**Ministerial Meandering 20 - 26th Sept 2021**

Nicodemus asked Jesus, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ (John 3:4), and of course, in practical terms or obstetrical terms, it is an absurd suggestion, and clearly lethal for the mother. Nevertheless, having explored the nature of divine energy and the ‘ability to cause a change’ this last Sunday, we now know that the power of God can create change in us - just as sitting on a fire will cause a change in your backside. (How do you like your crackling?)

Understanding baptism is also a bit like that; once baptized, you can’t be baptized again - just as if you’re cooked on the fire, you can’t be cooked twice - unless you are a biscuit, which means (of course) ‘twice cooked’ in French - ‘bis - cuit’.

However, just as you can renew or reaffirm your marriage vows, so you can reaffirm your baptismal vows, and it is planned to hold such a service at the same time as we have an adult baptism (for the first time) in my ministry with All Saints.

Those of you who would like to take advantage of this opportunity should please contact either of the Wardens or me directly, to let us know of your intention. You will not be ‘baptised’ in the same way as those undergoing baptism for the first time, but you will reaffirm your vows - with sponsors / supporters, if you wish, and be sprinkled with Holy Water.

If you still have your original baptismal candles, then bring them to be re-lit at the Paschal Candle, but it you don’t have one, you will be given another. No second Certificate of Baptism will be given to those reaffirming their vows; this is only given to those being baptized for the first time.

Let me stress that this is not a requirement or in any way necessary, nor is it a Rite of Passage to a higher order of personal divinity; it is just a personal statement that some that I am aware of would like to make. The Diocese is supportive of the practice, and I am happy to endorse it. If you want to do it - make sure you let me know. The date is not fixed yet, but will be fixed in the next two weeks. It is likely to be at Harvest Festival on 10th October, or on another Sunday in October, to suit as many people as possible.

While it is good, right and proper (in classic ‘Anglicanese’) to reaffirm our vows, and to do this with outward signs for all to see, we should not neglect that **that** is what we should be doing *every day* in our prayer lives, which should not be overt and ‘showy’. Our ‘Quiet Times’ are even more essential to our spiritual health than any outward manifestation of vows or promises.

What we do when we ask to reaffirm our baptism or marriage vows is to ask God’s help and the support of our community to carry out our promises. That is why church is so important a part of community. We cannot manage on our own, and need the help and propping up of our friends and church family.

The cop-out that says, “I’ve heard that God is everywhere, so what’s the point in going to church?” is sad and ridiculous. It is a bit like saying that the opportunity to win the 100 metres at the Olympics is always there - but you don’t stand a chance if you don’t train with folks who are motivated in the same way.

Coming ***bodily*** to church is a very important part of you being a Christian and living the Christian life, because not only do you get the support and encouragement **you** need, but you also give others the support and encouragement **they** need. It is also better for church finances!

As always, our Christian journey is teamwork. Those of you who are physically unable to come, I understand; those who are not, I would strongly urge you to come back now, so long as you are doubly vaccinated and symptom-free. You are welcome to mask - indeed, the bishop is still keen for this - and even distance, if you feel more comfortable doing so, but Dr Bonnie Henry allows all worship events exemption from such restrictions. It is sad to see half of our congregation still on zoom when we have so much space in our church and hall. We cannot be a real team *in absentia.* Neither can you maintain your faith for long without people to share it with. It’s like learning another language; you have to be immersed with people who speak it all the time to gain any fluency; similarly, we need companionship to enable each other to stay strong in the faith.

Consider if the disciples had said to each other, ‘So long, I’m off - see you guys in a couple of years, and we’ll see who wins the ‘Convert Trophy. Don’t get into any trouble!’

We know that most of the disciples ran into all sorts of trouble and persecution, and without companions for support, I personally doubt that we would have the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles to read today; also most of Paul’s teaching and writing would likely have never happened. Wherever we read in the New Testament, the disciples and apostles went around in pairs or more; Jesus sent out the seventy (or 72) in pairs to support each other (Luke 9) as he sent out the Twelve (Mark 6).

So baptism, whether for the first time or as a reaffirmation, is a time when we ask for the witness and support of our Christian friends and church family. Soon we will be welcoming a new member into the Church of Christ; let us make sure that she is not only a member of the Church, but a part of our church family.

Philip+