

St. Cuthbert's AGM 2022

Sermon & Rector's Report

Please make sure you are sitting comfortably. This is longer than usual!

Each of us has our own Feast day - our birthday – and you made mine a special one this year. It's a day when we celebrate being alive. Cards, flowers, gifts, a special meal and 'phone calls tell us that our friends are glad to know us and that we make a difference to their lives.

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. We celebrate Christ, risen, ascended and glorified. We give thanks to God for all he has done for us through Jesus and for the difference Jesus makes to our lives.

So today, as we do that, I now give thanks for you and the difference you make in my life – in no particular order.

Marie, Philip, Caroline and Iain – the paid staff who support me more than words could say.

Lesley, Margaret and Bishop Bob in their clergy support to you and me.

Judith, my Warden who will continue in her role. George, People's Warden and all members of the vestry. This has not been an easy year and I have appreciated your wisdom and support.

I also thank their spouses for the support they give to the individuals and the church.

Martin, who takes good care of our finances.

Audrey, for making sure there is someone in the kitchen each Sunday, and all those who volunteer in that role.

David Mackintosh, for the many different duties he performs.

For the newly formed pastoral visiting team, their support to me and the time they give to those being visited.

Kay, for helping with the children.

Christine, who looks after safeguarding.

Martin, Ross and Iain for looking after the property.

Bryan and the team of gardeners, including Ross, who I believe is in charge of the lawn mower.

Bev and Kay, our eco warriors, who have been working hard to help us achieve another Eco Scotland award.

Everyone who does a duty – welcoming, reading, leading intercessions, arranging flowers, putting out bins, opening the hall for parties, bringing people to church.

The Phoenix Group for the friendship and fellowship they offer each other.

The Thursday service leaders – Caroline, Joan and Margaret.

Community Corner – Joan, Susan, Judith & Hilary.

R&R for the peace and reflection found within it and shared.

Wendy Pearson for her encouragement in supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Edinburgh.

St. Raphael's for their continuous prayer for those in need.

The Badminton Club for keeping fit and supporting each other, even without a mission statement.

For everyone who supports and raises awareness for charities – leprosy mission, Christian aid, foodbanks,

seafarers, milk bottle tops and stamps for someone and probably more that I don't know about.

Colin, Marie, Martin, Robin, Lesley – for managing cameras and live streaming.

All volunteers who help Caroline with children's events.

Margaret and Robin Holmes for the myriad of duties they perform – particularly coming back to church to check that lights are off and doors are locked.

For the people I visit. The privilege of being invited into their homes to hear their stories and be a small part of their lives.

All of these people are kings or queens for what they do, and today we celebrate the Kingship of Christ, but what sort of Kingship is it that we're celebrating? Our Gospel reading gives us a vivid picture to reflect on.

The picture is certainly not what we would expect to see illustrating kingship, power and authority. Here are no fine robes but a naked and scarred body. His crown has no jewels, only vicious thorns. On his hands there are no rings of power, just the nails which fix him to a wooden cross – no golden throne. There are no courtiers or servants around him –

just two criminals sharing his fate and an assorted crowd of soldiers and ghoulish spectators who taunt and mock him.

But before we turn away from this ghastly picture of cruelty and humiliation we see the words “This is the King of the Jews” and we hear the voice of an unlikely believer “remember me when you come into your kingdom”. Someone here has caught a glimpse of the glory that is hidden by the awfulness of this torture. And we hear another voice, the voice of authority coming from the defeat of the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise”.

We heard the voices of mockery and hate. Now we hear the voices of faith and compassion and it makes us stop and wonder.

Is it possible that in this picture we are getting a glimpse of the sort kingship that can meet our deepest inner needs, the needs we sometimes daren't even face ourselves and which certainly aren't met by the rulers of this world.

Here is a King who is prepared to suffer alongside us. This is not a King who holds himself aloof from ordinary folk. This is a King who experiences betrayal, savage injustice, brutal cruelty and utter humiliation and yet maintains his dignity and integrity.

This is a King who has lived life as we live it, who has died as we must die but who now lives a new resurrection life.

He reassures us and welcomes us into that same resurrection life in his Kingdom where we will know the peace and healing for which we have longed.

The picture of Kingship in our Gospel story turns traditional kingship upside down. It reaches out to us, calling us to offer ourselves to Christ the King and we can perhaps sense what a difference this would make to our lives.

Next week we will begin again to tell the story of the coming of Jesus into the world as a baby and we will again start looking forward to Jesus returning as Christ the King. As we journey through the year, hearing again the stories of Jesus' birth and life, his ministry and teaching, his death and resurrection we too will be travelling on our own journeys. We too will go through wilderness times of doubt and anxiety. We may enter the Gethsemane of anguish and despair We will have mountain top experiences of excitement and good news. We will plod along through the everyday life of ordinary times.

As we travel, we will also have a companion alongside us and a vision to give meaning and purpose to our lives. Our companion will be Christ the Son of Man who knows what it is to be human and who will show understanding and compassion when the going gets tough.

His presence will make all the difference when we feel most alone and isolated. Our vision will be that of love's victory over death and of Christ the King who will draw us into his eternal kingdom. His kingship will make all the difference when things seem out of control, chaotic and heading from bad to worse.

Today we celebrate the eternal presence of Christ the King in bread and wine. Let us pray that his spirit will make a difference in our lives bringing us refreshment, peace, the power of love and whatever else our hearts need for the journey that lies ahead.

Today we also look at the year that has past, which again you will see in pictures at the end of the AGM and our plans and hopes for the future.

We did not escape Covid in the past year and for the first six months, we continued to receive Communion in one form only. Thanks to the imagination of a priest in the Church of England and the generosity of Joan Smith, we were gifted an intinction (or dipping) chalice



in memory of her mum, Jinty Deighton, which allowed us to receive the body and blood together. Small steps towards some form of normality.

The plans for the Sanctuary Project began, with a visit from Alex Stewart and other members of the Diocesan Buildings Committee to guide and advise us.

I am pleased to say that everything is on schedule for the replacement and moving of the organ in January. The next part of the project to go ahead will hopefully be the kitchen, having consulted with all the kitchen users.

Earlier in the year we had received a Canon 35 permission to change the sound system. Unfortunately, the person doing this was involved in a car accident and has only just started back to work. We are hoping to meet very soon to get that project completed.

Caroline, Youth, Families and Children Worker, and I have been having conversations and thoughts about how we, as a church, minister to the youngsters. Sadly, our Sunday School is very small, so we have decided to make some changes.

In January, there will be Sunday School once a month, on the first Sunday of the month. This will replace the Family Service.

Caroline will continue to run the very successful, weekly, St. Cuthbert's Toddler Group and will also arrange monthly events, aimed at nursery and primary school children. Caroline and Lesley will be planning to run Youth Alpha, aimed at senior school ages too. Caroline will continue to plan the events that have already proved successful – such as events at Easter, Halloween and Christmas and is also researching holiday clubs.

What we all must remember is that Caroline cannot do any of this alone. A few people have been helping her with the Toddler Group but if we really want to minister to the youngsters in Colinton, we will need more volunteers. Please consider if you can help in this very important ministry – which doesn't have to be on a Sunday.

So often I hear people say that we are just an old congregation – along with many other congregations, I will add. However, I would like to remind you, that you are not 'just' an old congregation, you are the living body of Christ on this earth and it is through you, through us that God's work is done.

One very important piece of news is that Lesley will be joining us full time from January, as a stipendiary minister, while still serving her curacy.

We all know what a wonderful priest we have in Lesley, but please remember she is still here to learn. During her curacy she will have one study day off a week and two other days for rest.

We all know things are not easy. Climate change, economic crisis, war, dwindling numbers, so much to complain about like the two criminals alongside Christ on the cross. But they changed and they were given a vision of the future – ‘today you will be with me in paradise’.

Remember, we are the living body of Christ on this earth and we are the ones who should be telling everybody of the joy of knowing Christ, the joy of worshipping God together as a family and community and the promise of being in paradise. If we can't share our enthusiasm with others, we will not get newcomers through the door.

Let's do this together - supporting, encouraging and loving each other, let the Holy Spirit dwell in us and guide us. There is a lot of hard work ahead and I ask for your prayers and support for everything we do, as we begin a new church year. Amen.

