

# WEDNESDAY SUPPLEMENT

1<sup>st</sup> April 2020

Welcome to this week's Wednesday Supplement. For our devotional suggestion this week, based on the Five Marks of Mission, please turn to page 4.

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## MORNING PRAYER

Since Sunday, as announced in my Sunday email, I have been recording a daily service of Morning Prayer.

I have placed it among the Seathwaite *ACChurchNearYou* pages, because one of the particular casualties of the lockdown has been the nascent plan to hold an evening service at Holy Trinity on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month. You can visit the Morning Prayer page directly at:

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/4742/page/55145/view/>

(In the PDF version of this *Supplement*, you should be able to click on the links, perhaps by holding down the CTRL key at the same time.)

As well as a link to stream the service, there is a link that you can use to access the liturgy for the day via the Church of England's website. If you keep the audio open and playing in one tab of your browser, it should continue to play while you open the order of service in another tab. I don't know what it sounds like, as I can't abide the sound of my own voice, but I listen each day sufficiently to check that the recording actually worked!

I'm particularly proud of my little 'ping' sound effect that gives you the opportunity to pause and take stock, reflect or pray. I do occasionally forget to trigger it at the right moment (and yesterday triggered it at a wrong moment too). I hope you will have an occasional opportunity to join me for Morning Prayer!

## PALM CROSSES

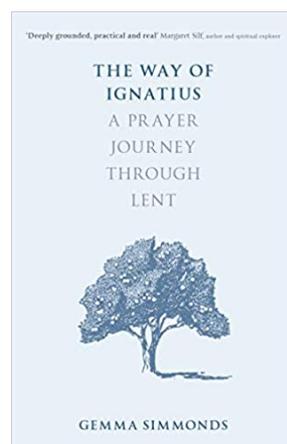
Palm Crosses were left in church porches on Sunday for you to collect. Since this time, the Church of England has issued guidance discouraging the distribution of palm crosses and printed materials. Aware of the impact of this on those who do not, or have difficulty accessing the internet, I and a number of other clergy in the Deanery have urgently requested

additional guidance in the hope of finding safe ways to distribute hard copy materials like the *Supplement*.

**Details of our special worship for Palm Sunday will be delivered with the Sunday Supplement.**

## CAUGHT IN THE SYSTEM

I was hoping to offer a digest of people's thoughts about the lent reading each week, but I've not yet had any input: don't be shy! In the meantime, I wanted to draw attention to one of my favourite bits of either book, chapter 7 of *The Way of Ignatius*, entitled "Caught in the System".



When we think about *sin* we often think in very personal, individual terms. We also tend to think in very basic terms: Ten Commandment terms if you like: about lying and theft, for example. We sometimes worry, no less than some of Jesus' interlocutors, about what the sabbath ought to mean to us. Should we go shopping? Which shops should be open? Should this or that job be done on a Sunday?

When we think about *charity*, our focus is often very different: we tend to look at a wider, but also a less specific, picture. It is one of those occasions (rarer than they should be in modern, Western society) when our focus is not on one or more individuals, or ourselves. Many of the great charitable organisations are concerned with the *general* welfare of communities: the eradication of poverty, hunger, hate and oppression, or exploitation (whether of human beings, of animals, or of the natural world). Charity (in law as well as in public perception) is about *public* as well as individual benefit.

It is relatively seldom that we connect these two areas of thought: sin and charity. In church services, we generally begin with an act of penitence that is about personal sin, before we move on to talk about some greater good (or ill) that lies before us (or besets us).

In chapter 7, Gemma Simmonds is talking not about "our own sin but ... the sinfulness of the systems in which

we are all 'bound to sin' by our belonging in a world constructed on complex social, political and financial networks." She goes on to give instances of this: the way in which sweated labour often underlies still what we buy on the High Street, for example. And the way in which the poorest in society pay, through cuts in public services, for the economic decisions of the rich. I have been involved in education for the last 16 or so years and it is transparently clear to me that the austerity which followed the 2008 financial crash has hit schools and allied public services for six, greatly to the detriment of all our children, but most of all to the least advantaged. I don't have first-hand knowledge of other public services, but I suspect that the same applies in a whole host of areas. I know it does in local government.

Gemma Simmonds also points to the fact that roughly one-third of global food production is simply wasted. This happens mostly in, or at the behest of, affluent nations, in which clinical obesity, itself a danger to health, is rising. At the same time, nearly a billion people globally (many of them children) suffer from malnutrition. Yet it is a simple fact that there is enough food in the world, not only for everyone alive today, but actually for several billion more. About a third of the global population lacks a safe water supply and more than half do not have proper sanitation. Here in the UK, we have all these things. We are able to change our cars, mobile phones and clothes regularly, to reflect the latest fashion. And yet even here, we are shamed by the fact that large numbers of people are dependent on emergency assistance from foodbanks.

We really do not live in a nation, much less a world, in which God's gifts are justly distributed. The societal structures in which we are all complicit allow us to feel good through individual acts of charity and kindness. However, they also systematically keep some of us in poverty. We love our neighbour individually, while allowing a system while often inflicts hate and deprivation on our unseen or unnoticed neighbours.

This, says Simmonds, "is what systemic sin looks like – a world in which millions of human beings and God's good creation fail to flourish as a result of unjust political, social and economic structures." Systemic sin is sin in which all in a polity are implicated, but which few (if any) have consciously chosen to commit, or have power to alter.

If you have a copy of *The Way of Ignatius* or can borrow one in due course, please do read chapter 7. Gemma Simmonds makes a better job of explaining systemic sin than I can in a limited space. Elsewhere you might find this concept referred to as 'corporate sin', as I often do. It is the most besetting sin in our world, bar none.

Shameful statistics, says Simmonds, can induce desolation and despondency, but they can also galvanise us into action. It is my sincere prayer that every Christian in the land might come to an understanding and engagement with systemic sin, and be galvanised into action. But I fear that there is a dangerous third way between despair and galvanisation, which Simmonds has missed. For both despair and resolve can be responses to a problem that we have accepted and appreciated in all its magnitude. It is my fear that we are very bad at believing that systemic sin is our problem; very quick to think that there is nothing that we can do about it; very ready to believe that we have done what we can; very adept at finding other explanations for poverty and deprivation. It is just too uncomfortable to think that the whole of human society has not developed into the best it possibly can, but rather that it is driven by inequality – and that we have the good fortune to be in the privileged group, in the driving seat of systemic sin.

## FOODBANK

On Monday I appealed for assistance for our Foodbank, which is based in Barrow with branches in Ulverston and Millom. A handful of people have come forward with some very generous donations, which will enable us to make a very real contribution. Thank you to those who responded and who did so within hours of my appeal.

The problem is enormous: last month, the foodbank distributed more than 6 tonnes of food. Even when they have funds to spend, they are struggling to find a wholesaler who is able to provide the quantities of staple goods that they require. This is a continuing problem. Demand is now increasing, due to the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak, on those who are most vulnerable.



Let me make a bold suggestion: haven't we got beyond the point where a few tins or packets of pasta in the box at church or in the surgery will cut the mustard? What must we do to help sustain the foodbank in the longer term? And, importantly, what can we do to work towards a day when foodbanks are no longer necessary?

## PRAYER

Please pray for the family and friends of Barbary Greenhow RIP. Her funeral will take place on Friday at Thorncliffe crematorium, attended by immediate family

only, as current guidelines require. There will be a public memorial service at St John the Baptist, Ulpha, once restrictions have been lifted.

Please pray for the foodbank: for all its volunteers; that the hearts of potential donors (especially those willing to give regularly) may be moved to assist; and that the political climate may be changed so that our system no longer allows people to get to the stage where they have to depend on a charitable hand-out of three days' basic food.

## SCHOOLS

*While our physical horizons are so narrow, it's important (and an opportunity) to broaden our other horizons. This week, I have asked Charlotte, Mrs Tudway, to tell us a little about the concerns of her working life in the Diocese.*

Those who know me well (in fact, those who know me at all) will know that I never miss an opportunity to champion the amazing work that takes place on a daily basis in Church of England schools.

Having first volunteered in a Church of England school, then worked as a teaching assistant, then as a teacher, and subsequently led church schools for more than 13 years, I am prepared to accept that I am more than a little biased!

I have just taken on a brand-new role, as Deputy Director of Education for the Diocese of Carlisle. I now have the privilege of supporting the 104 Church of England Schools in our Diocese and seeing the overall picture across all of them. I continue to be struck, time and again, by the wonderful job our school staff do, in extremely challenging circumstances. I am constantly reminded of the diverse ways in which our schools need us, their local churches, to support them.

One of the themes which has emerged in the schools where I have already spent time is the lack of availability of support; the extent to which our schools nowadays have to go it alone, or find sources of support locally. As a Diocesan team, we are very small - there are four of us, only one of whom, Vanessa O'Dea (the new Director of Education) works full time. Although supported by a team of self-employed School Effectiveness Consultants who bring a range of expertise and backgrounds, building up a network of support and looking for ways in which our work can complement (rather than duplicate) the work of others is very important. As with all areas of school life, lack of funding is requiring more and more creative and ingenious ways of working to ensure that our children get the education they deserve.

Between 2009 and 2019, cuts to education funding reduced the amount spent per pupil by 8% (and schools were not sufficiently funded to start with). The recent pledge by the government to "largely reverse" these cuts will mean that, even if this promise is fulfilled by 2022, our schools have still faced a 13-year 'pay freeze'.

During this same period, the expectations on school staff have increased exponentially. Not only in terms of the academic and curriculum-based demands (including through the testing at all ages and using these test results to judge the school) but also in many other ways. Cuts to local government funding have meant that support from the local authority and external agencies has been pared down so that it is almost non-existent. This includes nursing and health, social care, mental health professionals, education psychologists, occupational health professionals and specialist autism and special educational needs advisers. Mainstream schools have had to manage the complex and difficult needs of more and more pupils, who would formerly have had specialist provision, without the support or funding they really need. Schools are now judged on how well they support the mental wellbeing of pupils. Often, as well as supporting their pupils, schools are supporting the whole family, providing support (and even breakfast) not only for pupils, but their parents and siblings too. Counselling and mental health services are delivered as part of the routine school week.

School teachers are paid on the basis of 32.5 hours a week (6.5 hours a day). If you know a teacher, ask them how many hours they work on the average day. I bet it's more than 8! Or, ask them when was the last weekend they can remember not needing to work unpaid to prepare for the week ahead. Ask them whether they have ever been on a residential trip, spending a week away from home and family or friends, on duty 24/7, without any extra pay or time off in lieu in return. When I was a teaching assistant, I calculated my hourly wage. It fell well short of the living wage (i.e. the amount actually needed to live on) and was about in line with the National Minimum Wage.

And yet, our school staff continue to defy the odds, often at their own personal expense (in terms of time or even purchasing equipment and resources from their own money) to create environments which are truly Christian. In a Church of England school, every pupil's uniqueness is cherished. They are recognised as being made in the image of God and their personal circumstances or background are respected and valued. School staff work tirelessly to overcome the factors that prevent individual pupils from flourishing and to

help even the most vulnerable of children, living in the most difficult of circumstances.

Our Church of England schools give pupils the opportunity to grow spiritually, to encounter *and lead* a range of styles of worship and to make their own well-informed decisions about faith. When surveyed, more than 75% of Christians say that they first came to faith under the age of 18. Supporting the work of our church schools could not be more important.

Two weeks ago, as a result of Coronavirus, we asked our school staff to completely and radically change the way schools operate, in order to provide safe childcare for those who need it. They did it, and they did it within a matter of hours. They have found ways around every conceivable problem: driving supplies of cleaning products, soap and gloves between schools; continuing to get food to our most vulnerable pupils, who would otherwise receive free school meals; volunteering to work right through the Easter holidays when they are exhausted and in need of rest; and risking their own safety by looking after the children of workers who are most likely to be carrying the virus. They don't have any personal protective equipment. They just have commitment, passion and dedication.

When you are clapping for NHS staff, please also clap for school staff. When all this is over, consider how you could support a local school with time, money or skills. You don't have to work with children to support a school: remember they are desperately short of funding and resources and there is no limit to the ways in which you could help. You might want to offer your services to join the active and committed volunteers who make up school governing bodies all across the County. You might have a profession, trade or skill which would be invaluable to a local school – painting and decorating, gardening and accounting to name but a few. You may feel able to help work directly with children – supporting with reading or maths, or playing games at lunchtimes.

If anything in this article has inspired you and you would like to discuss it further, do get in touch. If you would like some further reading about the importance of the close work between schools and churches, have a look at the Church of England's Growing Faith document:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/GS%20121.pdf>

## PRAYING THROUGH THE MARKS OF MISSION

What is God's purpose, to which we are called as fellow-workers? Since 1984, the Anglican Communion throughout the world, to which we belong, has thought about the mission of God in a particular way. It has summarised the mission of the Church and every individual Christian in five simple statements.

These are the Five Marks of Mission, that **the mission of the Church is the mission of Christ to:**

1. **proclaim** the Good News of the Kingdom
2. **teach, baptise and nurture** new believers
3. **respond to human need** by loving service
4. **transform unjust structures** of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; and
5. strive to **safeguard the integrity of creation**, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Over coming days, please set aside a time for prayer, structured around each of the Five Marks of Mission.

Begin by lighting a candle of hope, that shines in a darkness that cannot overcome it. What is that darkness in the present time? Consider the words about systemic sin above. Read chapter 7 of the *The Way of Ignatius*. Reflect on society: how would society look if it was shaped only by and in the image of God?

Now take one of the Five Marks of Mission. What does this Mark describe about what God is seeking to do? How might this make a difference to the broken and fallen world which we inhabit?

Jesus said to his disciples, "*the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,*" (Matthew 9:37).

Give thanks for the scale of God's goodness. In your prayer, reflect on these questions and, as you ponder, allow God to speak in the thoughts of your heart:

How many of us are labouring on the Mark of Mission which you have selected? What needs to be done globally? What might need to be done here in our parish? What should we be doing? Do we really know? To which part of God's rich harvest have you personally been called? Are we labouring across the whole local harvest, on all five of the Marks of Mission as they apply to our parish and its context?

*Lord, help us to walk with you in prayer and action after the example of your time among us. Give us wisdom to see what we might change and heal. Give us strength to act!*