

10th July 2022

Our first reading is 1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Our second reading is John 6:47-61

⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

10th July 2022

Sermon: Jenny Warrington

Over the next few weeks, we will be looking together at what it means to be an inside-out Church, tapping into some of the LICC (London Institute of Contemporary Christianity) resources, to help us.

One year ago, at our PCC day away we grappled with who we are as a church, our distinctive features and where God was calling us to join him, in His mission for St Paul with All Saints and the surrounding community.

We agreed we needed to strengthen the pillars of this church – not the physical ones but the spiritual and fellowship ones.

Having identified four pillars, the leadership team and PCC and many of you, have been working hard.

Strengthening – our teaching and prayer life

Two homegroups continue to meet.

The Alpha course started last month and is going well.

We held a wonderful prayer day earlier in the year from which some visions and prophecies emerged.

The computer room is slowly being transformed into a space for prayer and for our young people to meet.

We now have six people who are authorised to preach and lead services. And there is room for more.

We are beginning to explore offering different styles of praise and worship, building our worship team and encouraging others to get involved.

We've been Strengthening - our social action

– by building closer links with our community project with volunteers working in the foodbank, helping at Splurge, at the computer bank,

- and by our lunch club feeding folk across the area with a hot two course meal.

We've been Strengthening - our wellbeing

– what wonderful work has been done on the remembrance garden, a beautiful place to sit and meditate.

and Magpie garden too has been transformed,

developing what little green spaces we have at church.

- We've been supporting the project's depression and anxiety group, hosting the patchwork group and supporting craft events

We've worked hard at Strengthening our socialisation

– restarting tea and coffee after services,

- Holding a wonderful time together at the Platinum Jubilee Tea

10th July 2022

- a fabulous bring and share lunch a couple of weeks ago.
- Plans for a church picnic later this month – as long as Covid rates don't escalate again.

There is much more work to be done.

But what is the purpose of strengthening the pillars of the church?
What was the impetus behind all this activity?

It is so that we can become a more effective INSIDE-OUT church.

Today is the first in this short series, in which we will begin to unpack what that means. Today we consider how we, as Christians, make 'All the Difference in the World' – wherever we are, whatever we do, whoever we are, We make an enormous difference.

Statistics show that in the UK around 6% of people worship in a Christian church once a month or more. It's not many... but it is significant.
We are significant on Monday to Saturday BECAUSE we gather on a Sunday.

When we gather on a Sunday, we may seem like an insignificant corner of the community but on Monday to Saturday – we are scattered out in the community, bumping into many people. Influencing more people than we could ever imagine.

When we gather as worshippers on a Sunday, we remind ourselves that we believe a very particular story about the world.

We believe it is God's – he created it.
We believe it's broken – because of sin;
We believe that Jesus's death makes new life possible,
We believe that one day everything will be transformed.

We live as people with a distinct story in a culture that may not believe any of that.

In general, if you tell people you go to church, they will think it's because you're religious and it's what people like you do.
Or they will think it's where your friends are, and that it's a good place to connect with people.
Or maybe they know how well we support one another and are pleased that you belong to such a community.

Whilst there is a grain of truth in all these views,... this is not the fundamental reasons we meet. It's not what the New Testament suggests the church is all about. It's much deeper, and more significant than that.

As we look at our short readings this morning, we will see how deep these roots go. We will see the importance of being reminded of our distinctiveness and how,

10th July 2022

because of this, we really do make a significant difference in the world when we go from here.

When Peter begins his letter to small groups of Christians scattered across ancient Turkey, he wants them to understand what it means to be church. He does it by helping them see themselves as part of a bigger story, reaching way back into the past. We are all part of a story that reaches back thousands of years and recorded for us in Old Testament.

Peter uses two key words and a stunning truth.
The first key word is we are God's **elect**

God's purpose from Genesis 12 onwards was that Abraham and **all** his descendants would be blessed and would be a blessing to the world around.

Genesis 12 verse 2-3

'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

The Christians Peter was writing to, would not have all been Jewish by birth. Yet Peter draws each one of them into the ongoing story of God's intention for the world. We are all called, elected by God to be part of His story.

Whatever our journey of faith to Jesus has been, when we surrender to his Lordship, when we said yes to Jesus ruling in our heart, we become part of his people.

When we gather together, we do so to strengthen and encourage one another to be who we are – God's chosen people. To be reminded that GOD chose you.... God **CHOSE** you, God chose **YOU!**
It is not a mistake you are here.

The second term Peter uses is that we are **exiles**

Peter is reminding us, of the great disaster of the Old Testament – when Israel lost their land and were taken into exile. At first, they hoped for a quick return. But the prophets told them of a different plan....

Jeremiah 29:4-7 reads this..

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

They were to become distinctive where they were.
They were to grow where they were.

Today we are scattered most of the time.
We live in a post-Christian country.

10th July 2022

We don't spend all our time with fellow Christians.
We may be the only disciple of Jesus at home, or at work, or in our class.

These are the places we are called to shine.

Philippians 2:14-16 says

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

It's important that we don't lose our distinctiveness and become the same as the surrounding culture. God has a plan in placing us in our scattered context.

Last Sunday, Jenny met with our confirmation candidate and talked to her about what it means to be confirmed and she wrote a short, but powerful testimony.

This is Stephanie's testimony, her story...

"I want to be confirmed because I want a further understanding of God. I want to know him more and connect with him. I want God to use me to inspire others and become a role-model for my friends at school and people around me"

Wow! Just wow – here is a 12 year old who longs to shine . Someone who understands what it means for her to be a part of an inside-out church.

To further understand God and for God to use her to inspire others around her... you truly are a star, Stephanie.

We are called by God, elected for a purpose. And we are all the scattered people of God. We may be small in number but we make a huge difference.

And finally, Peter concludes his opening greeting with a stunning truth...

He reminds us of the wondrous work of the Trinity in our lives: We are never on our own.

[we] have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Our situations are known by God the Father – his foreknowledge. He knows the challenges we face and the challenges we are going to face.

We have all been set apart by the Holy Spirit – his sanctifying work as he transforms us little by little. Equipped with power to do things we could never achieve on our own.

And we can be confident of our relationship with God because of the sprinkling of blood, Christ died for us, thereby sealing a lasting covenant relationship with us.

And that covenant relationship makes us distinctive in that we are promised eternal life.

Our Gospel reading reminds us of manna, that miraculous substance with which God sustained his people in the wilderness. John goes on to remind that Jesus is the

10th July 2022

bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and by doing so, will never die.

Jesus says,

This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

Jesus died for the world – not just for you and I, but to bring **all** to him so that *on that day at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

God wants no one to perish.

So today, we are reminded that we are part of a bigger story, we gather to remember that we are distinctive, we are chosen, and we take our distinctiveness wherever we go and spread the light and fragrance of Christ into our scattered lives.

We are called to be an inside out church because with Christ, we make, all the difference in the world.

Amen