

Sunday 1st May 2022
Easter 3 (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: Acts 9.1-6

NT: Revelation 5.11-14

G: John 21.1-19

Over the last couple of years we have learned a lot about our priorities. We have seen people look for ways to change their lives because they knew that, post-pandemic, they didn't want to live as they lived before. This has been a more profound change than the usual increase in gym membership every January: it has been about people assessing how they want to enjoy the rest of their lives. New jobs, new hobbies, new friends. This is what we are seeing around us. I would also argue that this has not been an entirely new phenomenon, but rather an acceleration of what was already underway. There have been winners and losers in this progression: a loser has definitely been the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, where it is demonstrable that the appetite which people once had for staying behind after church for a further hour to participate in a meeting has melted away. Before the pandemic, we tried to make this more attractive by providing food as well, but there was hardly a queue around the block even then. So, we have shrunk the annual meeting to meet the statutory requirements, but it is not imposing on your time. Having said that, scrutiny is important, so please speak to clergy or Church Officers afterwards if there are any issues you would like to raise or explore more fully.

There have been other priorities which have been evident in our church life. The generosity of congregation and visitors towards the Foodbank; the energy which has gone into the Lauda Project with the Gypsy-Roma-Traveller community; the support and commitment to the arts. These are areas which are thriving. Before Christmas we ran a successful study group, and there will be another one starting in the next few months. And we have also

seen many people volunteering for new roles within our church life. In addition, the reach of the church into the City continues as it has always done, with active roles in a number of communities and on a range of projects, from homelessness through to education and to LGBTQ justice. This all feels so active at the moment that it feels like the wrong moment to pause and talk about it all at an annual meeting.

In our Gospel today there is a glimpse of the disciples after the resurrection. In the light of what we know about behaviours following the pandemic, it is a slightly surprising reading because the disciples appear to have resumed their old lives. They had already, we heard, seen the resurrected Jesus, but they did not recognize him when he appeared by the Sea of Tiberias. However, the fishing career resumed. Perhaps this is not surprising, in the hand-to-mouth existence of first century Palestine, but the implication is that they were not preaching and teaching to continue the ministry of Jesus. After the trauma of the crucifixion and even the resurrection, our own experience tells us that the disciples would have needed to stop and reassess. Where were they going? What were they doing?

At the moment the Parochial Church Council is doing just that. Back in 2014 and 2015 we produced a Vision and Strategy document which you can download from the website, and we successfully used that document at every PCC meeting to measure our outputs and plan for the future. The pandemic was a moment to stop and assess, and we are doing that work afresh. When we are a bit further along in our work we shall bring this out to all of you for consultation so that we can shape the future together, but I want to share with you now the values which the PCC associates with our Church. At the centre of what we do is Jesus Christ, but there are four further values, which are 'Inclusive Welcoming', 'Serving', 'Ethical Compassion', and 'Joyful Hope'. In future we shall measure our activities and outputs not

against a list of what we want to *do*, but rather against what we want to *be*.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus asks Simon Peter the same question three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And this question is a challenge to ask what Simon wants to be, rather than what he wants to do. It is a relational question, but also an existential one which Jesus asks all of us. An Annual Meeting is, in its procedural way, a rather dull affair. The Reports are the interesting bit, and they will tell you everything you need to know about the life of Liverpool Parish Church at the moment, but the opportunity of an annual 'pause' in our Church life is to look at ourselves and ask 'who are we?'. When we align our values with membership of our church community and the outward functions of our Church, then I hope that the core will be Jesus Christ. We have much to do in the year ahead, but even greater than that is all the things which we have to be.

Fr Crispin Pailing