

**God at Work**  
**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2010**  
**Rev Brian Senior**

**Readings:**

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 23

Acts 9:36-43

Our readings this morning remind us that we're still officially in Easter season ... which lasts from Easter Sunday until the Day of Pentecost. Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter.

Fifty days to celebrate the resurrection!

Why fifty days?

Well obviously because the period between Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost was fifty days ... but also because the resurrection was such a pivotal event in the whole of history that to remember and celebrate it for a day, and then move on, would not give it the weight that it is due.

Those fifty days were a period of expectant waiting before Peter and the others began the mission that was theirs and is still ours. Fifty days of Easter give us an opportunity not only to celebrate the glorious truth that Jesus is Risen, but also to consider and understand the implications of his resurrection for us ... both for now, and for our future.

Our reading from Revelation 7 gives us a glimpse into a future which is assured because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but towards which we are still called to be working. John sees a vision of a great multitude before the throne of God ... a multitude so large that no-one can count ... and made up of people of every nation and tribe and people and language. It is a glorious picture of the redeemed ... and a challenge to the Church today!

Who are the redeemed? They are those who have heard and responded to the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... who can join in the shout of praise:

*"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

And how have they heard? They have heard through the Church which Jesus called into being before he ascended into heaven ... we who have come to know Jesus and been saved by faith in him ... boldly proclaiming the Gospel and calling men, women and children into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Isn't that what we're here for? Isn't that what the Church is?

The Church exists not as a cosy club into which Christians can retreat in security and comfort, but as a training camp to send us out into the world as witnesses to the amazing love of God, and to the sure and certain hope we have because of what Jesus has done for us. God calls us to call others to share in the future glory which is ours:

*"... they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple;  
and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them."*

*Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.  
The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.  
For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;  
he will lead them to springs of living water.  
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."  
(Revelation 7:15-17)*

So ... I have a challenge for you.

- [1] What are we doing as a Church which proclaims the gospel to our community?
- [2] What are you doing as your part of the Mission and Ministry of St Philip's?
- [3] What do you think God might be calling the Church to do?
- [4] What do you think God is calling you to do?

I don't want to alarm you ... but I do want to challenge you!

We are not all called to up-front ministry ... but we are all called to be witnesses, and need to learn to communicate our faith. We are not all called to be evangelists or preachers or teachers or leaders, but we are all called to live the Christian life, and to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us ... and to share in God's work in his world.

I hope you have picked up a copy of the blue booklet "Belonging to the Church". In it I have tried to set out some principles and guidelines about what it means to belong to the Church, based on the promises we make at our Baptism:

- It is a reminder of the top priority which worshipping together should have in our lives.
- It explains why getting together with other Christians is vital to maintain a healthy Christian life, and why we place such a high priority on Home Groups in order that we can study the Bible, Pray, and have Fellowship with one-another.
- It reminds us that Prayer is essential if we are to thrive as individual Christians or as Church, and why the Church Prayer Meeting is so important.
- It sets out ways in which we can serve the Mission and Ministry of St Philip's, because we are all called to service of one kind or another in the Kingdom of God. (Remember from our reading that even in glory we will serve in the presence of God.)
- It even tackles the thorny issue of giving, reminding us of our responsibility to give generously to the work of the Church so that we are not constrained by lack of funds.

There are many ways to serve the Lord and his Church, and there are many here who work tirelessly for God through St Philip's. The APCM is traditionally a good opportunity for me to thank them ... and at risk of missing anyone out, I do want to thank:

- the Church Wardens, who do so much more than many will ever guess.
- the members of the PCC, who share in the leadership of the Church.
- the MLT, and members of the Ministry Groups, who work together to get things done.
- the paid staff, Jackie and Lu.
- the Deputy Wardens, who do so much which is unseen.
- the authorised lay ministers who share in the preaching, evangelism and pastoral

care.

- the Children's and Youth Work team – who work under great pressure. We need more!
- the Home Group Leaders, who nurture, teach and pray for members of their groups.
- the sidesmen, coffee team, flower arrangers, work day helpers, & Philippian collaters.
- the Music Group, the Scripture readers, Intercessors and Prayer Ministry Team.

Thank you all for your commitment and for your fellowship in the gospel ... and please accept my apologies if I have missed anyone out!

The work these people are doing is God's work ... work in which he calls us all to share ... but we must also recognise that God's work is also done at home, in the workplace, and among families and friends. We need to take that into account as we look at the need to spread the load more fairly at St Philip's.

The team of trainee vicars who were with us over the winter to do their Mission Project, described St Philip's as "a small but active church, punching well above its weight in the local community." I rather liked that!

We are a small Church, at least by Tunbridge Wells standards, though if you put us in many places around the country we would be seen as quite a large Church. But because we are not large, and we run many activities and programmes, there are some people who are doing far too much ... and some who might well be able to do more.

Is God calling you?

But I don't want to forget our reading from Acts 9.

Luke writes about Tabitha, or Dorcas ... a disciple "*who was always doing good and helping the poor*" ... which could describe a number of people here this morning. She became sick and died ... and her friends called Peter to come to them.

Did they expect a miracle? ... or just words of comfort? We can't be sure.

Peter knelt and prayed for Tabitha to be raised to life again, and God answered his prayer. Tabitha opened her eyes, and sat up ... and Peter took her by the hand and helped her to her feet, and reunited her with her friends.

Should we expect to see miracles like this? Perhaps we should! ...

... but it is God's prerogative and not ours how he chooses to work among us, while it is our responsibility to pray and to trust. Sometimes God intervenes in miraculous ways, and sometimes he works through the work of human hands. Sometimes God works healing miracles among his people ... and sometimes he blesses us with the ability to use medicine well. But there is no doubt that God is still in the business of miracles.

The really important miracle in this account is that many people in Joppa came to believe in the Lord. The biggest miracle of all is when someone is born again of the Spirit of God and becomes a believer. Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 17:

*"If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

The Mission Statement of the Diocese of Rochester is:

"Proclaiming the Word and Work of God."

We gave today the title "God at Work." When we are made new in Christ Jesus, we become part of his Church, which he brought into being to do the Work of God. So God's work is our work.

As we look back over this past year we have much to be thankful for. It is in the nature of God that he has not let us down. But we have no room for complacency, because God calls us to continue his work until Jesus comes again.

So what part will you play in the Ministry and Mission of God at St Philip's?

- Will you come and help with one of the Youth Groups, which are so understaffed?
- Will you make a commitment to come at least once a month to the Prayer Meeting, to pray for the Church, our community, and the wider world?
- Will you decide to join a Home Group so that you can learn more about the Lord?
- Will you sign up to help on a Work Day so that the jobs are not all left to the same few?
- Will you help to deliver Philippian around the Parish for Harvest, so that people in the flats don't get left out?
- Will you reconsider your giving, in the light of the financial needs of the Church, and so that we can be a more generous Church in supporting Mission?
- Will you offer to join the Mission Ministry Group, so that we can widen our interest and support for God's work in other parts of the world?
- Will you make a real effort to be at Church every Sunday, whenever possible?

There are so many ways in which we can all help ... and we all have a part to play.

So, I return to my earlier challenge. I'm going to hand out a sheet with four questions for you to consider. The questions concern both the Church as a whole and you personally.

These are the questions:

- [1] What are we doing as a Church which proclaims the gospel to our community?
- [2] What are you doing as your part of the Mission and Ministry of St Philip's? (Remember you are still part of the Church when you are at home or at work.)
- [3] What do you think God might be calling the Church to do?
- [4] What do you think God is calling you to do?

I'm not asking for an immediate response. Instead, please take the sheet away and prayerfully consider the questions. Please fill it in and bring it back next Sunday, or drop it through the Vicarage letter box.

This is not a guilt trip, but a way for us all to share both in seeking God's purpose for us as a Church, and being involved in it. Let's celebrate what is good, and rejoice in whatever ministries God has given us. You might pray about Question 3 and come up

with something no-one has ever thought of before, or you might even pray over these Questions and consider that God might be calling us as a Church or you as an individual, to give something up!

Remember the Mission statement which sets out our purpose:

“St Philip's the Evangelist, Sherwood ... living and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Let us pray that as we go into a new Church year, we may go with confidence in God and a determination and commitment to share in his work in our Church and beyond.