



# The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church

Sunday 26th March 2023

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

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

471

### **St Mary's, Bocking**

Sunday 26th March

8am Said Mass

98

10am Sung Mass

Wednesday 29th March

9.30am Said Mass

597

Sunday 2nd April (Palm Sunday)

8am Said Mass

*Christ Triumphant*

10am Sung Mass

### **Panfield Church**

Sunday 26th March

11am Holy Communion

Tuesday 28th March

5pm Evening Prayer

Sunday 2nd April (Palm Sunday)

11am Morning Worship

## Gospel Acclamation

*I am the resurrection and the  
life, say the Lord, whoever  
believes in me will never die*

## NOTICES

**Thank you** - A huge thank you to all involved in our space weekend, it was an incredible success. Hundreds of people took part, and thoroughly enjoyed it too. We were able to make a donation to the North East Astronomical Society and still have a profit of over £300.

**Quarterly Newsletter** - The Spring Issue is here and it would be fantastic to get copies out across the Parish. If you are able to deliver to your road or other local roads please take enough to do so and sign the sheet at the back so we know what road/roads are covered. Thank you.

**Funeral** - Fr Charles' funeral will take place here at St Mary's on Thursday April 6th at 1.15pm. This will be a Requiem Mass and you are warmly invited by the family to join them in celebrating Fr Charles' life.

**Christian Youth Outreach** - CYO do brilliant work in our local schools both primary and secondary. This month's coffee moneys will be going to support them and especially their link with Bocking School. Coffee Money from January came to £102.37 and is going to the RNLI.

**Electoral Roll** - If you have joined St Mary's recently it is likely you are not on our Electoral Roll. Indeed there may be others who have been meaning to do so, but not taken up the chance. Ahead of the APCM on May 21st, we are inviting you to join now. A short form is at the back, which is easy to fill in.

**A Warm Place this Winter** - Our Warm Space has been an incredible success, and will now conclude on Friday April 7th with a slightly shorter session which will conclude at 1.30pm. I am thrilled to say that this regular Friday community lunch space will re-launch in May, more details on that in due course.

**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 Maud White, Dorothy How, Frank Noble, Reg Saunders, Grace Goram, Dorothy Smith, Chris Brown and Prudence Radley.

## The Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
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 - Romans 8:6-11***

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

### ***Gospel Reading - John 11:1-45 abridged***

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here,

so that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

## Address

Some of you, like me, may be old enough to remember the BBC sitcom *Yes Minister*. At the time it was first shown, I was working as a Civil Servant, having occasional contact with Government Ministers and their offices, so I suppose it struck a particular chord with me. There is scene early in the series where Sir Humphrey, the Permanent Secretary (effectively head of the Department) says to the Minister, Jim Hacker: ‘Directly responsible to me are ten Deputy Secretaries, 87 Under Secretaries and 219 Assistant Secretaries’. Hacker says: ‘Can they all type?’ The pompous Sir Humphrey replies: ‘None of us can type Minister. Mrs McKay types – she is your secretary’. In the days before word processors, the secretary who could type was an invaluable member of the team, even if near the bottom of the hierarchy.

But is that not true in many situations? The people who keep the show on the road may not be the people who have great status or impressive job titles (Permanent Secretary is actually short for Permanent Under-Secretary of State). I was very aware of this in one of my previous parishes. I had two conscientious church wardens, a very efficient PCC secretary and a treasurer who worked for a local firm of accountants. And then there was Gwen. Gwen was on the PCC but did not hold any specific office. But it was Gwen who made sure that the church was open when it should have been, that the cleaning was done, that everything was in its proper place, that the church hall bookings were properly managed, that the toilets were checked and toilet paper replaced ... and a multitude of other tasks. Every church – and indeed probably every organisation – needs a Gwen. She (or he) may not always be noticed – at least until they are not there.

Today’s Gospel reading is set in and around the household at Bethany. Perhaps it was a place where Jesus could go to get away from the crowds and seek some refreshment for the next stage of his mission. There is a brief mention in St Luke’s Gospel where Jesus gently rebukes Martha for being ‘worried and distracted by many things’ and commends Mary who has been sitting at his feet and listening. I do sometimes wonder what sort of response Martha might have been tempted to make. The third member of the household, Lazarus, is not mentioned here, but after the story of his being raised from the dead we hear of him being at a dinner which Martha (inevitably) had prepared for Jesus six days before the Passover.

So Martha has traditionally been associated with an essentially practical faith. We might see her as the patron saint of activism, of that strand of Christianity that is primarily concerned with helping others, with caring for the sick, with running charitable organisations. All of that is important and necessary. It is also what many churchgoers might point to if asked to justify why the church needs resources of money and property. The contemplative Mary may have ‘chosen the better part’ (Luke 10.42), but unless someone else is earning the money and paying the bills it is hardly a sustainable lifestyle. In suggesting, as I am going to do, that there is much more to Martha than this traditional image, I am not implying that there is anything wrong in being the practical one. Every church needs a Gwen as I said earlier.

At the heart of today’s Gospel passage we heard that it was Martha who went out to meet Jesus when he arrived at Bethany. Mary, however, stayed at home. That is perhaps what we might have expected from our prior knowledge of the two sisters. It is perhaps also not surprising that the forthright Martha opens her conversation with Jesus by rebuking him: ‘if you had been here my brother would not have died’. After a brief exchange about

resurrection, Martha declares, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world'. Is there not an echo here of St Peter's answer to Jesus asking about who people thought he was: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'. These words, the apostolic declaration of faith in Jesus, are in St John's Gospel spoken by a woman. And the woman who utters them is not the contemplative Mary but the ever busy Martha. There is no necessary contradiction between being a person of action while at the same time having spiritual depths.

The Gwen I spoke of earlier might be seen as essentially a Martha-type character. But she was also usually one of the first to sign up for a study group or a Bible study. She was deeply interested in questions of faith, though I am not sure that the silent contemplative prayer group that one of the parishioners convened was quite her scene. I'm not quite sure that it was really mine either! It was, however, greatly valued by its members. We are all different and parish life should ideally reflect that.

The story in St John's Gospel reaches its climax with Lazarus coming out of the tomb, hands and feet bound with grave clothes. The ever-practical Martha, despite her earlier recognition of Jesus as the son of God, is concerned that 'there will be a stench'. Presumably there wasn't. We hear little more of Lazarus in the Gospels. There is a tradition that he left his native land, went to Cyprus and in due course became a Bishop there. One modern novelist, on the other hand, kills him off in a bar brawl soon after his being brought back to life. All is speculation and it doesn't really matter. The centrepiece of the story is surely Martha's recognition of just who Jesus is and the implications of this both for life in the here and now and for eternal life.

So what might we take away from today's Gospel reading? Let me close with a few thoughts. First, the importance of being cautious about stereotypes and first impressions. It might be possible to depict Martha as the sort of person who is always rushing about like a headless chicken – or is the new idiom 'like a Trot in a Labour Constituency' to borrow a quote from the play *Bazaar and Rummage* being performed by Bocking Theatre Club later this week at the Village Hall. But this would be to do Martha a disservice. Being busy and competent does not preclude also having spiritual depths and a genuine insight into how God is at work in the world. Nor is being passive and contemplative any guarantee of having a better understanding of matters connected with faith. Of course we all have our strengths (and weaknesses), but a balanced approach to life should surely combine elements of the active and of the reflective. Secondly it is striking that, given the conventions of the time, the apostolic declaration about Jesus is given by St John to a woman. Perhaps this might prompt us to reflect on whether there are groups in our day whose voice is not usually heard but who ought to be listened to. Thirdly, the words 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the one coming into the world' could almost be seen as a Gospel in miniature. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of words in the Bible and in our prayer books. Sometimes we need a pithy summary of what it is that we believe. There is a lot to be said for trying to keep things simple.

The raising of Lazarus is one of the significant turning points in the Gospel. If we read beyond verse 45 we discover that this is the point at which the Jewish leaders finally decided that Jesus had to die and began to plot his death. This Gospel reading is particularly appropriate as we move towards the final weeks of Lent and begin to prepare ourselves for Holy Week.

### Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us, that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever. Amen.