

**APCM Sunday/ Easter 5 Year B**  
**28<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Acts 8:26-40, John 15:1-8**

May I speak in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen

Today's sermon forms part of my Rectors Report for the APCM as I feel it important to put, what is in the main, a business meeting, into the context of scripture and worship, linking in with a passage from the set scripture of the day. The business meeting is a legal requirement of the Church but what sets it apart from any AGM of any other organisation is that all that we do, we do in the name of God and the proclamation of the gospel.

From this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, *"Then Phillip began to speak & starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus."*

**Philip proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.**

That is what each and everyone of us should be about.

Empowered by the Spirit Philips words to the eunuch were so great, that as they travelled on and came to some water the eunuch said, *"Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptised?"* And the eunuch was baptised.

The gospel of Jesus had been proclaimed and acted upon with authority.

And from our gospel reading,

*"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."*

**That you bear much fruit and become my disciples.**

In this passage Jesus is telling his disciples that he is the vine, his Father is the vine-grower, and they are the branches. One cannot flourish without the whole. Branches need the vine otherwise they will wither and die. Those who abide in Jesus and Jesus in them bear much fruit.

Have we as a church borne much fruit in 2023? I believe that we have but that we must never become complacent and think that our work is done. For our work is far from done, never complete or over. Our work is a continual journey, and we should never think that we have arrived for there is always so much more to learn and to do. We journey as individuals, and we journey collectively as a church. We may think of ourselves as individual branches, but we must not lose sight that

without the vine that holds us all together we will wither and become ineffectual.

Today as we gather for our APCM it gives us the opportunity to look back and reflect on Parish life here at St. Edmund's during 2023, both its high and low points. Much of what we do, the various strands of life in community repeat in some form year after year, perhaps without too much thought and somewhat unchallenged. If we are not careful, we can sit back, put our feet up and think all is well with the world and not do what we are called to do 'Proclaim the good news and make disciples', for it is up to us all.

Yes, we need to be positive and grateful, but we must be proactive in our calling.

Much of what has taken place has already been reported on in some way in our Annual Report booklet, but I would like to take this time to highlight just a few things.

We began the year with the sad news of the death of our dear friend Sheila (Crawford). Sheila having been born in the village, at the age of 93, was the longest serving member of this church congregation. Her knowledge of church and village life, her humility, her smile were so much part of who she was.

In August another one of our community Brian (Deathridge) was taken to be with our Father in heaven. Brian was a people's person who thrived on being with others and enjoyed nothing more than a good old chat.

Sadly, in November Maureen (Southgate), another treasured member of our congregation departed this earthly life. Maureen was a lady of strength and quite determination. A lady who cared so much for others. She was a vital part of our pastoral team and her work amongst the sick and bereaved was 'second to none'.

The year ended with the fairly sudden death of another stalwart of our community, Moya (Arundel). Another strong woman with a wicked sense of humour who over the years made an enormous contribution to the life of St. Edmund's. There was always a rush for Moya's delicious marmalade and many of the cards given on birthdays were and still are cards made by Moya.

They are all greatly missed for who and what they were, and, in their memory, it is important that we go on and thrive as a church community in this place.

Our biggest venture of 2023 must be St. Edmund's Centre. Having taken it on in August 2022 it was in January 2023 that we really established it as a Mission & Outreach hub. The work and activities that go on day by day, week by week in that place are fantastic. Groups and activities that reach out from the church into the local community. Please do read of all that goes on in the Report Booklet. All that we offer as a church is offered freely without cost to those who attend. It truly has been a blessing. I thank all those that have taken on the oversight of various activities for your time, for your welcome, for your encouragement of others, for your listen ear, for your care and concern, without you the activities would not happen. I must also take this opportunity of thanking my husband Don who diligently sorts our all the bookings, needed to keep the Centre running, and oversees any small maintenance jobs that need doing.

This year I looked at our worship and how our Eucharist services may be enhanced whilst still taking into considerations the concerns of communicants, post covid. A number of people had indicated that they would once again like to receive wine from the common cup whilst others preference was still by intinction. The smooth running of this has been enhanced with the help of two new servers, who are robed and as well as administering the cup, help in the preparation and clearing up of the communion vessels. I am grateful to Sharon and Zac for responding to God's call in this way. I also asked Sharon if she would consider taking on the role as sacristan which she agreed to. If you are unsure of the role of a sacristan, please do speak to me later and I will explain.

Another area that needs to be highlighted is that of our pastoral care. The members of the pastoral team, led by Rev Mandy have worked hard in responding to the needs of those that are lonely, sick or bereaved, with regular visits and the taking of Home Communion. I am eternally grateful to them for all that they do. Often, I hear said, 'that nobody from the church has been to visit so and so.' When I think through what has been said I realise that they often mean that a member of the clergy has not been to see them. I am aware that my pastoral visiting is not as I would like it to be but that is a matter of time restriction not because I don't want to visit. I would love to spend much more time visiting. In my defence, if such is needed, I always respond in times of

crisis and emergency. However, so much of my time is taken up with the administration, all the things that go on day by day, week by week, that keep this place going. Often, I am asked what I do with my time and so for a whole week I wrote down everything that I did, not to boast, not to say, 'How great am I', NO just to stop, look, see and reflect. The week I noted down was just a normal one (if there is such a thing), nothing special happening – I worked 63 and a half hours. And so I can only apologise if I haven't been to see you. I truly do my best. I am extremely grateful to Mandy and all that she has done in the pastoral ministry of our church. But as we know Mandy will soon be leaving us and my reliance on the pastoral team will be even greater.

And now to say an enormous thank you to you all, for you all have had a part to play in, as they say, 'keeping the show on the road.' This place, this church community, could not exist without all who volunteer in so many ways, that's YOU. This is a journey we make together. A church that works together, grows together. I am aware that there are many volunteers needed to keep this church alive and active in the proclamation of the gospel and I thank each and everyone of you. I am not going to pick out individuals, because in doing so, I am sure, to unintentionally, miss somebody out. Some may think nothing of what they do, or that their task is menial, but each and every one is important AND I THANK YOU.

I will however make one exception – Angela I want to thank you today as you step down after 6 years as churchwarden. I thank you for all that you have done, much unseen and unknown. I thank you for your unwavering support of me, especially during the Covid pandemic. I know that you will still be beavering around in the background but hopefully enjoying a little more time to yourself.

As we step out on the next part of this journey together, I pray that God will continue to guide us. However, this is only possible if we have open hearts, minds and ears to listen to his call and in listening RESPOND to that calling.

'He is the vine, we are the branches. Those who abide in Jesus and Jesus in them bear much fruit. Amen.