

Annual Parochial Church Meeting 13.10.2020

Today is the feast day of King Edward the Confessor, the last Saxon King, who was canonised a century after his death, in the 1160's. I mention this in order to give background information to this portrait of King Edward. You will notice that there are lots of jewels in his crown. He is endowed with great worldly prestige. And so are we, in a sense, as Frenchay Parish Church. We have a magnificent history and a beautiful physical building to worship in. But in this portrait, the eye is quite naturally drawn to the ring he is holding up. Attached to that ring is the story of how, when Henry was approached by a beggar, he had no coin to give him, so he gave this royal ring as alms. How much such a story is legend, is debateable, but it serves our imagery of Frenchay church quite helpfully. The ring is symbolic of God's perfect love – as it is the shape of a circle. We, as the church, are challenged to lay down our history and tradition, even our beauty of architecture, and to offer the Good News, the gospel of God's love, to all who come seeking.



So my word for the church this APCM is 'gather strength, and give generously'.

Gather strength, like King Edward, in the sense of worker smarter, not harder. I'm delighted to see people join by Zoom tonight. We are challenged in these exceptional times, to make the most of opportunities to meet together, in so far as they exist. Through the Zoom services and prayer meetings, courses and socials, we have been developing a beautiful depth of openness and sharing, which I have not encountered previously in all my five years as Rector here in the benefice. We were reminded recently by Rev Judith that before lockdown a Wedding couple commented on our fellowship then as a place where you can talk to anybody about anything and you will be taken seriously and listened to, and made to feel you matter. So this Jesus-like trait is there already in our fellowship, ...and it is growing. What of those who are unable to join by Zoom visually (they have no

internet), and who are not able either to attend physically? There have been great efforts made to keep up practical support and spiritual encouragement through people making telephone calls and delivering printed material, in contact groups set up by Kate Davison and Sylvia Perry. We have so many contact group leaders to be thankful for, and with those who I have already mentioned by name, we can be thankful to God for an A1 group of ministers, and churchwarden.

Yet, we are in a dangerous period in many ways. As a second spike of COVID-19 affects our country, we run the risk of the weary and isolated becoming disconnected from Christian discipleship and encouragement. What do I mean by this? The difference between talking from a media perspective about life and its blessings, and talking from a perspective that is God's, through His word. By meeting in prayer partnerships or prayer triplets, or small groups, online or as far as we are allowed to do physically, we can better fulfil mutual Christian care in this church. This is every member ministry. This is the grass roots of discipleship, where we share how God's word impacts our lives as a daily reality. We will not, of course, make anybody join up who does not wish to do so, but as a Pastoral Team of ministers across the benefice, we will be teaching about this, training willing leaders, and inviting you all to opt in to this network of small groups. Way beyond the pandemic, this will enrich and strengthen the Body of Christ here in Frenchay. So, gather strength.

Now for the 'give generously' part of Edward the Confessor's example. And here you may expect me to be talking about money, but I'm not. What's the greatest gift we have been given in this church, that we have to share? Is it not our knowledge of God the Father, through a relationship of faith in Jesus? In short, this is 'the gospel'. If we only think of strengthening our spiritual lives, and looking after ourselves as church, we are not doing the work Jesus commissioned His Church to do. As I said earlier, Edward gave a gold ring – a symbol of love – to the hungry and needy. Around about us in tis community are many such people, eager for an anchor for their soul in these confusing times. I know that, because I have tasted some of this eagerness when going door to door in both parishes.

Looking back to when I was appointed to this benefice as priest-in-charge, the doubling of Frenchay's population with a new community on the old hospital site was all the talk. As I look back over the prayer walk with members of this church and others in our Churches Together locally, as I look back over the visiting with Welcome packs in teams on Saturday mornings, I see a response of overall gratitude by the vast majority of people in Frenchay Park and Frenchay Gardens. I am an evangelist by calling and experience, and I am wanting to fulfil the parable of the talents where I am concerned in this benefice. I wish to devote more time than I have been able to recently, in building

confidence and experience among those willing to engage in personal evangelism more effectively.

So in conclusion, this is a wonderful hub for worship, prayer and fellowship. But its main purpose is not to feed itself, but to be like Christ, and go into the world with the good news of God's love in Jesus. The gospel can't be spread without the hub, and the hub can't fulfil its generous, giving purpose unless there is purposeful outreach.

In a moment I'm going to share a set of slides which will remind us, I hope, of many special people, many special times. We have so much to thank God for and celebrate - what a crown! As you see these slides come nearer to the present time, you may see some faces you don't recognise so easily. Families at Tiny Time or Messy Church, for instance. Rejoice with me that we have outreach to build on, and as we approach the future let's be strengthened as church, and resolve to share generously too.

Rev Charles Sugden