

ON THE SIXTH DAY....

Sitting here on 17th May, I have been Rector of All Saints and St Anthony's for six days!

In six days God had made the heavens and earth, all the vegetation, seas, mountains, sky and birds and animals, men and women and decided to rest. All Creation in fact.

Not being God, I may have to manage my expectations....

But much has happened already.

Monday, Bishop Rosemarie installed me as Rector, and Archdeacon Greg reminded us to keep "the main thing the main thing".

Tuesday morning we inaugurated Morning Bible Study – a time of reading a Psalm, an Old Testament and New Testament reading then discussing their contents and praying together. They have already been fruitful times of sharing and God speaking to us through his Word.

The morning progressed with meetings with the staff in the office. A very enjoyable experience and I look forward to working with them all.

Next a PCC gathering. We shared a bit about ourselves and I outlined the way in which I operate as Chair. Then I asked four questions :

1. Who is the most important person in the room?
2. Who sets the PCC agenda?
3. What is the most powerful tool we have to be an effective PCC?
4. Who arbitrates if we disagree?

Pleasingly we quickly got to the answers I was hoping for..... (see below)*

We then spent time in groups looking at selected scriptures that challenge us and point towards the five marks of mission – evangelism, discipleship, loving care, justice and stewarding creation. We ended in prayer having received the following verse:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Wednesday was Morning Bible Study followed by Wardens and Clergy. Moving to Costa we explored a whole range of ways in which we can both simplify some processes and extend our worship and outreach while preserving what is working well.

There is a key principle of continuous improvement and strategic change. Any change has to balance the gains to be made with what is lost. If what is gained exceeds what is lost it is worth considering that change. To do something because we have always done it that way is not a reason to continue but neither is it a reason to change just because we are changing!

Lots of new ideas are firing off in conversations and we will continue to draw these together into a cohesive whole. Each suggestion must have a positive reason and an intentional outcome to be considered further. Some things we will leave alone or even do more of because they are working well and can even be expanded.

The walk round the buildings that followed was revealing of many needs but also several opportunities.

Thursday was the start of staff One-to-ones and finalising the service for Sunday. But also leading my first service at All Saints.

I have never led an Ascension Day service before and it was my privilege to do so. We used the white seasonal service booklets for this day, but I wanted to use a different consecration prayer so we also used the Orange Kingdom Season booklets for that element. It worked. A bit different, but effective.

Its such a powerful set of readings on that day. Jesus not only ascends to heaven, he commissions the disciples.

"..you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

In preparation, Jesus had opened their minds to understand the scriptures (how magnificent) and left, blessing them. They returned to Jerusalem, joyful and filled with worship.

Maybe, I suggested, the blessing alluded to in Luke's Gospel was the command to be witnesses he expanded in the book of Acts?

Because, it is our privilege to receive this Good News and he wants us to give it away. It is a blessing to have this faith, to know the scriptures and to have the knowledge of salvation. And to live with the Holy Spirit in us, and for us.

It's all too good to keep it to ourselves. He commanded us to give it away by witnessing to all that he has done for us.

To encourage us in this I have a Witness Course that I hope to run. Look out for the dates and I encourage all to come along. Or maybe your House Group would like to set three session aside to do that course? Let me know.

Saturday morning was breakfast and Len Abrams came to share something of his amazing life story – a true witness, willing to share and be vulnerable, about how God had led him throughout his life. It was very impactful as well as fascinating.

It overlapped in many ways with my own testimony given as the sermon on my first Sunday.

I have sensed God's hand on all of these conversations, in our services, and in the ideas that are firing off in several directions. It's exciting and exhilarating but also a time for discernment and patience.

It's like being given a jigsaw a piece at a time. You can't put it together until you have enough of the pieces to frame the picture – because you don't have the top of the box to work from (that would be too easy!) But a picture will emerge and then we will see which pieces to use and how to put them together.

I pray that you will join me in asking the Lord constantly for the picture he wants to form here and that all of the pieces will fall into place in his time and for his glory!

All contributions welcome.

Your brother in Christ

Doug

Any questions or ideas or would like to chat and pray? Let me know.

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* Answers to questions posed at PCC:

1. God
2. Holy Spirit
3. Prayer
4. Jesus