

How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:4)

Easter Sunday is always a joyful celebration, and this year really was no exception. There is no doubt that the impact of Covid continues, but the relaxation of restrictions has gradually meant that more people are feeling sufficiently confident to attend worship in the church building, while others faithfully join on Zoom. The unseasonably warm weather lifted all our spirits as we celebrated the resurrection once again.

In some ways it felt as though a level of “normality” was returning – and thankfully so it is. And yet there is a sense in which we can never go back. However we end up emerging from the pandemic, life will not look the same as it did before. We have celebrated Easter this year at a time of war in Europe, as well as knowing that rising prices mean that many in our nation are struggling to make ends meet. As ever, we are reminded that finding resurrection hope involves digging deeper than a simplistic assumption that all is well with the world.

For me this year, Maundy Thursday had a particular impact. This was the first time in 52 years that the Queen was unable, due to ill health, to attend the Maundy Thursday service and distribute the Maundy money. The duty fell instead to Prince Charles.



Now that we have celebrated Easter, the nation is looking forward to a long Bank Holiday weekend in June, marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. We do so, though, at a time when we are aware of the Queen's declining health. Our festivities will be joyful, yet tinged with an awareness of fragility. The Royal Family is having to adapt as circumstances change.

Of course this isn't the first time that we have seen the Royal Family having to move with the times. The Queen has seen each of her children face various challenges including broken relationships, and it is fair to say that the death of the Princess of Wales was a particular moment of crisis. As is so often the case in life, there has been no blueprint, and we have watched the Queen and Royal Family as both individuals and institution navigate their way through changing times.

And so it is for the Church, too. As we emerge from the pandemic we face a situation that is different from any we have experienced before – and we are still trying to make sense of it. People's experiences of lockdown have been very different and as we return to life as a community, we do so changed and with slightly altered expectations, hopes and fears. We await what the future will hold.

Which brings me back to Maundy Thursday. Many of you will know that on Maundy Thursday the clergy gather at Guildford Cathedral for the Chrism Mass, where the oils to be used in church for the coming year are blessed, and the clergy renew their ordination vows. Then, in the evening, we gather in church to receive the oils, remember the Last Supper in a service of Holy Communion, wash feet, and hold vigil. The significance of this day struck me forcibly this year. The annual renewal of my ordination vows is always something I value. Whatever the year has held, and however I am feeling about my worthiness for ministry at that particular moment, re-committing myself to serve in this way is a reminder of the privilege of this calling.



There is something especially powerful about the evening service on Maundy Thursday. If you look at the vestments and hangings, there is almost something incongruous. From the purple of Lent, we move to the red of Palm Sunday and Holy Week, yet on Maundy Thursday we celebrate with white hangings, and the Gloria is sung for the first time since Lent began. It is as though the joy of Easter begins early, only to be stopped in its tracks. This happens as the Gospel of the Watch is read and the church is stripped bare in

preparation for Good Friday.

It strikes me that this incongruity is rather apt for life as we experience it. Joy and sorrow are rarely as separate as we might like to think. Times of despair can follow moments of celebration. And what holds us through it all is Christ – present in this service in the bread and wine. And, just as importantly, showing us in this service that we must serve one another, and telling us that we must love one another.

I wonder whether this service might help us symbolically as we look ahead to the coming year. Uncertainty continues to be a part of our lives. While we do appear to be emerging from the pandemic, we find that some things are familiar, and others have changed. Congregations were declining before the pandemic, and that trend certainly has not been reversed. The future is going to look different, even if we don't yet know in what ways. In my report in the Annual Report, I spoke about discovering afresh how to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Individually and as a community, we are finding our feet once again, and that will take some navigation. In order to navigate effectively, we need the right tools. In the Anglican tradition, we rely on scripture, reason and tradition for our insights. This might sound a little grand, but that is where the service of Maundy Thursday helps. It is a reminder of our foundations. That we are called to love one another; that we are called to serve one another; and that we are called to keep our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus.

Generation by generation this can look different. Those of you who keep track of Church of England matters will know that on an institutional level people are considering how best to secure the future of worshipping communities across the country. Likewise locally, we continue to seek to draw our ideas into such things as Church Development Plans, not because we are excited by documentation, but because we know that the world does not stand still, and we need to be ready to meet the various challenges and opportunities that come along. And all of this must take place with our eyes fixed firmly on God. Listening to one another. Respecting one another's perspectives. Loving one another.

I expect that we will all be interested to get involved as we return to our plans for the coming year, seeking to explore where God is calling us at

this time and in this place. One way we ensure continuity and faithfulness in the face of change is to look back on the year just gone – and as always the Annual Report contains a wonderful testimony to all that has taken place here at St Mary’s over the past year. As a church committed to seeking truth in scripture, reason and tradition, we are blessed to know that we will always be building on secure foundations – the foundations of our predecessors here at St Mary’s, and, of course, the cornerstone on which the Church is founded, Jesus Christ.

May Services and Events

Sunday 1	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Sung Communion and Children’s Groups
Saturday 7	08.30	Men’s Breakfast at Café Affair
Sunday 8	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	All Age Worship
	18.00	Service of Wholeness and Healing
Monday 9	19.30	Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room
Sunday 15	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Sung Communion and Children’s Groups
Wednesday 18	20.00	PCC in the Cuddington Hall
Thursday 19	14.30	Thursday Club Games Afternoon
Saturday 21	10.00	Women’s Group in the Cuddington Hall
Sunday 22	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Sung Communion
Tuesday 24	14.30	Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room
Thursday 26	20.00	Ascension Day Holy Communion
Sunday 29	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Sung Communion

Morning Prayer is said in church every weekday morning at 9am

Everyone is very welcome