



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church

Sunday 5th March 2023
The Second Sunday of Lent
Staying in Contact



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

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com
or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 5th March

8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass
Wednesday 8th March
9.30am Said Mass
Sunday 12th March
8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass

424

77

O for a thousand tongues

517

Panfield Church

Sunday 5th March
Tuesday 7th March
Sunday 12th March

11am Morning Worship
5pm Evening Prayer
11am Holy Communion

Gospel Acclamation

*The Son of Man must be lifted
up, that whoever believes in him
must have eternal life*

NOTICES

Ring for the King - In preparation for King Charles III coronation in May, we are looking to grow our band of bell ringers. For more information speak to Alan or Linda May.

Christian Youth Outreach - CYO do brilliant work in our local schools both primary and secondary. This month's coffee moneys will be going to support them and especially their link with Bocking School. Coffee Money from January came to £102.37 and is going to the RNLI.

Fellowship - next meet on Thurs 16th March at 12.30pm in the Hall. Bryan Thurlow will be the speaker and his talk is entitled 'The Perennial Mr Potter'. A popular speaker we expect this to be a busy meeting.

Lent Course - Mondays 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th March there will be a session to reflect on that week's material from 'Dust and Glory'. Sessions will run from 1.30pm to 3pm, at The Deanery. Whether you have been part of a discussion group before or not, all welcome.

'Out of this World' - March 17th—19th we are hosting a space themed weekend. Friday 17th March from 7-9pm will be a free star-gazing event in the church grounds, no need to book. On Saturday, we will have the Indoor Planetarium running all day, tickets £7 and can only be bought on the day. In the grounds there will be free solar gazing, and in church, free craft activities & refreshments. March 19th, Felsted Prep School Choir are joining us to make it a very exciting Mothering Sunday 10am service indeed!

Helpers needed - For the space themed event to run smoothly we are looking for volunteers who will be able to give some time on the day to help out. Please see the list at the back. Thank you in advance.

A Warm Place this Winter - Our Warm Space has been an incredible success, and so we have made the decision to run a little longer than planned and will now conclude on Friday April 7th with a slightly shorter session which will conclude at 1.30pm. I am thrilled to say that this regular Friday community lunch space will re-launch in May, more details on that in due course. Until then, please continue to show your support each Friday, and tell others about it too.

Coffee Morning - The last coffee morning to raise funds towards the Flowers for this year's Flower Festival will be on Friday March 24th at 10.30am in the Church Hall.

Electoral Roll - If you have joined St Mary's in the last year or two it is likely you are not on our Electoral Roll. Indeed there may be others who have been meaning to do so, but not taken up the chance. Well, ahead of the Annual Meeting in May we are inviting you to join now. A short form is at the back, which is easy to fill in and best of all there is no charge either!

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Peter Hopkins, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Margaret, Peter, Jenifer, Jo, June Blackwood, 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 Blanche Lee, Ethel Girling, Anthony Eden, Lancelot Broyd, Grace Earnshaw, Ada Peacock, Audrey Durie, Vernon Fitch, Grenville Morgan (Priest), Sidney Whitehead & Mike Townley.

The Collect for The Second Sunday of Lent

Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Epistle Reading - Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Gospel Reading - John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Address

I think it is fair to say that some questions in life are relatively easy to answer.

What day is it today? Sunday Is Marmite foul, and should be banned for all eternity? Yes

On a more serious note, some of the questions we ask are indeed much harder to answer.

Why do bad people exist? When will we finally realise that we can do so much more when we work together?

When it comes to our faith, whether it is well-established or something we might prefer to describe as a little less than that, well there are even more difficult questions.

How can God let tragedies happen in our world? Why does he allow such suffering?

Fair questions indeed but let me say now I think we all struggle with those, and even more so when they are thrown at us as reasons why God just can't possibly exist.

In responding, in our determination to seek answers, one of the places we need to start is not by seeing things literally but recognising there is much more going on. Rarely is there an easy or simple answer.

Nicodemus asks Jesus a difficult question on finding out how he must enter the kingdom of God. He needs to be born again. How am I to be born again? Can one enter for a second time my mother's womb? He takes the words he hears literally, when it needs a more nuanced and informed view to really understand what Jesus is saying.

Born again, the phrase, actually has so much more to offer. 'Born' is more likely to be translated as begotten. So begotten of the Father, telling as that he and therefore we, are of and from the Father.

'Again' being more realistically translated as 'from above'. So born again as Jesus means it, is not to literally be re-birthed, but that we are all begotten of the Father, from above. That in seeking to follow him, we are encouraged into a new way of life and a new relationship with him. His gift to each of us, that we must receive, acknowledge, and then live by.

To be born again then is a journey of relationship with God that leads us home to him. That moment with Jesus for Nicodemus was just the beginning, his understanding of how to answer his question grew over time, as did his faith. Jesus is expanding his imagination to see there is so much more going on.

I suspect it is in acknowledging and noticing these truths from the passage that explain why it has been chosen for us to receive as we move through Lent. For each of us to know that we have been born again, for our imaginations to be expanded and then we are encouraged to work on our journey of relationship with God.

For some, arguably, we haven't fully, satisfactorily answered the question. It needs to be a case of revelation of faith, of trust, of perseverance.

When it comes to answering questions like 'why does God let tragedies in our world happen', we need to respond in the same way with faith, trust and perseverance. The biggest problem is no-one else does. Most people want a literal, or an easy, or a quick answer. And I don't think that works. There isn't a real willingness to truly engage with the question and wrestle with how we might begin to answer.

Nicodemus needed time, we need time, also knowing that there is so much more to our world than we can comprehend.

If you think of God's creation as a tapestry, God can see the final piece, complete, perfected. We can only see a very little, and from the other side too where it is messy, where there are loose ends, and everything else life can throw at us. This image helps me when faced with these difficult questions.

As we seek to find answers to tough question, we also need to look for what we know about God to help us answer. Do we think of God as cruel or loving? Compassionate or demanding? We know God is loving, we know he is compassionate, and that forms part of our answer, to say that in our experiences that isn't how we understand God. Importantly, it is also what Jesus seeks to do in the reading. He doesn't leave Nicodemus without a true understanding of who God is, and indeed gives him a verse that has since become one of the most well-known, repeated and cherished verses.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Nicodemus needed to journey with God, journey with his questions but he did so knowing that truth, that God so loved the world that each who turn to him will have eternal life.

That is true for us, whether things are going to plan, or we are feeling we can barely stand up from the barrage of things going wrong. It helps me with those difficult questions too.

If in my life God is good, that God is love, alongside those scripture passages that tell me so, then when faced with how we understand life tragedies, I take comfort that God is present in them, that miracles will have happened, that life goes wrong, but he is there.

It is humanity that can be evil, that gets it wrong. With 7 billion people on this earth, have you ever wondered how there isn't more tragedy? Is God part of the reason why?

He loves us, believes in us, and gives us eternal life. That last word is so important too, life.

For life means choices, decisions, consequences, a freedom to act and a freedom to choose. If God intervenes every time we go astray, is that life? If he fixes everything, how will we learn, grow?

For some, maybe for many, this will still not be enough to answer the tough questions we have been speaking about. Today, inspired by Nicodemus and these reflections, I hope I can give all of us food for thought though, and plenty of encouragement as we seek answers.

As you do so, know you have been born again, that you like Nicodemus, are on a journey of revelation and relationship with God. I encourage us all to always put our trust in God, to take wise decisions in our lives, and to focus on what we can do and control, rather than what we can't. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God, you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:
keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls;
that we may be defended from all adversities
which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.