



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 17th September 2023
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 17th September	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday 20th September	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 24th September	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass

All creatures of our
God & King (*see sheet*)

369

466 (*omit vv4&5*)

577

Panfield Church

Sunday 17th September	5pm	Songs of Praise
Tuesday 19th September	5pm	Evening Prayer/Office Hour
Sunday 24th September	11am	Holy Communion

Gospel Acclamation

*My soul give thanks to the Lord,
all that is within me
praise his holy name.*

NOTICES

Bring and Buy - Mark your diaries, for on Sunday October 15th, following the 10am service at St Mary's, there will be a Bring and Buy sale in the Church Hall, more details to follow soon.

Heritage Open Weekend - Thank you to all those who attended yesterday at St Mary's Bocking and to the brilliant volunteers who helped make it happen. Don't forget that Panfield Church will be open **TODAY** from **2pm to 5pm** with a Songs of Praise service to close.

Coffee Morning - The Almshouses are hosting a Coffee Morning on Friday September 29th at 10.30am to raise money towards a second scheme car. They would be thrilled if anyone who is free and wishes to attend could come along for a catch up with some cake.

Junior Church - A new term of Junior Church starts **TODAY** with the first session meeting in the Church Hall. There will then be further sessions on October 15th, November 19th and December 17th. Please let any local families know, as all are very welcome to join in.

Stepping Stones - The next series of Stepping Stone sessions will start on **Tuesday 3rd October** from **6.30 to 7.30pm** in the church, please note the new date and time! A further three sessions will follow weekly, on October 10th, 17th and 24th. The theme across this course will be the relationship between church and the community, looking at the issues we face today, and the challenges they present.

Confirmation - We are thrilled to be hosting a Confirmation Service at St Mary's on Monday October 30th at 7.30pm, and will welcome Bishop Roger to lead the service. Have you thought about being confirmed? Want to know more? Then please speak to Fr Rod in the coming few weeks. It isn't often that candidates are confirmed in their own church, so please don't miss this opportunity.

Harvest Supper - The Friends of St Mary's are arranging a Harvest Supper for Saturday September 30th, 6.30pm for 7pm in the Church Hall. Tickets are £12 for adults and £6 for children, available today. Your ticket will include your two course meal and entertainment too.

Local wildlife walk - On **Sunday October 15th** there will be a wildlife walk starting at, and returning to St Mary's. We are meeting by the Church Hall at 11.45am. Jacqui Hogger, one of our Eco Church leaders will be guiding us. This is open to anyone, either as an individual, or with family and friends.

Friendly Friday Cafe - There are just less than three weeks to go now until the café sessions are back. They will re-start on Friday October 6th after those involved have had a well earned break.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Ron Cole, Peter Hopkins, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, Tony & Ann and Margaret Everitt. We remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Alexander Geddes, Doreen Dove, Bertha Challis, Frederick Goodwin, Colin Beattie, Philip Johnson, Colleen Parsons, William Collins, Charles Yeldham and Jean Hart.

The Collect for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Epistle Reading - Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy seven times. 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who

wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my, heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Address

Over these last few days it has been wonderful to take part in the National Heritage Open Weekends, a chance to share just how magnificent our buildings are, both as places of worship, but also as places with so much history. A close look around the building here will see you come across many hidden gems. From a penny from Dean Roger's day and his attempt to lay a million of them, to mention of previous Deans including a Wordsworth, surely not a relative of the Wordsworth, yes that one, or a helmet from the English Civil War discovered in a tunnel leading away from the church.

There are some not so pleasing features too, how many of you have spotted the graffiti? A number of the pillars, mainly near the choir, have what's called historical graffiti. On the one hand we don't like it, as the pillar has been defaced, but on the other, when it is centuries old, it feels like it captures a moment. Bored choir boys sitting in the stall many, many years ago, carving into the wall their initials and the year.

Do you remember earlier in the year, the story of the blue crayon used to deface a monument at Croome Hall, near Worcester? Uproar, that a number of prized monuments not least in the middle of a Capability Brown designed garden had been ruined. Thankfully they came clean, but there was a lot of fuss. One of the culprits though did come forward through a parent and apologise. He was only eight and had been handed the crayon by staff, but clearly not with the intention he used it for.

He said sorry though and was forgiven. Would the choir boys from St Mary's centuries ago say sorry now? Would we forgive them? Well, after today's reading, I hope we might try.

When it comes to day to day things going wrong forgiveness can follow fairly easily, but when those situations are more serious, devastating, life changing well that seems a lot harder indeed. Acts of forgiveness on that level can often make the news whether it be Eric Lomax, the railway man, forced to help the Japanese army build the Thai, Burma Railway. Then there is Gordon Wilson, whose daughter was killed in Enniskillen, each famously forgiving those who caused them unimaginable pain. Forgiveness in those most awful of experiences seems impossible but nonetheless that is what they did, along with a few others we could try to name, but it remains a rare act.

Years later Gordon Wilson was asked both why, and how it was that he found himself able to forgive. He had many reasons but one that struck me was that spoke of a hardness of his own heart that followed. That by not forgiving, he carried these little stones, cold, heavy stones in his once warm, open and kind heart. He was anxious of the pain they caused and the effect on him. Not least that if further challenges came and there is more that was unforgiven that his heart would completely turn to stone, no longer useful to him, to others, or indeed to God. So, he chose the path of forgiveness, however hard it was, because in the long run it might just save him.

I suspect we can all relate to that feeling of not wanting to forgive. Not wanting to forgive the pain someone caused us, directly or indirectly. Not wanting to forgive the unfairness of it all, amongst I am sure many other reasons too. However, God wants us to forgive. I mean he forgives us, and we get it wrong all the time, he always is forgiving but we struggle. So, Jesus reminds those listening we don't just forgive once, or seven times, but seventy seven if that is what is necessary, being forgiving needs to be truly part of who he are. We need to be warm, kind, generous of heart, not full of these hard unforgiving stones that weigh us down too.

Good advice indeed. The problem is it isn't advice. It is a command to forgive. It is not, have a think and maybe see in time that you might, maybe forgive. No, we must forgive.

No-one said being a Christian would be easy and here another challenge then, we must forgive or be like that slave. For we are forgiven but we will not offer it to others. Or we will, but only if we deem the misdemeanour not too serious. I'm afraid not, again this isn't advice but a command.

As Christians, it is one thing to think we hear, and another to truly listen and then act. Have you seen the Monty Python film the Life of Brian? It brilliantly depicts how although Christians are well intended they often sit far away and arguably deliberately so far away that they don't hear properly and so miss the point.

This is captured brilliantly in a retelling of the Beatitudes. Famously, Jesus is explaining who is blessed, and offering woe to those who have much. 'Blessed are the peacemakers', he says. Those listening, from afar, hear 'Blessed are the Cheesemakers'. Someone nearby says, that can't be right, it is not meant to be taken literally, he means Blessed are the manufacturers of any dairy products, not just cheesemakers. A funny line indeed, and overlooks the fact that cheese and peace don't rhyme but, we get the point. When scripture is challenging we can choose to sit far enough away to not fully hear the message and therefore act upon it. Well forgive me today, but I think we have heard it clearly.

What next then? To live out the command, to forgive once, seven times and seventy-seven if needed. We know forgiveness is possible, not least as we are forgiven. As Martin Luther King said, 'forgiveness is not an occasional act, but it is a constant attitude'. As we seek to live that out, may we find that any hardness of our hearts melt away with each and every act of forgiveness. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy;
and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall,
keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful,
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.