

## HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Philippians 4:4-7

Date: Sunday 13 March 2016 – APCM

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They say that a week is a long time in politics ... well a week and certainly a year can seem a very long time in the life of a church.

This time last year I was speaking about a new covenant (from Jeremiah 31) *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people ... they shall all know me*

I also mentioned some pet phrases of mine: “Friends sharing the adventure together”; “God is good, all the time”; “Changing the landscape”. And the latest one I was introducing last year “generous accommodation”.

Last year was our anniversary year – we celebrated in a variety of ways. We were coming out of a tricky time and beginning once again to regroup and re-establish who we were and what we were about.

It’s amazing how quickly the last 12 months have gone by ... and my sense is that we are still not all entirely sure who we are and what we are about. One of two people have asked me about our vision: has it changed? No. One or two people have asked about our direction? The same as it always was ... but I think it may be helpful for me very

briefly to talk us through what has been going on this last 12 months, as we very consciously stripped some things back, to encourage and to help us to see what some next steps might look like.

I say stripped back ... we have very deliberately reduced the numbers of meetings we have held and have put fewer things in the programme – to take time to think and to pray, and to allow God to speak to us, and to integrate and raise up new people and new things.

I said last year that one of the roles of the leader is to define reality ... so here goes, using the words from Philippians 4 as a backdrop ...

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice<sup>[a]</sup> in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

We asked for generous accommodation in the changes to our Sunday worship. We have said very simply that we will meet at 8.30am, 10am, 3.30pm and 6.30pm. The 8.30am will always be BCP Communion. The 3.30pm at Lynwood will have its familiar structure with a variety of speakers. The 6.30pm will be a varied programme: worship service, discussion, prayer, gathering. The 10am might be Communion. We might be wearing robes. We might be using the top table or the portable one. We just want to be together and to get to know one another better.

And we have seen that the musicians are with us together as a group most weeks, the volume of singing has gone up, the Peace is taking longer, more people are attending

worship as time goes on, and our day to day finances are back on an even keel.

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Apart from the set piece anniversary events which were all brilliant in their different ways, we have continued to meet in smaller groups: 4women curry, breakfast and dinner; 4men at the pub and a breakfast meeting soon; older people for monthly Lunch n meet; small groups in the week for learning and sharing life; the Alpha Course for newcomers and those have a another look at faith. Weekly study and monthly Communion at Lynwood and Communion at Dormy House. Youth Cafe twice a month; youth cell group every week; children's work and crèche, each Sunday morning. We have supported Foodbank, Traidcraft and Tearfund as well as The British Legion and our Christmas Charities. We have decorated the church for special occasions and have a regular flower team. We have taken groups out in the minibus to a variety of exciting places and have hosted a large group at New Wine again in the summer. We have welcomed some new faces and said goodbye to others. Life has been busy and God has been good.

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The passage goes on ...

<sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

We have put a pause on the Heritage Project. It would be easy for us to worry. But we have been having discussions in particular with the DAC (the diocesan buildings people) about the heating, the seating, toilets and storage. Steve Hall and Paul Sharman have been especially helpful here.

We will report again once we have heard back from the DAC. We will arrange a conversation with those who have pledged towards the Heritage Project already. And make sure that those who would like to get behind the first phase of what we hope to be able to do, can do that also. We want to build on the gathering momentum of what we see God doing amongst us.

The new chapter I spoke of last year has truly opened up. We don't want to lose that sense of the new thing. And we will offer it up to God in our prayers, without worrying, knowing that he is in control and has it all in his hands.

<sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Finally, I want to assure us that although there will be changes yet to come – Sue will be leaving us at some point as her curacy draws to a close, the Church nationally will be having serious conversations about human sexuality, even the ins and outs of the European question might affect us more than we think – but in all this we have a promise from God about his peace:

<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I feel have been guarded. I feel we have been protected. I sense that the calm, gentle and really lovely gracious spirit abroad in our common life is a gift. I sense pockets of new life springing up. Small assurances that we are on the right track. Signs of God's grace and of his loving provision.

I was on a conference recently where the leaders were being encouraged to be the "non-anxious presence" in a situation. We were challenged to keep the faith and to hold our nerve.

That is my prayer for myself and for us all this year ... as we give thanks for what has been, celebrate what is and look forward with eager expectation to what is yet to come.

God says:

*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people ... they shall all know me*

Friends, for Sue and me it's a privilege to lead you here, to serve you here, and to work and worship with you week by week. Thank you for working with us to bring about change and transformation in church and community, as together we seek to live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope. That was the vision. That still is the vision and by God's grace That will continue to be the vision which we are beginning to see worked out more and more, day by day. And for that we give thanks. Let's pray ...