



The United Benefice of
St Michael on Greenhill, Lichfield
with St John, Wall

COLLECT AND READINGS
5th July
4th Sunday after Trinity

Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you,
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
increase and multiply upon us your mercy;
that with you as our ruler and guide
we may so pass through things temporal
that we lose not our hold on things eternal;
grant this, heavenly Father,
for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

New Testament Reading.

Romans 7.15-25a

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Gospel Reading.

Matthew 11.16-19, 25-end

At that time Jesus said, ¹⁶To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

¹⁷"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

²⁵I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by

my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.²⁸ Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Sunday Sermon

The link for the Sunday sermon is

<https://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/sunday-sermons.html>

For those who receive this by post the text is printed below.

SERMON TEXT

Sunday July 4th (Trinity 4). Children – of God!

Readings: Romans Chapter 7 verses 15-25a; Matthew 11 vs 16-19, 25-30.

Children!

There is something very revealing about human nature when we watch children left to play together:

- There can be great sharing OR total selfishness with cries of "Mine", "I need that" or just grabbing!
- There can be playing beautifully for hours OR they are unable to be in the same place with tears or fighting
- They can be amazingly creative and imaginative, with sometimes complex and incomprehensible games and rules OR "I'm b-o-r-e-d!"
- Children say they will be best friends for life OR taunting each other with unkind words and chants "nya nya na nana"

Not Knowing What We Want

So we enter Matthew's gospel with Jesus being exasperated by the crowd:

¹⁶ *"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

¹⁷ *'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'*

¹⁸ *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

The crowd are behaving like bored, tired children who don't know what they want – they mocked John for his ascetic ways; they despise Jesus as a libertine, associating with the wrong sort. What DO they want?

They are like children who will only play their *own* game, and then only if they can have the lead part. When John, and then Jesus, try to initiate a new game, they won't play: "Your game is too sad," they tell John, "Someone is always dying in your game". "And your game is too loud!" they tell Jesus.

The end result – the crowd, the poor, cross, fed up children have no one to play with, and no idea how to play on their own Alone, crying, grumpy, not knowing what they really want – just that they haven't got it!

On the Other Hand

In verses 25-27 Jesus goes on to give thanks for those who are childlike in a different way – sincere, honest, straightforward, no guile. This is the child not left alone with other children, not left alone with other children to sort things out by themselves – this is the child whose parent, the Father, is there to play too. Not to force the game – the child will take it their own way – but there to share, enjoy, guide, rejoicing in the imagination and creativity of their child. To this 'child' comes the revelation that Jesus is the perfect child of God (like Father, like Son), uniquely able to reveal the nature of God to us – the inclusive God of love, mercy, justice and peace. To follow the analogy of children together, Jesus says something like: "Let's get to know each other, and I'll share my treasures with you, my friend".

The Treasures

The treasures are revealed in verses 28-30 where Jesus says:

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus turns to the lonely, grumpy children from the earlier verses and offers them rest. The burden of their discontent, sadness or frustration is too much. Their own inner stubbornness or pride won't let them play and join in; they choose to sulk and be miserable when they wanted to be happy. Will they take up Jesus' offer, put down their burdens and join in? Find a new way? A new, more fruitful game?

We, the Children

The gospel reading began with Jesus expressing his exasperation and sadness about the people of his day (v16-17).

Now, we are the people of the day. In some ways, as we examine current events, things haven't changed much, and we are still the capricious children:

- We selfishly flock to the beaches, putting the lives of others at risk AND we form communities who share sacrificially, go the extra mile, to help the vulnerable in this crisis.
- We leave tons of litter, on the beaches, in the countryside, on Beacon Park AND others go and pick it up, shaking their heads in sorrow that we can't all play nicely together
- We call each other childish names, maybe using racist terms like "Kung Flu" to hide the fact that we have lost our way and don't know what to do AND we join together in a new coalition government. Where once we didn't know how to play together we find a new game, a new way forward.

Paul recognises all of this dichotomy in his letter to the Romans:

15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

And how we recognise that for ourselves! Who will be his source of help, his lifeline, his rescue? *25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* is Paul's response.

We conclude, and concur, with the end of the passage from Matthew: *Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* We are God's children, fully present in the life of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We are fully held and loved by God, whatever we do, however we are. The thing is, as we love God, we long to do the loving and the right thing for others; we just don't manage it all the time. God, the loving parent, fully recognises that and still says to all God's children:

Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

In these times, in any concerns and anxieties, in any sadness, in any hope for the future, that is Good News to hold fast to.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

Nick Rutter, John and Sonia Doidge, Ralph Werrell, Jeyan Anketell.

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Anthony Staples aged 6, Audrey Egleston, Colin Eastwood, Yvonne Harper, Ian and Judith Watson, Alison Cox-Toplis, Julian & Wendy, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Robert Harris, Bill Hill, James Knight, Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Renee Wellings, Felicity Woodfield

Those who have died

Rosemary Hunt

ST JOHN

Those who are ill and their carers:

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Prayer Requests

You can text prayer requests to 07388 529020

The Rector, Simon Baker

01543 253010

CHURCH NOTICES

OPENING OUR CHURCHES FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP

Thank you to everyone who responded to our request to let us know if you would be happy to come to church under present conditions.

We have decided that both St Michael's and St John's churches will open for worship on Sunday 12th July at our usual times of 8.00am and 10.00am. It is a great delight for us to welcome people back into church for worship. We must also remember and support those who are not able to attend. Our recorded readings and sermons will continue to be sent out as we have been doing. In that way we will be able to maintain our unity and fellowship around the Word of God whether we are in church or at home.

The form of the service in church will be said Holy Communion and seats and pews will be arranged in such a way that social distancing can be maintained. The seats used for Sunday services will not be used again until the next Sunday.

Communion will be in one kind only – the bread – and will be received standing.

There can be no singing at present, but there will be music.

We have produced a full set of local guidelines to help everyone who is organising our services. These conform with the government and Church of England guidelines. You may wish to look at them [here](#):

To make things easier here are a few bullet points to remember when you come to church for worship.

- Sanitise your hands on the way in – sanitisers are available
- Keep a proper distance at all times
- Sit only in seats as indicated
- Leave the church as instructed by the clergy and do not stay in church for conversation
- Conversation may continue in the open space of the churchyard
- Take with you the Sunday service sheet when you go
- You may wear a mask if you wish, but it is not required
- Be aware of others at all times
- Children are welcome but there will be no toys or activities provided

Rector and Churchwardens

CHURCHES OPEN FOR PRIVATE PRAYER

Our churches are now open for private prayer only.

St Michael's Lichfield is open between 2.00pm and 4.00pm and will be open at this time every day. The church will be staffed during opening hours.

St John's at Wall is open on Wednesdays and Sundays from 10.00am to 4.00pm. The church will not be staffed during opening hours.

In both churches provision there is for hand sanitization, cleaning and social distancing. We are delighted to be able to open our churches, but we also want to make sure that everyone is safe.

BIBLE STUDY

WEDNESDAY 8th JULY

On Wednesdays at 10.30 June we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

We will be using "Zoom". This is quite simple to use and doesn't require you to download any software. All you need is a laptop or other device that has a camera. If you took part in last week's Bible Study, you will automatically receive a code to join the discussion. If you would like to take part starting this week, please email Chris Baker on 📧 c.j.baker@bham.ac.uk and he will send you a web link to join the study and some simple instructions.

NEW WEBSITE PAGE The text and questions to think about can now be found at. <https://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/bible-study.html>

WORSHIP BY ZOOM

We will be holding live worship by Zoom on the first and third Sundays of each month.

Sunday 5th July at 6.00pm.

You can join the service from 5.45pm. The service will last about 40mins. There will be readings, prayers, a short address and hymns.

If you would like to join in please email Simon on simonbaker57@outlook.com and you will be sent a direct link. You do not need to have Zoom downloaded on your PC or other device. If you have already joined a Zoom service, you should receive the link a few days before. If you have not had a link by Sunday morning, please email.

The next evening service will be on Sunday 19th July

FROM THE DIOCESAN BULLETIN

#BuildBackBetter

People are invited to sign the [#BuildBackBetter statement](#). #BuildBackBetter is a platform for everyone who wants the UK to come out of the Covid crisis a stronger, fairer, greener country.

It urges those in authority to prioritise the resourcing of health, social care, housing and other vital public services to meet future needs, mend inequalities in society, create secure, well-paid, rewarding jobs for all, and tackle the climate emergency.

Join Rowan Williams, the Bishop of Manchester, Big Issue founder John Bird and many others in signing personally or on behalf of your organisation <https://www.buildbackbetter.org.uk/?source=twitter&>

VOLUNTEERING AND CHARITIES

LICHFIELD FOODBANK is continuing to function and is dealing with increased numbers of clients. Donations of items can still be made at the collection boxes in our local Co-op, Tesco and Waitrose supermarkets. The particular items needed are – **snacks (breakfast bars, crackers), custard and tinned meat**. If you can, please do support this appeal. You can access more information about the Foodbank on our website. There is information for those who would like to make a financial donation and a gift aid form.

The drop off point in church is now available when the church is open for private prayer.

GIVING

GIVING TO ST MICHAEL'S

In order to make one off or regular donations easier we now have a **JUST GIVING** page for St Michael's. please visit:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stmichaellichfield>

STAYING IN TOUCH

The office Phone is not currently being regularly monitored. The ministry team and others are continuing a ministry by telephone to keep in touch. Rector, Simon Baker (☎ 01543 253010)

ITEMS FROM OUR MAGAZINE

MORE ST MICHAEL'S HISTORY

"I have been looking at St. Michael's baptism, marriage and funeral registers for the 19th century, and seeing what they can tell us about the parish and the church at that time. I have written a couple of blog posts that might be of interest to some - at <https://profchrisbaker.com/historical-studies/> . Be warned, there are lots of tables and graphs, so they won't be everyone's cup of tea by any means. Chris Baker"

The following article was left in the vestry a couple of weeks ago. It is by the former Rector of this benefice, the Revd David Beedon. It certainly gives us a different perspective. *Simon Baker*

PRISON IN A PANDEMIC IS WORSE

Restrictions on movement are not the same as incarceration,

Since the Prime Minister's announcement on 23 March, telling people to stay mostly indoors, the word 'lockdown' has become part and parcel of common parlance.

In the debate leading up to the announcement, concerns were raised about infringements of civil liberties. Subsequently, some on social media have likened the Covid-19 restrictions to being in prison.

It is not; and it is disturbing that anyone should feel that the nuisance of social distancing, limited shopping, and restricted movement is akin to mass incarceration. Having worked in prisons for many years, and having witnessed the levels of deprivation and despair that can reside within their walls, staying at home and washing my hands while singing 'Happy Birthday' are trivial inconveniences in comparison.

In England and Wales, there are a little more than 83,000 people held in Her Majesty's prisons. Speaking on Radio 4's *Today* programme last month, the president of the Prison Governor's Association, Andrea Albutt, described prisons as fertile breeding grounds for Covid-19. I know staff to be working heroically to maintain decent but safe and secure conditions behind the razor wire, and doing so at some risk to their own health (although they are rarely acknowledged as 'frontline' in public praise).

In a prison in which I served, I introduced a prayer-request board, on which those who came to chapel could pin concerns that weighed on their hearts. I would work through their requests systematically at morning prayer. I was frequently humbled and moved by the sorrow that these predominately young men had known already in their lives. These were life-wounded souls. None of this is to excuse or condone the crimes that they had committed, but it is to recognise their humanity, which can easily be lost in the criminal-justice system.

While it is sometimes observed that 'crime is a young-man's game' (as desistance – abstaining from crime – is known to increase with age), recent reports (before Covid-19) had started to highlight health-care challenges that were arising because of a growing elderly element in the prison population (partly to do with an increase in historical sexual-abuse convictions). Because of their age and concomitant health issues, many are extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Given the high incidence of adverse childhood experiences among the prison population, it is unsurprising that levels of mental illness are high. In a survey carried out by the Prison Reform trust, 26 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men in custody stated that they had been treated for mental-health issues in the year before being arrested. Similar levels of psychosis are reported (in the general population it is four per cent). A person in custody is 8.6 times more likely to take his or her own life than someone who is at liberty.

I have recently submitted to the University of Birmingham some prison-based research into pastoral care for indeterminately sentenced people in custody. In my interview analysis, I noted that some of the participants displayed high levels of anxiety and morbidness. Experiences in their formative years had left them deeply pessimistic about their life outcomes and those of their loved ones.

'LOCKDOWN' is a word that is familiar to anyone who has worked in a prison. It is usually a state that a prison or wing goes into if there is unrest or a security issue to be investigated. Residents can end up being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day: a shower is their only respite.

This is the state of affairs that prisons are currently working hard to avoid having to implement. The Government's proposed plans to release (on licence) thousands of low risk people in custody who have only a short time left to serve stalled, after it was discovered that a few were released by mistake.

The prison estate across England and Wales was strained before Covid-19; but if staff sickness levels and prison healthcare demands increase as rapidly as is predicted, it is hard not to be concerned about the possibility of widespread unrest. Presently, in most prisons, morale is reported as remaining high and relationships are healthy among staff and prisoners.

Family visits have now been suspended; so, for the anxious, they are 'banged up', fearing for their loved ones, and with only four walls to stare at, or doom-laden cyclical news reports to watch. Great work is being done by chaplains, mental-health staff, officers and others. But there is limited scope for the human interaction that is so important for us all, but especially so for the life-wounded souls who are often encountered behind bars.

In this season of Eastertide, when we celebrate a hope that transcends the fear of death or disease, I commend those souls to your prayers. I trust that knowledge of their plight makes the coming weeks feel less onerous for those of us still more fortunate, and the reasons for gratitude easier to find. This is definitely not like being in prison.

The Revd David Kirk Beedon was a prison chaplain from 2012 to 2018, and formerly the Rector of St Michael and St Mary Lichfield and St John Wall.