



Our Mission Statement

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and your neighbour as yourself. Matthew 22:37-38

Sunday Podcasts

of each Sunday Morning Service are available after the service on YouTube.

A time to speak

Parish Podcast on the YouTube channel.

The address for both is at the bottom of the page.

More Advent Quotes

“Christmas is fast approaching. And now that Christ has aroused our seasonal expectations, He’ll soon fulfil them all!”
St. Augustine

“Advent: the time to listen for footsteps – you can’t hear footsteps when you’re running yourself.”
Bill McKibben

“A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
1943

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It seems like our watching and waiting for the COVID vaccination is almost at an end and some semblance of ‘normal’ life will eventually return. But what is ‘life as normal’? Many would say that it is about being able to see and hold loved ones; to be free to travel wherever we want; to sing in church and to watch football matches and concerts; to go shopping without having to wear a mask or keep our distance (or queue for ages in the wet and cold). ‘Normal life’ is life as it was before COVID. But will it be THAT good?

There is still the whole Brexit issue and how we will manage without being part of Europe. Will it be better or worse? And what about the huge mountain of debt that we now owe? How are we going to be able to deal with that? Taxes, no pay rises, pension reductions, higher VAT? And there is still the issue about COVID, where it came from and will there be another like it? And the international and national tensions over racism, the environment and the attempted rewriting of history. And there is still the little matter of human sinfulness seen in stark relief in the selfishness and thoughtlessness of some during the crisis.

And what about the decline in the Christian faith and its message of love and justice? The old ‘normal’ saw a growing dismissal of objective truth, and right and wrong. In one recent advert for men’s perfume, David Beckham spoke the lines: “It’s not about what is right or wrong, but what is right by me” which perfectly sums up the ethics of the age.

The old ‘normal’ was about Black Lives Matter (the political ultra left wing organisation not the anti-racist slogan), Antifa, the misguided Extinction Rebellion and the woeful state of politics and political leadership. It was about the uncertainties in America and the mounting tensions in the Middle East. We are all desperate to get back to normal, but it was not Eden and it was not/will not necessarily be as good as we think.

I want ‘normal’ as much as anyone - certainly in terms of all the good things we had and enjoyed before COVID. But I want more than that. I want a country where God was back in the centre and pleased with His creation. I want a life where goodness is universally recognised, celebrated and aspired to. I want God’s kingdom to grow and people to turn back to Christ so that Christmas is truly celebrated as the birthday of the Saviour, and Easter once again looked forward to, not for bunnies and Easter eggs, but as the moment of our salvation and the hope of our resurrection. That’s the normal I want, and nothing less will satisfy me. So let’s get back to normal by all means, but let’s not forget what that normal was/is really like.

God bless,

Mark

Collect for 3rd Sunday of Advent

Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger John the Baptist to prepare the way for you, grant that the ministers and stewards of your truth may so make ready your way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**



Readings

Isaiah 61: 1 - 4, 8 - end Psalm 126 I Thessalonians 5: 16 - 24 Matthew 3: 1 - 12

THIS NEWSLETTER IS AVAILABLE ON THE PARISH WEBSITE:

www.stjamesswansea.org.uk

St. James Sunday Services on YouTube are available here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoNVea6r8mEr_KnOkSv6qQA/

The Vicar’s New blog can be found here: sonofzebedee.blogspot.com

The Christian Atheist

Pastor Craig Groeschel is a recovering Christian atheist. He may have called himself a Christian all his life, but he didn't always live as if God existed. It's a struggle he's had both as a layman and as a pastor. And it's a struggle he wants to help millions of so-called Christians to overcome. Christian atheists are everywhere, Groeschel, who leads LifeChurch.tv, writes in his book, *The Christian Atheist*. They attend church, seminaries and theological colleges, and some even read their Bibles everyday.

"Many of us look the part," he says. "Or we think we're Christian because, you know, it's not like we're Buddhists. We believe in God, but our lives don't reflect who he really is."

Groeschel introduced Christian atheism a few years ago in a sermon series titled *Practical Atheist*. The way Christian atheism plays out, he preached at that time, is:

"I believe in God but I want to do whatever the heck I want to do. I want enough of God to keep me out of hell and enough of God to get me into heaven but I don't want so much of God that it makes me change my lifestyle because at its root I believe in God but I do not fear Him."

Christian atheism is perfectly summed up in this piece he quotes by Wilbur Smith:

"I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please."

I would strongly recommend his book as a real eye-opener and a challenge to much of the watered-down Christianity that is awash in our churches today. Are you a Christian Atheist? Read this if you want to find out.

Five Questions

This week we welcome another contributor to Five Questions:

1. What is your name? - Margaret Lamb.
2. Where were you born? - Doncaster, South Yorkshire.
3. What is your earliest memory of Church? - as an infant sitting with my mum during Sunday Morning Service and being slightly scared of the vicar, a rather formidable man!
4. When did the Christian faith become important to you? - Attending church has been part of my life from my earliest days. In my teens a young vicar took over as leader of our church and he had a remarkable gift of relating well to young people, explaining what it meant to be a Christian, answering our questions and encouraging us in our journey of faith. He married Tony and me and we still have a plaited cord he gave to us during the wedding service - 2 strands represented Tony and me, and the 3rd red strand represented God, all entwined together in the journey ahead of us, with God as our strength and support.
5. What is your favourite Bible verse and why? - Psalm 121: 1-2 "I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." There are times in our lives when things get tough and we need help and support. I find this psalm a great comfort at such times, knowing that, if I am open to Him, God is present and protecting me now as He will be at my journey's end.

Bible Study

Please note that our Acts Bible study has finished until the New Year

Christmas Service 2020

Due to the continuing COVID restrictions there will only be one Christmas service this year in church, on Christmas Eve at 4.30pm. This will be, as before, a said service. There will be no service on Sunday 27th December although I will prepare a short podcast for those who are interested.

Depending on what happens over Christmas our usual Sunday Services will continue in the New Year at 10.30am beginning January 3rd (Welsh Assembly permitting).



Our last **Zoom congregational meeting** of 2020 will take place on Thursday 17th December 7pm. If you are interested in attending please let me - the Vicar - know via email. The numbers at the last meeting were disappointing and so if insufficient numbers are forthcoming we will cancel it. Meanwhile if there are enough people interested and it does go ahead please feel free to bring a poem, reading, or story to share. Please remember that this is a celebration of Christmas.

Longevity

An old man was relaxing on his 100th birthday party when a reporter went up to him: "Sir, what is the secret of your long life?" The man thought for a moment and replied: "Every day at 9pm I have a glass of port. Good for the heart."

"That's all?" the reporter replied. The man smiled, "That, and cancelling my voyage on the Titanic."

Contact information

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The Parish Website can be found at: www.stjamesswansea.org.uk