

**Sixth Sunday of Easter 2016**

**Acts 16: 9 – 15; John 14: 23 – 29**

Two things are going on this morning. The first is that we are celebrating the sixth Sunday of Easter. That means we've almost got to the end of the Easter season; and the drama of what Jesus does for us through Easter is almost complete. Christ has died for us; he has risen from the dead for us; on Thursday of this week we shall see him glorified as we gather here at 6.30pm to celebrate Ascension Day; and then just over a week later Christ will send us the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (that's a fortnight today, the 15<sup>th</sup> May.)

Of course that is no more than a dramatic scheme, stretched out over the course of nearly two months, to help us process, step by step, the way that, through Jesus we are united with the Godhead. In real time, it happens in an instant; because in reality this isn't an intellectual process: in reality it all happens at once

the moment we open our hearts – not our heads, but our hearts – the moment we open our hearts and say I want to follow Jesus.

In St. John's Gospel it all happens on the same day. Jesus appears to the disciples, breathes on them and says Receive the Holy Spirit. Resurrection and Pentecost are all one event. But in Luke's literature there is this separating out in an incremental process of what it is that Jesus does for us: death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost. And whilst that process is unfolding, the tension is mounting. And we've now had six weeks of that ratcheting up of the tension.

I remember, when as I was a student, hearing Sibelius' Finlandia for the first time. And it was a bitter/sweet experience. Because I realised that I would never again be able to hear it and not know what was coming. The tension was exquisite! And six weeks into Easter, that's where we've got to: Christ has risen,

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

but what's going to happen about it? So we get this tantalising reading from St. John's Gospel: Jesus says "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." And so, on the sixth Sunday of Easter, as we play out the drama, we sit here, ready and waiting to go, expecting the Holy Spirit.

The other thing that's going on this morning is that it's the first week of a three week Planned Giving Campaign. So there are letters at the back of the church for everyone on the Electoral Roll, plus a few extras, containing a letter from me and leaflet entitled Celebrating God's Generosity. Please take your own and any for people who live round about you but who are not here this morning. The idea is to encourage as many people as possible to join one of the Priory's planned giving schemes and, preferably, to set up a

banker's standing order to give money directly and consistently to the Priory.

Now there are two problems with talking about money at the Priory. The first is that it's a bit embarrassing, personally, for me; because most money church gets goes on clergy costs. So if no one gives to church, the church falls down, yes, but also I don't get paid and there's nothing in my pension pot. So it's a bit self-serving for me to talk about giving to church. The second thing, though, that makes it a bit difficult is that, actually, the Priory is in a very comfortable position, financially. So I can't stand here, with a straight conscience, sending folk on a guilt trip, trying to persuade them to give money they don't really want to give or can't really afford.

And there are three reasons we're in a comfortable position. The first is that previous generations have done more than just balance the books. They have blessed us with a restored building and a generous

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

portfolio of capital. If you were at the annual meeting and heard the accounts being presented, you will know that this church is backed by more than a millions quid. We are so blessed.

The second reason we're in a comfortable position is that, within the last decade, difficult decisions have been made to ensure we live within our means. Credit must be given to my predecessor, Adrian Cragg, who courted unpopularity so that today we run a realistic establishment in the context of the economic climate in which we live. And the third reason we're in a comfortable position is that people work so hard to make that regime work. We don't have a paid administrator. We don't have a vergger. We don't pay a gardener. We don't even pay a cleaner. And yet we operate so effectively. Because people do the work without being paid. We are so blessed.

Most churches like ours, which are not ordinary parish churches, but only have parish church resources, can

only manage to keep their doors open by running a deficit budget. When I meet with fellow clergy from the Greater Churches Network, they tell me about how their churches, year on year, lose £50 000 every year. There's one major church that has been losing £200 000 every year for years. They're broke. And there's a real question over whether they're going to stay open. We don't run a deficit budget. Last year our income exceeded our expenditure, and by a pretty penny. The year before that, our income exceeded our expenditure, again by a pretty penny. We are so blessed.

So it's a bit weird to be sending out letters and leaflets asking people to commit to a planned giving campaign when we are so blessed. But actually it's liberating. I don't need to send anybody on a guilt trip to ensure we can pay the bills. I don't want anybody to give a penny to the Priory that they don't really want to give; and I certainly don't want anybody to give anything they

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

can't afford to give. It means we can just concentrate on what's important spiritually.

Because we are so blessed we don't need to worry about paying the bills; and instead we can ask ourselves whether our financial commitment to Priory mirrors us sitting here as people celebrating the sixth Sunday of Easter; people expectantly waiting for the Holy Spirit to ignite the touch paper of our hearts; people who have received the good news that God has shared his divinity with our humanity to the extent that Jesus died for us, that he rose again and that by his ascension he will share our humanity with his divinity.

And as we consider how we should respond to that we have proclaimed to us, in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the way that Lydia responded when she received the good news. She threw open her house to Paul and his companions. She was lavish in her hospitality. She met generosity with generosity.

She had received so much that from the abundance of her heart she gave more.

And that is the premise on which this Planned Giving Campaign is based. It's not to do with paying the bills. It's about thinking about how generous God has been to us. It's about considering what the Holy Spirit, which we are so expectantly waiting on, is preparing us to do in his power. And it's about us opening our hearts so that the resources are there to be caught in God's mission: to ensure that future generations are endowed with the security we have inherited from previous generations; and to reach out with a transforming presence into the community we are called to serve.

Please take the Planned Giving Campaign leaflet and letter away with you. And please respond to it, not because you ought to, but because you want to.

Amen.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory