

Maundy Thursday Sermon 2020 (Outline not complete text)

Reverend Jane Banister

A new commandment I give to you.

We all have a list of things that we are missing at the moment. It includes people, experiences, work. Maybe for you there are some unexpected things on there; maybe it is a short list, but they are things that you are missing intensely.

And worship, church, faith – what is it you miss from that? The people, the buildings, the music? It is the interesting tension that although we can talk to people on the phone or see them through video calling and keep in touch; but it is not the same as being with them. We can see pictures of our church buildings, imagine them in our minds; but it is not the same; and we can hear the music in many formats, including singing the hymns ourselves, but it is not the same. Our faith is still there; our prayer life is still there; but like so much else in life. There is not the variety that we have been used to.

For some of us, there is a gap that we are struggling to fill, and that is not celebrating Holy communion. In our church, we come from all traditions, but communion, the eucharist is a central part of what we do, how we worship. And we cannot do it in that way at the moment. Very aware of that as approach peak of Christian year. Old school Days of obligation – hugely important. – what are they. Easter. Ascension & Pentecost.

Theology of communion – real presence, or important act of remembrance – transcends time. Yet is physical and in the moment. Still vital. Argument that matters? Not be resolved? Keep reserved sacrament in Tring church – is still there. Candle still kept alight by those doing Food Bank.

All of us had times when we cannot take communion – not in right place – not healthy. Not being able to be in church not make a difference in normal circumstances – communion comes to you. Important thing to know. Regular or one off.

Also is not something that a priest can do on own - it might be part of our vocation to say words of consecration, words over bread and wine – but need others there for it to be valid. Jesus was in community – communion – clue is in word. Dispensation from bishops – in current circs, priests can say it on own, but are still saying it for all people, as always. Whether live streamed and shown to others or not, communion can still be said for us.

Parishes & priests – varying views on this. As a clergy team, we have talked and prayed and thought much about this, and the conclusion we have come to, jointly, is that we will not be taking physical communion services until we are together again. Right decision? Who knows? But it is the one we have come to. No right – best way forward. Why? A gut instinct; an awareness that even if we do celebrate it, there will be those who do not have the technology to join us. Acknowledge that God is bigger than this – as a wise woman said to us in this discussion, God's time is not our time.

As ministers & priests -from varied backgrounds – different faith journeys. Knew this had to be a joint decision – very painful whatever we did. Some of us are in situation where we have a ready made congregation at home. But not all in that place. And our ready made congregation did not want to make their physical communion without you.

Thrown into so many new situations – including theological. What communion means to us, and how we value it. And to rediscover spiritual communion – church of eng website – and on ours. Which is that in extraordinary circs, still with God in prayer & worship, we still receive all that we

would do if we were being given the bread & wine in our local churches. God is still here; Christ is still with us; the Holy Spirit still fills us with breath and hope. We are still nourished by bread of life and cup of salvation. And these are extraordinary circumstances.

But nothing new – BCP – seventeenth century prayerbook that is still one of the pillars of the C of E – shows that. Prayers to protect us from Pestilence and famine and war. Communion for sick – reminder that we are still part of this body even if cannot physically receive it -we need to hear that message now. Earthly frailty makes the physical communion an unsafe option – spiritual communion gives us strength & hope & joy.

Also in BCP is marvellous reminder that this is why priests tell you to go to church & make your communion – it is as if you are putting something in reserve – your camel's hump of faith to draw on in desert times; a stockpiling that does not damage others – that means we have something to draw on now.

Communion is on the list of things I miss in its earthly form – both receiving it, and taking the service and sharing it. But I am not without it – we still share it together. And we have the future joy of when we will celebrate it again.

A new commandment I give you – that you love one another as I have loved you.