

Vicar's Letter – May 2019

APCM Address

Dear Friends

At our annual meeting on Monday, we celebrated all that God has done in the life of our church over the last year. We have so much for which we can be thankful. We can see God's hand of faithfulness over the year in his provision and favour towards us. Who could ever forget the excitement of the Gift Day on Pentecost Sunday or the opening of the Old Mission Hall once the refurbishment had been complete, or the Baptism service with so many of our teenagers committing their lives to Christ? I do not have the space in this letter to recount the multiple blessings that God has showered upon us over this last year or the ways in which we have been able to bless others.

So much has happened because of our commitment to a shared life together to pursue the purposes of God. I could go through our Church directory from A to W (there are no names beyond W!) and express gratitude for the contribution and commitment of everyone in our fellowship who has caught the vision to be part of something bigger than themselves and serve as part of a team. You have all given so much. You have provided financially for the mission of the church and for the purchase and renovation of the Old Mission Hall. You have committed time and energy to serve one another. You have given yourselves to reach out beyond the walls of our building with the love of Jesus to others (schools work, Street Pastor teams, Hospital Chaplaincy team, Food bank, Smarties, Outlook, to mention but a few areas of service). You have shared together in Life groups and supported one another through trials and challenges. We are truly a community of people who live to love God and love one another in fellowship with Christ.

In this way we live out our strap line: Meet God – Find Life – Make Friends.

As we draw closer to God, we discover more of the richness of life he offers, and find ourselves growing in our friendships with one another. We are a church in which we are all involved, everyone with a contribution to make, a part to play.

Looking Ahead

So as we look ahead to the next stage of our journey, let me give you 3 words beginning with the letter 'P' on which to reflect.

Perspective.

There is always a tendency for us to become so absorbed with the detail of our lives that we miss the bigger picture. When we see things from God's perspective, it can look very different, a bit like looking over the town of Tewkesbury from the top of the Abbey tower. Whilst we celebrate what we have and what God has done, let's not lose sight of God's perspective. He desires that 'all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:4). An awareness of this means we resist complacency and press on with reaching out with the gospel to those beyond the walls of the church.

Prayer.

We seek God's perspective by positioning ourselves in prayer.

'I am the vine and you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

We need to posture ourselves to listen and hear from God and respond accordingly in His time and in response to the promptings of His Spirit.

Prayer is the hardest thing and perhaps the most necessary and effective because it connects us to God. Revivals have come as God's people joined together in prayer. Part of the vision of the Old Mission Hall is that it would provide a space at the heart of our town where people could come and pray. It is therefore a joy that this is the venue for our Churches Together response to the 'Thy Kingdom Come' global prayer initiative of the Archbishops this year between Ascension Day and Pentecost. From Wednesday 5th June – Saturday 8th June, the OMH will be open for prayer (further details to follow).

Pioneering new pathways to faith.

As we listen to the Lord in prayer and gain God's perspective so he releases his Spirit in new and creative ways to enable his people to pioneer new pathways to faith. This brings a fresh burst of energy to break new ground, try something different, take a risk. We must always be aware of the temptation to be settlers, to downgrade our dreams, to play it safe. Where are the pioneers today, those who have a vision for praying audacious prayers and believing God for the

impossible? It is easy to settle in a place of comfort and in a land of plenty but there needs to be those within our community who are pioneers and who will venture all for Christ and the Gospel.

'Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith'

Hebrews 12:1-2

Stephen