

February 2019

Dear Friends

Isn't Easter late this year? April 21st! Such is the quirky way that the date of Easter is fixed, it can fall on any day between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> but it does seem to happen on some days more often than others and the pattern is a very irregular one. If I were to go into the precise way in which Easter is calculated I would need rather more space than Pat would be happy to allocate me! One of the consequences of such a late Easter this year, however, is that Lent does not begin until March (Ash Wednesday is March 6<sup>th</sup>) so February is, unusually, almost all what the church calls 'Ordinary Time' and will be a bit short of special days.

Time, perhaps, to ponder how God is at work in the ordinary, the mundane, the unspectacular parts of our lives just as much as the special ones. One of my favourite spiritual writers, Ann Lewin, speaks of 'Ordinary Time' as a good time to remember that we don't have to wait until Advent to *'learn to be alert, to keep awake, to remind ourselves to look for the signs of God's coming in the things that we do, the people we meet. ... we have time to ... be nourished by God's gifts: to be strengthened in faith, built up in hope and grow in love.'* All very beautifully put but what might it actually mean for us in the here and now?

News in the 'here and now' locally is somewhat dominated by the subject of electrical power, its generation and its distribution. The possible construction of both a new nuclear power station at Sizewell and a sizeable electricity substation in Friston are, hardly surprisingly, matters of huge concern to us all. We fear that decisions are being taken in high places over which we have no control and about which we are only being given partial information. We challenge, but fear that our challenges are not heard. We are angry, we organise protest groups and try to make sure that everyone knows about what might happen and how we might more effectively protest. This is important work (and I'm sure it's very hard work sometimes) and is being very well co-ordinated in our local communities. But what can, or should, the church do?

Some months back two of the Elders of St Mary's Friston suggested that the very first thing we should do as a church is to pray. Now, each Wednesday evening at 6pm, people gather in Friston church to do just that. One rather beautiful definition of prayer is that it is, simply, paying attention to God. In the ordinary activity of daily life it is perfectly possible to forget about God. Most of us find that God doesn't shout at us, God's call is much more subtle, though, when we learn how to pay attention, we find it an insistent voice. Prayer is not just about asking for stuff, it is a way of drawing closer to God, listening, paying attention to and, literally, being inspired by God. As an angel once said to a young girl in Nazareth *'With God nothing is impossible'*.

When we pray in a difficult situation we hand that situation over to God, asking for guidance and praying (as Jesus taught us to pray) *'your will be done.'* Faith is, after all, *'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'* (a quotation from the biblical Letter to the Hebrews). If we have faith then we truly believe that God, who we cannot see, is always listening, aware and active. If we pray *'your will be done'* we believe that, in God's own time, God will act, through the actions of people like us.

We also have a role as church to be alongside those in difficulty. One modern bible translation includes this, from one of Paul's letters to the young church in Corinth. *'(GOD) COMES ALONGSIDE US WHEN WE GO THROUGH HARD TIMES, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, HE BRINGS US ALONGSIDE SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS GOING THROUGH HARD TIMES SO THAT WE CAN BE THERE FOR THAT PERSON JUST AS GOD WAS THERE FOR US.'* Whatever happens in the future we have a role just to be there for anyone in need and please be assured that we will, with God's help, try our best. In the end, divine intervention is unlikely to be of the 'lightning flash' variety. Ordinary human beings, inspired by their faith in God, can and do make a difference, and even in this 'ordinary time' we can be assured of God's love for us and God's call to each of us.

With my love and prayers, as ever

*Mark*