

**Wednesday 1st July 2020 Henry Venn, John Venn and Henry Venn the younger**

**Priests, evangelical divines, 1797, 1831, 1873**

*“As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence O God,*

*set our hearts on fire with love for you”*

Dear Friends

The quotation above is taken from the opening responses for Morning Prayer in Common Worship. I find it really helpful in re-setting my mood and approach to the day. Often these past months I have woken not feeling joyful at the prospect of a new day at all. To be reminded that this should be part of my opening response to God each morning, a joyful thank you for the gift of life itself, is humbling. More is expected of us though. Basking in the light of God’s presence all around us, we pray that our hearts may be set on fire with love. Our response to God is not simply for our spiritual welfare, but for sharing with others through word, prayer and deed.

It has been said frequently that we are living through strange and unusual times. Now we are living through times of transition too as – wisely or not – society returns to its old habits and preferences. The church is wrapped up in this too of course and on Monday evening the worship committees of both churches will begin – together – to consider how and when we return into church for worship. Times of transition are always times of risk, uncertainty and doubt: we need to place our trust in God that all will be well and pray for the wisdom of our Creator.

Today the church celebrates three generations of one family, the Venn’s. Stretching across a century, these three generations became famous for their evangelical piety and, in the case of the younger two generations, they were central to the foundation and work of the Church Missionary Society. The centre for much of the work of these three generations of clerics focused on Clapham in south London.

My church background is very much middle of the road Anglicanism with slight leanings towards the liberal catholic tradition for I value worship that involves all of the senses. On the surface it may appear that I don’t have much in common with the Venn’s. However, one can be an evangelist without being part of the evangelical wing of the church, and this is very relevant as our churches in Bromsgrove enter the next stage of their lives.

One of the strengths of these past few months is that we have improved the quality of our communications immensely. Going forwards we need to improve the quality of our communications beyond our congregational boundaries too. If our churches are to survive – let’s not shy away from the generational challenge we face but own up to it – we must tell people about our common life together, the pleasures and benefits it brings us, the difference faith makes to us each morning as we wake.

Some of you may have read the book ‘Jeremy’ by Hugh Walpole. It tells the early life of the boy of the book’s name. Early on in the story on a very snowy night, Jeremy discovers a stray dog in the garden. He promptly brings it indoors to the astonishment of his sisters of the nanny, all of whom think Jeremy is now likely to face the slipper from his somewhat distant clerical father. To their surprise, Jeremy’s mother takes a shine to the dog – largely because the dog growls at the curate who is despised by mother – and the dog, now named Hamlet – becomes a close member of the family.

The point of this story in the context of evangelism is that we mustn’t assume that the church no longer has anything to offer the community that surrounds us. We mustn’t assume the worst as Jeremy’s sister and nanny did. There are more ‘mothers’ out there, waiting for us to show interest in them than we might imagine.

We have a task ahead and not for a moment do I pretend it will be easy. The most difficult part though, is not reaching out to people, but truly welcoming newcomers into our midst. As I explained to someone quite recently, there are two stages to being a welcoming church. The first, is to welcome people to join us (and this I believe we do very well). The second, is to welcome people to change us. This is the far bigger challenge that requires much prayer.

May your days be filled with hope as we go forwards trusting in the Lord who is already ahead of us: with my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

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