

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Eleventh Sunday of the Year (Trinity 1)



The good news that our churches will be open from Monday has come with a great sense of relief and thanksgiving. During the first stages of the lockdown we have come to be reminded that *place* matters, and *holy places* matter too. The foundation of the Christian Faith is the Incarnation.

'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' (St John 1:14)

God became man in a particular place and at a particular moment in time. People could reach out and touch him, see him, hear him. It is through the sacraments of the church, water, bread, wine, oil that Christian people continue to use their senses to encounter Jesus Christ. Christianity is a physical religion or it is nothing. Therefore place matters and holy places matter as well. This is not to say that some of the imaginative and creative ways of 'being church' which have developed in the last few weeks – using Zoom, Youtube – are to be decried. However, it seems to me that these should be seen as an admirable way of working in a crisis rather than a blueprint for our future life.

Some places are holy at the outset. Others become holy over time. Churches are special places because prayer has happened there over the years, decades and centuries. They are holy. That holiness aids the interaction with God that is the purpose of worship. This does not mean that prayer and worship cannot happen elsewhere. However, it happens most fittingly in churches built and consecrated for that purpose. I do like the story told by Timothy Radcliffe in his book *Why go to Church?* He remembers being taken into church by his mother to light a candle and say a prayer at the end of a shopping trip. 'We could have said the prayer equally well at home, but the empty church was not empty for my mother. It was the home of God, and a reminder of the communion of saints and of the whole church.'

Prayer

O Heavenly Father, we humbly beseech thee to make the door of our church a gateway to thy eternal kingdom; and grant that all who worship thee within thy house may also witness for thee in the world outside, to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And finally...

The church service was under way and they passed the collection plate. When the preacher saw a £50 note in the collection plate, he stopped the service and announced "Who ever put the £50 in the plate please stand up".

An attractive single woman stood up and said "I did."

The preacher told her, "Since you put that much money in the plate I would like to let you pick out three hymns." Excitedly, the woman said, "How nice, I'll take him and him and him!"