



# The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 8th October 2023  
The Eighteenth 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 8th October

8am Said Mass  
10am Sung Mass

169

395

Wednesday 11th October

9.30am Said Mass

My song is love unknown

Sunday 15th October

8am Said Mass  
10am Sung Mass

(omit vv 4 and 6)

429

### **Panfield Church**

Sunday 8th October

11am Holy Communion

Tuesday 10th October

5pm Evening Prayer/Office Hour

Sunday 15th October

6pm BCP Evensong

## Gospel Acclamation

*I call you friends, says the Lord,  
because I have made known to you every-  
thing that I have learnt from my Father*

## 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.

**Funerals** - At St Mary's we were very saddened to hear of the death of Peter Smith, a bellringer here for many years, his funeral will be **Friday 27th October 1.30pm in church**. In Panfield, we wanted to let you know that Chris Halls' funeral will be **Weds 25th October at 11am in Panfield Church**.

**Stepping Stones** - The next session will be on **Tuesday 10th October** from **6.30 to 7.30pm** in the church with a further two sessions on October 17th and 24th. The theme will be the relationship between church and the community, looking at the issues we face today, and the challenges they present.

**Friendly Friday Cafe** - is now underway and will run each Friday until December 15th. Sessions start at 12noon and run until 3pm in the Hall. All are very welcome, why not pop down and bring a friend 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.

**Harvest Weekend** - A huge thank you to all those who celebrated with us last weekend. The Harvest Supper welcomed about 70 people and we are thrilled to say raised nearly £750 in profit. Braintree Foodbank came on Friday and collected all of the donations too, after a wonderful response. Thank you.

**Quarterly Newsletter** - The Autumn Issue is here and it would be fantastic to get copies out across the Parish. If you are able to deliver to your road or other local roads please take enough to do so and sign the sheet at the back so that we know what road/roads are covered. Thank you.

**OCC Shoebox Appeal** - If you have any knitted items, stationery, toiletries (no creams/liquids) could you please bring them in by the end of October, thank you. *Pamela Gibson*

**Prayers** - We keep in our prayers Gemma Howe, Julie Wilkinson, Barry and Janice Goody, 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 Edward Francis, Walter Lewis (Priest), Donald Careless, Mike Griffiths, Joyce Holden, Barbara Lawrence, Nellie Broyd, June Beynon, Margaret Taggart, and Joan Percival.

### The Collect for the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us your gift of faith  
that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before,  
we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy;  
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 - Philippians 3:4b-14**

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

### **Gospel Reading - Matthew 21:33-end**

'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' When the

chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

## Address

Matthew 21 verse 43: 'Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom'. It's a seriously unpleasant story; the slaves had done nothing to justify being beaten, stoned and murdered. But it is in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and New Testament scholars would generally agree that it was a story told by Jesus. It may even have been based on something that had actually happened. A landowner who lived abroad might well have been unpopular and his servants may not have been particularly sympathetic towards the tenants. They in turn saw a possibility of getting control of the vineyard, but miscalculated how the landlord would react.

Whatever the origins of the story, it soon became understood as an allegory of how the Jewish people had turned away from God and rejected, or even persecuted, His prophets. In due course they would also reject and kill His Son. So God's favour would no longer rest on them but on those who followed in the way taught by Jesus. Is there any message for us today in any of this? Most of us – so far as I know – do not have vineyards (even if we might grow a few grapes in our gardens) and hopefully do not resort to such desperate methods to get our own way. Perhaps if we think in terms of people becoming complacent and assuming that all was well, and would remain so, without them have to do much about it, then perhaps we can find some relevance.

Let me explore this idea of complacency in three different contexts. First, with regard to the Christian Church in our own country and the Church of England in particular. I am just about of the generation which had no real difficulty in assuming that the UK was a Christian country and that, at least in England, to be C of E was the default setting for anyone who did not assert that they were something else. The 2021 census shattered some of these illusions. Less than half the population of England and Wales described themselves as Christian while those of 'no religion' increased sharply. Church historians might debate both the causes and the timing of these changes: were the 1950s really a boom time for the churches? Did the cultural changes associated with the 1960s precipitate the decline? Or do we have to look much further back?

Statistics can tell us about what has been happening but not why. Did the churches simply fail to read the signs of the times and remain stuck in an outdated way of doing religion; or were attempts to be relevant in an ever-changing world counter-productive? Both of these might be true, but I would also suggest that complacency had a part to play. For most churches there was no immediate crisis so it was easier to 'keep calm and carry on' than risk the sort of radical change that might upset regular (and generous) church-goers. I recall one bold Vicar saying at a clergy conference that he knew he had to accept losing around a quarter of his existing congregation if he wished to grow his church. Most of us would, I suspect, not take that risk.

If the church as a whole has perhaps been a bit too complacent in recent decades, then the same is likely to be true of individual parishes. I'm not suggesting that this is the case with St Mary's, though every parish sometimes needs a challenge. But I can think of churches that seem content to settle for managed decline, blame external circumstances and not ask hard questions. One of the Derbyshire churches I had links with springs to mind. It is a church with a similar tradition to St Mary's, including a well-attended Sunday Mass at the heart of its worship. When I was first involved there, Sunday congregations were not far short of 100 at the main Mass. Gradually this slipped down to 60 or 70, mainly because older church members were becoming incapacitated or dying, and not being replaced

by younger people. Good work was done with children and some young people, but little thought had been given about integrating them into the mainstream life of the church. There was nothing seriously wrong, but the church was, at least from an outside perspective, aiming far too low. I am hopeful that the arrival a few years ago of a younger Rector with a more evangelical background is having a positive impact. But challenging complacent vested interests is never easy.

Complacency does not, however, just affect institutions. It is all too easy for each of us to become complacent in our own Christian lives and witness. It is not that we are doing anything wrong, just that everything has become routine. We attend Sunday Mass on a regular basis; we try to get to a weekday service; we say our prayers and read the Bible. Perhaps we feel that this is enough. The world around us is a sufficiently troubling and challenging place for us to need a place of refuge on a Sunday. There is nothing wrong with that so far as it goes. Indeed for those who have particularly challenging or stressful lives it may well be enough. For others, however, it is not enough. We might need to be encouraged to leave our comfort zone and try something new. There are no rules about what that 'something else' might be: some structured course of Christian learning; participation in (or even leading) some different forms of worship; involvement in taking the church into the community both in terms of service and of mission. The opportunities are out there.

It is not particularly easy to apply the parable of the tenants in the vineyard to our daily lives. Thankfully most of us do not behave in the way that the tenants did. We are much more sophisticated than that. But there is a warning there. We have no automatic right to special treatment simply because of our status or indeed our life-long church membership. We may not be doing anything wrong; but are we doing enough things that are right and which work to establish and build up the kingdom of God on earth? The parable is troubling, not just because of the behaviour of the tenants but because it contains a promise – or is it in fact a threat - of the certainty of judgment. Ultimately we will be held accountable for what we have done with our lives; or perhaps equally importantly for what we have failed to do with them. It is easy to be complacent. Few, if any, of us are bad people. Most of us try to do our best. But do we sometimes hold something back? That doesn't necessarily have to be something to do with church. It might be the 'busyness' that prevents us from giving a helping hand when one is needed. It might be the prioritising of our own wishes over those of others – even of those we love and cherish. It might be hiding behind so-called 'commitments' to escape from an unwelcome encounter. Sometimes this is the right thing to do. There is a possibly unreliable story of the great psychologist Carl Jung being spotted by a would-be patient sailing on a lake. The patient later challenged him: Dr Jung you said you could not see me because you had an important prior engagement. Yes said the doctor: I had an appointment with myself and those are the appointments I always keep. It is important to strike the right balance between care for ourselves and reaching out to others in need.

Twenty-first century life is complicated and challenging. The parables can help us negotiate it, but only if we think carefully about how to apply them. The parable we heard earlier today is a particularly challenging and complicated one.

### Post Communion Prayer

We praise and thank you, O Christ, for this sacred feast:  
for here we receive you, here the memory of your passion is renewed,  
here our minds are filled with grace, and here a pledge of future glory is given,  
when we shall feast at that table where you reign  
with all your saints for ever. Amen.