



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 24th September 2023
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
Staying in Contact

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

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com

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

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 24th September

8am

Said Mass

42

10am

Sung Mass

137

Wednesday 27th September

9.30am

Said Mass

507 (*omit v2*)

Sunday 1st October

8am

Said Mass

Hills of the North (*see sheet*)

10am

Sung Mass for Harvest

Panfield Church

Sunday 24th September

11am

Holy Communion

Tuesday 26th September

5pm

Evening Prayer/Office Hour

Gospel Acclamation

*The Lord is just in all his ways,
he is loving in all his deeds.*

Sunday 1st October

11am

Morning Worship for Harvest

NOTICES

Eco Church - Well done St Mary's! After the hard work of the last year, we have been awarded an Eco Church, Bronze Certificate! This is a brilliant and deserved reward, but the work goes on!

Bring and Buy - Mark your diaries, for on Sunday October 15th, following the 10am service at St Mary's, there will be a Bring and Buy sale in the Church Hall, more details to follow soon.

Coffee Morning - The Almshouses are hosting a Coffee Morning THIS FRIDAY September 29th at 10.30am to raise money towards a second scheme car. They would be thrilled if anyone who is free and wishes to attend could come along for a catch up with some cake.

Stepping Stones - The next series of Stepping Stone sessions will start on **Tuesday 3rd October** from **6.30 to 7.30pm** in the church, please note the new date and time! A further three sessions will follow weekly, on October 10th, 17th and 24th. The theme across this course will be the relationship between church and the community, looking at the issues we face today, and the challenges they present.

Confirmation - We are thrilled to be hosting a Confirmation Service at St Mary's on Monday October 30th at 7.30pm, and will welcome Bishop Roger to lead the service. Have you thought about being confirmed? Want to know more? Then please speak to Fr Rod in the coming few weeks. It isn't often that candidates are confirmed in their own church, so please don't miss this opportunity.

Harvest Supper - The Friends are arranging a Harvest Supper for Saturday Sept 30th, 6.30pm for 7pm in the Church Hall. Tickets are £12 for adults and £6 for children, available today.

Local wildlife walk - On **Sunday October 15th** there will be a wildlife walk starting at, and returning to St Mary's. We are meeting by the Church Hall at 11.45am. Jacqui Hogger, one of our Eco Church leaders will be guiding us. This is open to anyone, either as an individual, or with family and friends.

Friendly Friday Cafe - There are just less than two weeks to go now until the café sessions are back. They will re-start on Friday October 6th after those involved have had a well earned break.

MacMillan Coffee Morning - Panfield Village Hall, Saturday Oct 7th from 10.30am onwards. Homemade cakes for sale. As well as a tombola, games, bric-a-brac and crafts. Please support this worthwhile cause, you never know when you might need this.

Childrens Society - Thank you to all those who returned their collection boxes. We are pleased to say that £60.60 has been raised.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Ron Cole, Peter Hopkins, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, 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 Doris Jarvis, Charles Pasfield, John Watkinson, William Percival, Graham Bright, Ronald Wiltshire, Sidney Plumb, Joseph Brown, Adam Hurst and Joyce Turner.

The Collect for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers
of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
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 - Philippians 1:21-end

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but

each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

Address

Many years ago when I was Curate at one of the churches in Chesterfield, a church in a nearby parish set up a project to do something about unemployment and to help unemployed people. It was a very worthy objective. But it seemed to me, as I became slightly involved with it, that there were two problems. First, although the Chesterfield area had suffered from the closing of coal mines in the 1980s, the quite prosperous neighbourhood where the church was located had relatively few unemployed people. To find one was almost like finding gold dust. Secondly, there was no real vision for the future. Questions like: 'what might the world of work look like in say the year 2000' or 'do we as Christians think it right that people should have to work in dirty and dangerous conditions' were not being asked. As part of my connection with project I went to a conference in London about the future of work at which one of the speakers made use of the story of the labourers in the vineyard which we have just heard. She preferred to call it the parable of the unemployed in the market place. I will come back to some of this later in this sermon.

The parable is, of course, not really about work. Rather it is about God's generosity. We reflected on that in a slightly different way last week when trying to calculate how many times we should forgive – or perhaps expect to be forgiven. Was it seven, or seventy-seven? Or even 490? The numbers don't matter. The point was that God's willingness to forgive is limitless and that we should reflect on and learn from that. Nor does it matter whether our Christian journey has been lifelong or only for a short period, perhaps towards the end of our lives. Did the disciples perhaps hope for special treatment in God's kingdom because they had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry? Did they think they deserved more than those who perhaps only became followers of Jesus in the last weeks of his earthly life? It would be very human to think in those terms. Similarly do those of us who might regard ourselves as lifelong Christians think that we deserve a better place in the Kingdom than those whose Christian journey has been very short? Jesus makes it clear that this is not how things are. Our place in God's kingdom is not earned by long service; rather it is the free gift of a generous God. At a time when at least some people may have thought that the end of all earthly things was imminent, this was good news indeed. God's generosity would be extended just as much to the latecomers as to those who had travelled with Jesus from the start.

But what of the unemployed in the market place? Why were they standing there all day? Was it that there was not enough for work everyone, so gradually people slipped away and in due course the vineyard owner realised that he needed extra hands and so hired those left? Or were they perhaps not really seeking work, but preferring to stand and gossip? Might they have had a feeling that if they hung around for long enough they would get both work and a decent wage? We do not know. Many of us, when in the world of paid work, may have been lucky enough to have the sort of job where we knew what we were going to be paid and how much was expected of us. The sort of casual labour described in the parable was however very common in past times and is probably more common now than it was when I, or perhaps many of you, were in secular paid work. The landowner's words 'unto this last' were picked up by the Victorian radical, and indeed prophetic, writer John Ruskin and used as the title of an essay condemning the sort of rampant capitalism that had produced much suffering, inequality and insecurity in his own day. His essay is still worth reading.

The church in our own country has at times had quite a lot to say about unemployment and about the destruction of the sort of heavy industries that used to dominate manufacturing cities particularly in the north and the midlands. It was also, at least when I was in Derby Diocese, very aware of issues affecting rural communities such as feelings of loneliness and isolation; and offered support to farmers and other rural workers. The church generally, however, has perhaps been less successful in

articulating a theology of work for a 21st century largely post-industrial society. A ten (or so) minute sermon is not the place to attempt this. So let me just offer three possible starting points.

First, the present world of work, at least in developed western economies, can be very stressful, but can also be exciting and offer creative possibilities, especially when compared to the situation in previous centuries. More people than ever before have the opportunity to plan and to manage their own careers. Women have a real chance of full participation in work. The rewards of work, and not just the material ones, can be greater than ever. This is especially the case if work is redefined to give increased worth to a wide range of voluntary and family-based activities. Much more could be done in this direction and the churches could help to change both thinking and practice (imagine what could be done by a really creative use of non-stipendiary ministry). Instead of always complaining, the churches should be celebrating what is good and life enhancing in the present world of work and encouraging all to aspire to the best.

Secondly, a prophetic voice is needed on behalf of the work poor. For one of the consequences of the shift away from manufacturing and towards knowledge-based employment has been to leave not just individuals, but whole communities, deprived of the prospect of lasting paid work. Men, made redundant from manual jobs, and young men with limited aspirations, are especially affected. An under-class with no paid employment, no prospect of paid employment, and often not even the prospect of meaningful unpaid work could easily come into being. The churches are uniquely placed to speak up for job poor families and communities and try to ensure that they are not forgotten by politicians and those tasked with job creation.

Thirdly, the churches could have a pastoral and prophetic role with regard to the over-worked and the work stressed. And that can include clergy. For the downside of globalization, increased competitiveness and the introduction of commercial practices into public services has been to increase the pressures on many of those in work. Such pressures may take the form of longer working hours, leaving neither time nor energy for family and leisure. Or they may also involve increased personal accountability and insecurity. Working from home, which has become increasingly common since the pandemic, has its advantages, but also blurs the important boundary between home and family on the one hand and work on the other. Clergy have long been familiar with this. Work stressed individuals need pastoral care. But this can only be offered from a basis of understanding, hence the importance of industrial mission and encouraging congregations to engage with the world of work. For some, church needs to be an oasis of calm and refreshment, not a place where yet more demands are made. The church's prophetic role here comes from naming as idolatrous the sort of attitudes towards work, whether by employer or employee, which lead to excessive demands of time and energy and the resulting burn-out. Such an unbalanced lifestyle is not consistent with a proper, and spiritual, understanding of work.

Christians will not make a useful contribution unless they are prepared to engage with the realities of work in the twenty first century and gain some understanding of the economic forces driving change. Well-meaning platitudes or protests are not helpful. But what happens to the world of work is crucial to what happens in the family and society more generally. An informed Christian voice needs to be heard. Reflecting on the labourers in the vineyard and the unemployed in the market place is not a bad starting point.

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God,
you have taught us through your Son
that love is the fulfilling of the law:
grant that we may love you with our whole heart
and our neighbours as ourselves;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.