

Pastoral Care (Colossians 1:11-20)

10:00am Holy Communion – Sunday 23rd November 2025

Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

Somewhat strangely today, I'll begin my sermon with the prayer which we have after taking Holy Communion:

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Yes, today is Stir-Up Sunday, as it's something known, or otherwise called the Sunday before Advent, or even the Festival of Christ the King. For those who are partial to Christmas Cakes and Christmas Puddings, today is the signal to get into the good mixing-bowl of fruity ingredients with a wooden spoon, and to tip on another half-pint of brandy! I understand that it takes weeks to get the rich mix fully prepared for the knife or the flames, which signals glorious Christmas Day.

Next week – 30th November – is Advent Sunday. The colours of worship change from Red, being a signal of the blood of Christ's complete self-giving for us, and then towards a purple array - fit for the season of penitence, a season of weeks to prepare for the great work of God in Christ's coming again. Think of yourselves also as 'in the mixer' during Advent, which is to turn us over, that we ourselves may be a little 'stirred-up' in our imperfect lives, for confession and a penitent heart before Christ.

Just yesterday, I gathered together with the PCC – the Parochial Church Council – and other ministry leaders, for a Vision Day. What I mean by that, is that together we took time review the journey that the parish and our ministry have been on since we last held a vision day back almost three years ago. We are a busy parish with much happening all the time. Together, the group reminded themselves of

all which the parish offers to the town, but also to be clear and honest with ourselves about what needs renewal and perhaps new directions. **We are the Body of Christ, which for us means many parts working together**, but we all know that sometimes our body-parts can be unwell or perhaps less trim than others. I have the legs of an athlete, but my hair is falling out! You may be able to complete the Times Crossword but then struggle to get out of the seat!

As part of the Vision Day briefing, I prepared a grid of all our ministry, set out in such a way that we could see how we are a balance of being both outward facing to the town, and yet also caring for God's servants and those who come *within* to worship. **Let me tell our about just one part of that.**

You may be familiar with the term *pastoral ministry*, under which name the *caring* side of the church is known. Ordained ministers in parish work (such as myself and Justin) are said to be called to *pastoral ministry*. It's an oldie-woldie term which takes it's meaning from the care of animals in a rural setting. Christ was himself the great shepherd of the sheep – indeed the Good Shepherd. Those who first took up his calling, as disciples themselves became shepherds in his stead, and continue to be to the present time.

So, in terms of what we do in pastoral ministry, how does that look?

The first thing to say is that Justin and I go out visiting around the parish. Speaking for myself, I try to bring some comfort to those who are unwell, or in difficult times. Furthermore, I try to visit those who are new to our churches, by way of welcome and

encouragement. As a sort of chief-shepherd here, I also pay occasional visits to those who lead on parts of our wider ministry, again to encourage and give thanks. There is still a nice old picture in people's minds of the clergy of yesteryear, who spent their daytimes drifting around the parish tapping on doors, knowing everyone apparently, and visiting every house.

Pastoral visiting does happen in a much wider way too, as an important and key ministry of The Pastoral Visiting Team. That is a squad of around fifteen, who live in a range of neighbourhoods and have all sorts of relationships around Haslemere. The Pastoral Visiting Team are great at visiting those who are frail and perhaps lonely, so they cover much more ground than I and Justin ever could. **As Christ made clear in his own life, we are disciples to serve, not to be served.** You have heard from me many times how I see my work as offering a range of ministries across the parish, so we can all serve in response to our faith. Pastoral ministry is a team game.

There are also teams which go monthly into nursing homes and other care establishments in the town, such as Redcot, Oak Hall, Whispers Village and the Hunter Centre. They take short services of singing and holy communion, often visiting the rooms of the frail and bedbound. Normally I join the team at Redcot, and as usual **it's a happy time where we are always welcome.** I particularly like way they crank-up the heating at this time of year!

On the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month we host the Pop-In Coffee morning, in conjunction with Hearing Champions. It's perfect for those who are often alone at home and miss a bit of company, so would like to share a cuppa and have a chat.

The Hearing Champions ministry runs at the same time, offering a service of care for those with hearing aids. The Champions can test, fix, clean and prepare people's aids, upon which people rely. All of this is done with love and as a free gift. Even better are the rock cakes I so love! **So once again, here is a team of faithful serving as disciples.**

Another angle on care visiting is the work of bereavement, and funerals. That ministry is a little more specialised, considering the sometimes-complicated situations of how people are in difficult times. Some of the pastoral visitors have a valuable brief as bereavement visitors, **although I do wish we had as much funeral ministry as we once did.** Like so many changing shades in our society, far fewer people are asking clergy for funerals. I hope you all will – but in your own good time! Just in case you were wondering – yes, we do visit people at the point of death to bring anointing, prayer and the final rites. **I've been out at all hours to do so, and you should never be afraid to ask.**

Around the end of October / beginning of November, the parish hosts the All Souls Memorial Service in remembrance of those we have loved. **That includes pretty much anyone and everyone.** We name them, pray for each other and bring a lit candle of thanksgiving before God.

All of this is the core of our pastoral work in the church, **but I could say still more** about the outward love of the **Parish Magazine**, which is delivered well beyond the churches to those who cannot come. In the same way we continue to live-stream our services, which are watched by around 25-30 people each week. We still even post the Sunday notes sheets to a number of those housebound.

All this is official stuff, but we surely also know that the good neighbourly intention of just looking out for each other. Our care is not programmed as a task; it comes naturally and spontaneously to us as Christian people. Only these last few days Justin and I have had contact with a homeless person visiting this church, who was offered warm rest, a hot drink and a gift for supper and breakfast. **Very rarely, I'm even asked to visit homes to cast out ghosts! If you see one, you know who to call!**

Recall these words of St Paul:

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

All of our ministry fits together in body of the church, called by the Spirit of God, and lived in us by the example of Jesus Christ.

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen