

**Wednesday 22nd July 2020 Feast of Mary Magdalene**

Dear Friends

Today, the church remembers Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus’ closest and most faithful and loyal friends. Mary Magdalene stayed at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion, was the first disciple to discover the empty tomb and the first to greet our risen Lord.

Church tradition however often places all of this second to the rumours of Mary Magdalene’s early life before she met Jesus. The idea that one of Jesus’ closest friends was a former prostitute are entirely scurrilous and rooted in the only reference to Mary Magdalene’s previous life in Luke 8.2 - *The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out…* Tradition assumes that Jesus healed Mary Magdalene but there is absolutely nothing in the New Testament to connect demon possession with prostitution…

If the rumours about Mary Magdalene’s early life are true, today’s bible interpreters would almost certainly see this as a positive example of Jesus supporting and enabling an exploited woman. But church tradition has chosen a different interpretation, seeing the rumours as a way to undermine one of Jesus’ closest friends and perhaps even get at Jesus himself. Such attempts to rubbish others are so common. Hardly a week goes by without one public figure or another being defined by their past, however inaccurate, rather than their present. We may have even experienced this ourselves. We may be shaped by our past, but we are transformed by our faith encounters that lead us into new, exciting futures, and hopefully towards our true selves. As a forgiven people, we are forgiving, but as people of faith, we must be committed to always searching for the truth too.

Exciting times are beginning to re-surface in church life. For the first time for several months, it has felt this week as if some aspects of church life are returning. I’ve had a baptism enquiry, visited a wedding couple, finalised arrangements for Heather to return to work as our parish administrator (more on that below) and advanced arrangements for our first services in church in August. All very encouraging!

At a practical level though, much will feel very different. This will affect us in different ways. The virus means that we all have to learn new good habits and this will take time so that – for example - it becomes second nature to sanitise our hands upon entering church, and so on.

Our roles in church may need to adapt temporarily as well. You may need to step back for a while from a public role – such as sidesperson – if you are in a vulnerable category or shielding someone at home. Please don’t be offended if asked to make this kind of change; your health, and that of those close to you, must come first.

Heather returns to work in the parish office at St Godwald’s on the 4th August and will now be working on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9.30am-1.30pm. To ensure that Heather has a safe environment in which to work, the office, Ruth Heald Room, toilets, kitchen and related corridors are now ‘no entry’ areas. The only exception is if you are visiting Heather and these visits must be by prior appointment and masks are mandatory.

We continue to explore how to re-open our halls in a way that is both safe and financially viable. Possibilities are emerging but we may lose more money by opening than by remaining closed. We will face that conundrum when we have all amassed all the facts.

You may have noticed that August has five Sundays this year which means that on the 5th Sunday (30th August) we would usually have a team service. We’ve decided that this isn’t practical this year and so there will be a zoom service as usual that Sunday morning at 10.30am. Hopefully we can resume our team services on Advent Sunday, 30th November.

Finally, in a letter that has been more notices than pastoral reflection, a reminder that in August all our services will be on zoom at 10.30am with the service on 2nd August broadcast from All Saints and on the 16th from St Godwald’s.

In addition, each Sunday afternoon at 4pm, there will be a short act of evening worship. The first, on Sunday 2nd August, will be in the tradition of the Taize community.

There is much talk this week of vaccines and winter flu – and lots of uncertainty may lie ahead. For now, let’s focus on today, and all the blessings we might quietly receive and rejoice in – like the Kingfisher I glimpsed on the canal this morning.

Remember, God is good. With every blessing:

David Ford, Rector

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