

Easter 4. Rectors Report. Langham with Boxted APCM
Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18
I am the Good Shepherd

Our gospel reading today reminds us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and he doesn't show this to us by taking up an important office or by a display of strength, but by his sacrificial love for his sheep. There is a clear contrast between him, the Good Shepherd, and those who are paid to do the job. When it comes to the crunch, they don't really care about the sheep, so they run away. But, Jesus has such a knowledge of, and love for, his sheep, he is prepared to lay down his life for them.

The secret of this is not that Jesus will accept a martyr's death, which he can't avoid, but rather he lays down his life voluntarily and with a specific purpose. He laid his life down to take it up again. And as he does this, he fulfils his Father's command, and the reason for his Father's love, to offer salvation to all.

It is the love which Jesus speaks about in this passage which he has for us. He is there for us through thick and thin, the good and the bad times. He is with us when we need succour and support, perhaps more than when we are experiencing times of abundance. He is with us now in Langham with Boxted Parish. So let us thank him for being there and trust him to be our Good Shepherd, and to lead us into the future ... which I believe is going to be great.

In the light of this I want to thank all of you for all that you do for the parish, its churches and all of the things we arrange and support in the villages. And I also want to thank Paul who makes it possible for me to be part of this family, and able to play my part in its health and wellbeing.

I'd like to particularly thank Graham, Stephen and Denise for being our Churchwardens this year and to thank Dominic for being prepared to join them for the coming year. Graham has indicated that this will be his final year, so please support him, with the other churchwardens, in your prayers and consider who might take his place, this time next year.

May I also thank you all, for all of the other things that you have been doing during the year, Fabric Officers, Reader, Deanery Synod Representatives, administration for PCCs and in preparation for our chrim APCM, Village Hall representatives, Tree Officers etc. etc. ... too many to list. Thank-you. And a big thank-you to all of your spouse's for supporting you in all that you do.

A big thank-you to Liz Nickerson for being our PCC Secretary, and we offer you our sincere condolences on Mark's death. Thank-you too to Stephen Whybrow and Anthony Corin who are caring for our finances, and Colin Jones and Michelle Percival who administer our Stewardship and the Gift Aid associated with it. The good news is that under their tenure we have stopped eating into our reserves this year. 'Not a lot' ... but a bit.

Thank-you everyone who is a PCC member and for giving so much of your time; Patsy Ann as our Vice-Chairman, and leader of Sunday Group. During the year, it became clear that Sunday mornings weren't the best time for our ministry with our children and young people, and so Sunday Group is no longer meeting during our services. I miss having the children

worshipping with us, but we are working on other ways to minister to them ... more about this later.

Thank-you Mark for playing so faithfully for us both on the organ and the keyboard, even if there is a bit of busking at times! We enjoy the fairground music, hearing about beer festivals and your dog!

Thank-you to Laura for being our Safeguarding Champion, and working with everyone, who, due to the changes in the regulations, needs a DBS check and on-line training. Thank-you Patsy Ann for working with Laura on this. Thank-you David for co-ordinating Good Neighbours and to everyone who faithfully and graciously help folk in our villages. Thank-you for your generous donation to the Faith Garden at St. Peter's School, Boxted. There will be an official opening in July, by Bishop Roger, to which everyone who donated to the project is invited.

Thank-you to Brian for your faithful behind the scenes work on the fabric of St. Mary's, and thank-you to everyone who has worked hard on the Hurlock Room to make it so much more pleasant to use. Thank-you Roger for caring about our trees.

Thank-you to Tim Clarke for faithfully being our Electoral Roll Officer, and thank-you to Amy for taking over the co-ordinating of tea and coffee at St. Mary's. A big thank-you to Ann Hollands for the many years she has undertaken this service, and to all those who give us a treat after our services, both here and at St. Peter's. We do appreciate it.

I'd also like to thank Pauline Coverley who is the Editor of the Langham and Boxted Newsletter, and who is sadly standing down after the September edition. We thank-you for all of the work you have put into the Newsletter, we are grateful. Please could you consider who we might ask to stand in Pauline's shoes? Thank-you Claire for being such an efficient and successful Advertising Manager for the Newsletter.

A big thank-you to Dot and Annette who co-ordinate the flowers in our churches, and everyone who makes them so beautiful. There are some less visible parts of our ministry here in church, and I want to thank-you all of you who clean the churches, particularly in inclement weather! It does make a difference, thank-you. Thank-you to Jos for acting as vergers at weddings and funerals and to everyone who rings the bells for us so faithfully. Thank-you.

Thank-you to Liz for all her work in relation to baptisms, weddings, funerals and a plethora of other matters for all three parishes and who faithfully runs the Church Office for us.

There are many more who work tirelessly for our churches ... thank-you all, too many to name, for your time and commitment. Thank-you for your contribution to making the Family of God in Langham and Boxted all that they are. You are all very much appreciated.

Looking back over the year...

- This time last year we were in the process of applying to get funding for a part-time Families Worker. The great news is that the funding grant was awarded and we were able to interview for the post. Jo Jeffrey was appointed. Steve Kersys, the Diocesan Children's and Families Adviser was part of the interview panel and his comment on Jo was, "Rarely have I seen such a good candidate." We are delighted that Jo is our

Three Parishes' Families' Worker. She was commissioned here in January and has been very busy ever since. Here she has been into St. Peter's School, the Zone, Friday Morning Drop-In and I shall be introducing her at Langham School as soon as I can this term. It is a case of 'watch this space' and looking towards an exciting future.

- I mentioned earlier that the Sunday Group had come to the end of its season, and that we have been prayerfully considering how to move forward in our ministry to our children and young people. Following a series of meetings with the children and young people, their parents, Dominic and Linda, Patsy Ann, Jo Jeffrey and myself, it has been agreed that in addition to Morning Praise on third Sundays at 9.30, we will introduce a Family Service on second Sundays at 4.30 pm. This is in addition to our regular services, not instead of any of them. Jo will be setting up the initial services and subsequently working with those attending, in the planning of subsequent ones.
- In addition to this, Dominic and Linda have agreed to continue to run The Zone from 5.30 to 7 on Friday evenings during term-time. In addition to this Patsy Ann will be running a Nurture Group for young people who have been confirmed over the last few years and any other young people who would like to join them. This will run from 7.30 and will include pizza and ginger beer! This pattern will be reviewed at the end of the summer term and at the same time the reintroduction of The Edge, for secondary school aged young people, will be considered.
- The North Colchester MMU has been agreed by the Diocese and the Incumbents and parishes have started working together, and supporting each other. It is hope that the cross-licencing of the Ordained and Lay Ministers will happen in July.
- You may be aware of 'GDPR' which stand for General Data Protection Regulation, it is the reason why you keep getting letters and emails asking whether you want to continue being contacted by various organisations etc. This is something we have to work through as a parish as well, creating various policies, and making sure that we know where data is held, and how it is used. Thank-you Stephen Whybrow for spearheading this for us. Please be prepared to respond to any administration he sends to you.
- There is on last thing to say, and that is that I shall be taking Extended Study Leave, ESL, otherwise known as a sabbatical, in the autumn. I shall be away from early September till mid-December. I have already arranged cover for all of the services which I will be away for. Those taking services include the ministers who you already know and the Reverends Hannah cooper, PiC St. Luke's Colchester, Paul Norrington, our Area Dean, Paul Mann and even Bishop Roger.

I think that these thoughts illuminate how much of a journey we have been on this year, and give us some ideas for what might happen in the year to come. Our desire continues to be, to grow the Kingdom of God, both in numbers and maturity in our parish.

So, looking forward to the coming year ... there are lots of things in the pipeline, and some questions to ask ourselves.

Questions we can be asking ourselves include

- How have we grown spiritually during the last year, both individually and corporately?
- Are we like the church in Ephesus, having lost its first love of God?
- Are we lukewarm like the Laodicean church?
- Or are we like the church in Thyatira, on fire for God, full of love, faith and service, with perseverance and growth?

- How confident are we in our growth in maturity and numbers in the Kingdom of God in the coming year?

As we reflect on these questions, may the breath of God, the Holy Spirit blow through us, and let us act in response, so we become more Christ-like in all that we think, and say and do. Then, Christ will be honoured, and his Kingdom will grow in this parish. I am sure that this is what we all want for our parish. So let us journey on together and worship God in spirit and in truth, and bring glory to his name. Amen.