

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 13th September 2020 – Patronal Festival

Isaiah 61.1—end; Psalm 45.10-end; Romans 14.1-12; Luke 1.46-55

Today is a great day for St Mary-le-Tower church. On our patronal festival no less, our choir is once again singing in church. They have emerged from closeted months of virtual existence, and great credit must go to all choir members for their perseverance during a challenging time. Many of them are of course young people who are such an important part of our church. But they are not just young people, all ages too have persevered with singing on-line. It has been a very different experience from normal choir singing.

The particular accolade goes of course to our director of music, Chris Borrett, who has laboured ceaselessly to sustain the choir of St Mary-le-Tower as a virtual choir, preparing for today when choir singing takes place in church again. For the time being we won't be seeing our young choristers on Sunday mornings; the boy and girl choristers are beginning their practices again on Mondays and Tuesdays, and in due course Choral Evensongs will begin again. But be assured, the choir of St Mary-le-Tower is back in business in their choral ministry.

Thank you, Christopher, for all you have done to sustain the various sections of the choir over the lockdown months. It has, I know, been a great labour, amid all your lockdown childcare responsibilities, and also struggling a ridiculously slow rural home internet speed. In truth, our choir has continued to be in lockdown until now, and it is really wonderful to see so many of you here this morning both in the chancel and in the congregation. Well done everyone.

Today, St Mary-le-Tower has become as it were itself again, with choral worship once again being offered to God in this place, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In a curious way our worship style sort of comes into its own at this odd and difficult time; a time when a masked congregation may not sing, but an unmasked socially distanced choir can and does.

Of course, all of us can and do have singing hearts, as the singing of the choir carries us along, and indeed works with the Holy Spirit to carry us into the presence of God. Surprisingly, in a curious way, this is our moment, and as we seek to sustain the music of this place, we are able prove yet again the great value of this tradition of choral ministry.

Blessed Mary's heart sang as she came to terms and to deeper understanding of her call to be the mother of Jesus. We heard her song in the Gospel reading as she exults in the salvation of God, and in many ways this is what it means to be the Church. We are called to be a community that exults in the salvation of God, knowing that God is amongst us and that he changes lives, lifts up the humble and lowly and saves us from ourselves. This, really, is what all our singing is all about; exulting in the salvation of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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We need to remember this. As well as the quality of our singing, a vital part of this is remembering also what sort of community we need to be. The salvation of God of which we all sing in our hearts, needs to be lived out in our relationships one with another, if it is to be transparent to others, and to those around us in the wider community. The heart of this, is our commitment to one another in the Body of Christ, and our acceptance of one another despite of differences and our disappointments.

Our first reading this morning was about this. The particular issue was about the ethics of the food people eat. It's interesting that such things are again a huge issue today, though for different reasons. St Paul challenges his readers by switching around from what you might at first think are the examples of strong and weak faith. Surprisingly, he calls the omnivores the strong in faith.

But he does so to tease, and in order to draw attention to his main point, that whatever Christians eat we all belong to the Lord and to one another, and in whatever might be perceived as the sin in what we eat, God himself makes up for it, and accepts everyone nonetheless. Whatever you do, he says, try and have a clear conscience and try to respect the clear conscience of others. Christians are called to respect and accept one another as brothers and sisters who are also loved and accepted and forgiven by God.

This is the bedrock of how Christians are called to live together. The very last thing we are called to do is to judge one another or to have a spirit of criticism of one another. With all the pressures and challenges, and all the usual weaknesses of human nature, this often does not come easily. We need to remember all this when we sing of the salvation of God over the coming months.

The coming months are a time, with the winter battle against Covid-19, and all the restrictions that are likely to come upon us, when we really do need to take care of this our church community. We perhaps need to think more about how we are going to do this. We cannot do the normal thing of chatting after services. But please be part of our worship whenever you can, either here in church or on line. Please support the opportunities to meet on line. We are going to need each other and your church really needs you.

As our choir sings again today in church, there is already a growing realisation in our country that we are facing a difficult winter. We will need our singing hearts exulting in the salvation of God to sustain us. We will need each other, and to take care of one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ. We will need to pray for one another. So that together we can be a beacon of the salvation of God of which Blessed Mary sings. Amen.

CJ. 13.09.20