



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church

Sunday 23rd April 2023
The Third Sunday of Easter
Staying in Contact



The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

563

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 23rd April	8am	Said Mass
Sunday 23rd April	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday 26th April	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 30th April	8am	Said Mass
Sunday 30th April	10am	Sung Mass

Panfield Church

Sunday 23rd April	11am	Holy Communion
Tuesday 25th April	5pm	Evening Prayer/Office Hour
Sunday 30th April	11am	BCP Holy Communion

C

Praise Good St. George

F

Gospel Acclamation

*Lord, explain the Scriptures
to us, and make our hearts
burn within us*

NOTICES

May Day Raffle - Alongside the top prize of £150 we are also looking to giveaway some other incredible prizes. If you would like to offer something or could donate monies so that we can buy something to raffle off, please speak to Jo Mallows or Fr Rod.

Monday May 1st - May Fayre helpers needed! Please have a think about how you might help us to make it a really successful event. You may be able to offer some time on the day, make something to sell, or sponsor one of the Flower Displays. Pru, Margaret or Jo look forward to hearing from you a.s.a.p!

May Day Tombola! - Angela Fuller and the team on the tombola are inviting any items for it to be brought to church in the coming days, and no later than next Sunday. Thank you in advance.

Coronation Weekend - It is just a few weeks until the Coronation. Understandably many will be watching the ceremony on Saturday May 6th, but we are hoping for a full church on Sunday May 7th at 10am for a special service of our own. Then on Monday May 8th, we will be hosting a picnic in the Church Grounds with a Cream Tea. All welcome, bring your own food and drinks for plenty of good fun and maybe some singing. Please arrive from 1.30pm onwards. If you would like a Cream Tea, cost £5 these need to be ordered in advance & can be collected on the day from 2pm. Sign up sheet at the back!

Light a Candle - We are pleased to be hosting this special service once again. Janet C. Davies', 'Light and Candle' service will be on Sunday May 14th at 3pm. All very welcome.

Warm Place - Our Warm Space has been an incredible success and after 20 consecutive weeks has now finished. The outreach and support for this initiative has been fantastic and Fr Rod would like to say a huge thank you to all involved. I am thrilled to say that this regular community lunch space will re-launch on May 12th as the *Friendly Friday Café* from 12-3pm and will run until July 21st.

Save the Date - On Sunday June 11th at 4pm, we are thrilled to be welcoming back 'Rock Choir' who will be performing another fabulous concert. We are hoping, weather permitting, to hold this outside, but we shall see! More details and tickets will follow after May Day.

Friends of St Mary's - The Friends have arranged a Barn Dance at Bocking Village Hall for Friday July 14th at 7pm. More information will follow in due course but for the moment we wanted you to have the date, so you can get it in your diaries now.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Peter Hopkins, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Peter, Jo, June Blackwood, Tony & Ann, and Margaret Everitt. We remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Edwin Stone, Thomas Worthington, Reginald Vaizey (Priest), David Huit, Stanley Pryke, Kendra Cook, Terry Moore, Alice Emerson, and Mary Woolcock.

The Collect for The Feast of St George

God of hosts,
who so kindled the flame of love
in the heart of your servant George
that he bore witness to the risen Lord
by his life and by his death:
give us the same faith and power of love
that we who rejoice in his triumphs
may come to share with him the fullness of the resurrection;
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.

Epistle Reading - 2 Timothy 2:3-13

Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself.

Gospel Reading - John 15:18-21

'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Address

Let me tell you a story:

Once upon a time in a country far, far away there lived a most ferocious dragon. The dragon was terrorising the country and the people of the land were feeding it a daily sheep to appease it. They soon ran out of sheep. The dragon then demanded the sacrifice of a young woman each day. The supply of young women was not infinite and in due course only the King's daughter remained. She would have to be sacrificed in a day's time.

But unbeknown to the dragon, a famous warrior had just arrived in this far away country. His name was George. On hearing about the dragon and the imminent danger to the princess, he decided to act. He approached the dragon's cave. The dragon emerged and roared with a sound like thunder. George came closer, struck the monster with his spear, but made no impact on the beast's scales. Determined not to give in, George thrust his spear into the soft flesh of the dragon, under its wings. The dragon fell dead and the princess was saved.

The story of St George and the dragon may be familiar or, as it was for me, a case of knowing the headline but not the story. There are many versions, but the one I have just told includes all the essentials. It is, however, worth reflecting on the fact that the story only became popular in about the 1100s; St George died in about 304 AD, during one of the persecutions of Christians that took place in the late Roman Empire. Not all that much can be said about him with any degree of certainty. He was probably a soldier living in the area we now know as Palestine in the late 200s and was acknowledged as a martyr by the church of that period. His story seems to have been known in England before the Norman Conquest in 1066; legends about him may have been spread by returning crusaders; and he was perhaps regarded as the English patron saint by the time King Edward III founded the Order of the Garter in the mid 1300s. And that is more or less all there is.

So why celebrate St George today? And why involve the no doubt mythical dragon? I will come back to the dragon a bit later in this address. However, keeping St George's day provides an opportunity to think about some aspects of our nation's story and how we deal with them in the multi-cultural society of the 21st century. Let me briefly reflect on these under the three themes of history, community and national identity. As many of you probably know, I am a historian by background even if my particular interests are in the history of everyday things like shops and markets rather than the grand sweep of political history. So it is not surprising that I think that history matters. It is important that people know something about our nation's story. It also matters how that story is told. When I was much younger that story tended to celebrate all that was good about our island's history, rather as maps of world seemed to be dominated by the pink colour denoting countries of the British Empire. It was a one-sided view. But have we now swung too far in the opposite direction, only noticing the things that were bad, particularly slavery? If done well, history can bring perspective and balance.

Unlike in some of the eastern religions, history plays an important role in our Christian faith. What Jesus did, and what was done to him, is at least as important as what he taught. The historical setting for his life and ministry – a not very important but potentially troublesome province on the edge of the Roman Empire – is also important. So is the story of the coming of the Christian faith to our own islands and the way in which it became the religion of the nation as a whole. Many of the good things done by English (and British) women and men in the past were inspired by Christianity. But religion was also one cause of conflict and political turmoil. Any account of the history of our nation has to include the role of the Christian faith and the churches.

History can be local as well as national. Indeed local history is a popular leisure time pursuit as well as having a place in the world of scholarship. Perhaps exploring the history of the place where we live can enhance the sense of belonging. Despite the ease with which it is possible these days to communicate over vast distances; or indeed to be in a virtual classroom with people from all over the world studying

some subject in which they are all interested, the local community remains important. The story of St George and the dragon took place somewhere even if we do not know exactly where and it was the people of a particular community who breathed a sigh of relief when the dragon was vanquished.

Like many clergy, I have moved location quite a few times in the course of my ministry. I think all the parishes I have served would have prided themselves on their sense of community, some with more justification than others. This is not simply about geography. I was aware of a much stronger sense of community in the London suburb where I started my ministry than in the Derbyshire village from where I retired. Traditionally a healthy local community will have a school, a pub, a village shop and a church. Bocking has all four. The oldest by far is the church. It is important to celebrate the place of the parish church at the heart of the local community. If that means having fuzzy edges and sitting light to doctrine, so be it. Whether or not people believe in all the details of the Christian faith, they are welcome here. Welcome because all of us need a place that speaks of something beyond the mundane, a place that is rooted in the memory of the community, a place that can provide space for reflection and soul-searching, a place that can honour the key events of people's lives. If the Church of England ever gives up on the parish church then I suspect it might as well give up entirely.

There is something slightly odd about England's patron saint being a rather shadowy figure with no known connection to England, or indeed to Western Europe and whose fame rests on an event which belongs to the realm of legend rather than history. It does, however, have the advantage that there are not lots of inconvenient facts that have to be explained away. St George can become a symbol for all that we want to celebrate about England, and indeed about the United Kingdom as a whole. Even if times feel hard at the moment, there is still much to celebrate, not least in the way that our nation has adapted to a rapidly changing world. We may no longer be a 'great power' in the sense that Victorian Britain was, but we can still be a force for good in the wider world. We also have much to contribute in the realms of science, technology and the arts and literature. We have become a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society, not without some tensions along the way, but without witnessing the sort of divisions that have torn some nations apart. Our sense that noisy patriotism is generally in bad taste (except at the Last Night of the Proms or when England do unexpectedly well in the World Cup) is probably a useful character trait in the world as it is.

But what about the poor dragon? After all, he (or she) was only doing what dragons do. Yet if the community was to survive and prosper, the dragon had to die. Are there things in our own lives, or in the life of our church or local community, that are holding us back from being the person or group that we want to be and could be. Do we each need to imitate St George and be ready, with God's help, to slay those dragons?

Post Communion Prayer

Living God,
your Son made himself known to his disciples
in the breaking of bread:
open the eyes of our faith,
that we may see him in all his redeeming work;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.
Amen.