-11;
John 4. 5-42.

Sunday 15th March 2020

The 3rd Sunday of Lent

Collect

Almighty God,
Whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
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

It may well be that the next few weeks will be particularly challenging for the communities of which we are a part. The Coronavirus spread around the world is now starting to have an impact upon our daily lives and this may, or may not, become more significant in the coming weeks. Communities are being challenged to think about how they relate to one another, as they work, as they relax and as they live as families. We don't know how the next few weeks will unfold, but we do know that they will provide an opportunity for us to think about the way we understand and connect with the notion of community and how we, as disciples of Jesus, focus our effort and attention.

The Gospel reading set for today reminds us that it is in the transformation of community that Jesus is especially present. This is true in so much of the Gospel narrative, as we see Jesus time after time challenging people to rethink the ways in which they relate and reset the values that underpin so much of our interaction with each other.

In this Gospel reading today, Jesus brings the Samaritan woman to faith, but then goes on to have a transformative impact on her whole community – indeed he stays with them for some days and the witness of his presence seems sufficient to transform lives. A community that seemed to be most distant from a living faith was transformed through encounter and relationship.

At times of uncertainty our understanding of community is inevitably put to the test. Do we look after our own interests ahead of those of other people? How do we react to the challenges of keeping relationships going as the way we interact with one another may begin to change – at least for a short time?

Perhaps we can draw some confidence from the Gospel reading today, that it is when Christ encounters community that his presence has the most impact. It seems he doesn't actually need to say very much, but gesture, presence and relationship can make all the difference. Perhaps we may be wise to follow that example.

Perhaps there may be people within your own community who are anxious or uncertain about how the next few weeks will unfold, particularly among those who are in the most vulnerable groups. At times like these we have an opportunity to make sure that we do all we can to build community, to stay in contact, to keep relationships fruitful and to help us all feel that we belong together. Now is the time for us to be thinking and praying about what we can do to play our part in sustaining and building community.

St Paul, in this morning's reading from the epistle to the Romans reminds us that endurance produces character, and that character produces hope. He is responding

to the challenge of how the Church functions in difficult and uncertain times. Although the context is, of course, very different, as we look ahead to the immediate challenges we face together we can recognise that – as has been the case throughout our history – it is at times like these that communities have grown in understanding and faith.

Whatever the coming days hold for us, and whatever the particular challenges we face, let us pray that we may draw strength as we recognise that Christ is present within our community and let us work together to share the love we know in Christ and offer hope to all who face uncertainty.