

Rector's Ramblings

March 2016

Dear friends,

Spring is starting to be in evidence all around us after what can only be described as a bit of a non-winter, and I'm sure all of us (except snow enthusiasts) will be very grateful! The longer days remind us that Easter is not far away, and I hope that you are all making the most of this season of Lent - not only as a preparation for the commemoration of our Lord's death and resurrection, but also as an important season in its own right. It is a valuable time of reflection, self-examination, self-denial, prayer, and looking out towards the needs of others.

Jubilee

Jubilee is an Old Testament command to the people of Israel, an extension of the concept of Sabbath.¹ The Sabbath Day was to be observed every week as a day of rest and renewal for the people and their domestic animals; this was extended to a Sabbath Year, where every seventh year the land was to be allowed to lie fallow. So, one in seven days the people rested; one in seven years the land rested, and then, after 'seven weeks of years' the year of Jubilee was proclaimed. On the 50th ((7X7=49)+1) year - the Year of Jubilee - not only was the land rested, but slaves were set free, property was returned to its original owner, and debts were cancelled. It was a kind of 'reset button' on the life of God's people.

At the root of these instructions is the idea that the land belongs to God, therefore the people of Israel don't really own it, and that God's heart for the poor means that no-one can amass land and wealth to the detriment of a fellow-Israelite. It was also a demonstration of trust in a generous creator-God, who provided enough in the sixth and 48th years to see the people through the seventh, 49th and

50th years without hardship. There is something similar going on when we fast during Lent - the thing we're fasting from is shown as having no power over us, and we demonstrate trust in God our provider for everything else we need.

Why am I mentioning Jubilee? Well, it's a word that has come up in several different contexts recently, enough for me to really take notice! For my recent birthday, I was given a book by Pope Francis, 'The name of God is mercy'. Francis has declared 2016 to be an 'Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy', with the tag-line 'Merciful like the Father', referencing Luke 6.36. He is encouraging Catholics throughout the world to demonstrate the Father's mercy in all areas of life during this year.

On its own, this might not have piqued my interest so much, but today I watched the recording of a sermon from HTB by Nicky Gumbel entitled 'The Year of Jubilee'. He mentioned that 2015-2016 is a Year of Jubilee for our Jewish brothers and sisters. Nicky has declared 2016 a year of jubilee for the HTB family of churches, and is looking for a fruitful harvest of people coming in to God's Kingdom this year. It's a good sermon, which you can find on HTB's YouTube channel (HTB Church).

And then there's Milton. A lot of things that normally take place in our community are taking a break this year: our own Women's Day; the Hospice Gala Day and the Village Fayre. So it feels like a Sabbath rest - or maybe a Year of Jubilee - for Milton's community too!

From these three Jubilee examples come three words: mercy, harvest and rest. Two of these are things that are generally in our control, one is up to God alone, but we have a role to play too.

Rest: our Oasis day for Women (**all** All Saints' women, not only those who've been on team for the Women's Days) on 14th May is an opportunity to rest, relax, reconnect and refuel. Do book in for this if you can - it

¹ See Exodus 20.8-11; Exodus 23.10-12; Leviticus 25.

promises to be a great day. There will no doubt be other opportunities throughout this year for us all to rest - holy rest, sabbath rest, grateful rest, trusting rest, recreating rest.

Do get the rest you need - rest is a creation ordinance - we need rest and sleep to live as human beings in the world. Being starved of rest and sleep is as bad as being starved of food. If church activities are hindering your ability to rest properly, then you might need to re-assess what you're committing to. I'd much rather you were asleep than at a meeting if that's the trade-off. I don't want any of us to be rest-malnourished because of being over-busy at church!

Harvest: although not in our control, it is up to us to pray for the harvest of people to come in to God's Kingdom in Milton. Our monthly church prayer meeting will continue on the second Wednesday of each month at 7.45pm, and this is a good place for this kind of prayer to happen communally; do please continue to pray in this way in your personal prayers too. Also, we will be joining in with the Archbishops' Call to Prayer during the week leading up to Pentecost Sunday (8th-15th May). More details will be available nearer the time, but please be ready to support this important initiative 'that all may come to know Jesus as Lord'.

Mercy: this is something in which we can all participate: in our personal lives, in our life as a church, in our community life, and in our national life. Mercy and generosity go hand in hand, and it may be helpful to see it in that way, as I'm sure we can all think of ways of displaying generosity in each of those areas of life. At our recent termly staff team meeting, two things were mentioned that chime with this area: 'How can we be generous as a church to our own community?', and the possibility of a 'Love Milton' theme through the week of the Call to Prayer. There's no flesh on those bones yet, but if these grab your attention, or if you have ideas that might contribute to working them out more fully, please do be in touch with me.

Maybe this can be an 'Extraordinary Jubilee Year' for All Saints' and Milton too!

Finance (please don't skip this bit!)

The Churchwardens and I met with Roxane, our PCC Treasurer, recently to compile a forecast for our finances for this year. As usual, we have been as conservative as possible in our assumptions, but even so we are predicting a deficit of £14,287 on the General Fund, which is the largest for several years. Of course, this is only a forecast, and, through the generosity of you all, we have usually substantially reduced our forecast deficits by the time we get to the end of the year. However, we cannot afford to be complacent, and I would ask that you please review the level of your giving to God's work here at All Saints'. It may be that you have received an annual bonus, or (even in these difficult times) an annual pay rise, and you might be in a position to respond to God's generosity to you by increasing your giving. On the other hand, some of you may be experiencing a degree of hardship, and might have to reduce what you give; please don't feel bad if that's your situation. Others may feel it is best to keep things as they are for now: that's fine too. We have a generous God, and I have every confidence that he will, as he has in the past, provide for all our needs. I leave this with you for your prayerful consideration, and thank you once again for your generous support for God's work here.

Alpha - very early notice!

We've not run Alpha for a while, and I think it's the right time to do so again. Alpha is an opportunity to explore life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment. Alpha has around ten sessions, and includes food, a short talk and a discussion at the end where you can share your thoughts. We will be starting Alpha this autumn, meeting on Monday evenings, beginning on September 5th. Can I please ask you to begin to pray now about who you might invite to Alpha? You might want to do it yourself - that's fine too. See alpha.org. More later!

With love,

