

Today as we have heard and know is the yearly celebration of God's gift of the Holy Spirit to his Church. Coming 50 days after the mighty and victorious resurrection of Jesus from the dead and 10 days after his glorious Ascension we, members of God's Church, are lavished upon with his promised gift – the Advocate – as indeed were Jesus' first Disciples. For the disciples, this was a life changing moment. No longer do they hide away scarred of their own shadow; no longer do they mope in grief; no longer do they think they have wasted 3 years of their lives following this Jesus whom they believed to be the Christ, the son of God, and yet dejectedly saw him arrested and executed on the cross. Instead, they are empowered to go into the Streets and speak the truth. With the fire of God's love burning within them they retell the story of Jesus and how he overcame death and rose again. With the fire of God's love they invite all who will hear to listen to their message of love and forgiveness and so baptise those who choose to accept that message as new members in the Household of Faith.

Nearly 2000 years on, that is still the task of the Church. To tell the story of Jesus – his love, mercy and forgiveness, to enable people to draw near to God and to find their place within the Household of Faith. Through the Gift of the Spirit we have been empowered to continue this work, throughout the world, routed in the foundations laid by the Apostles – Jesus' disciples who were sent out throughout the world to share the Good News. Like the Apostles we are to be submersed in prayer and praise. We are to have the boldness and confidence, in the Spirit, to invite or challenge friends and family to Church or to talk about matters of faith and answer questions they might have. We are to trust in the Power of the Advocate, that he will furnish us with the answers and skills required to be able to achieve this.

Pentecost is a day of new beginnings for the Church – in fact some might even say it the beginning of what we have come to know as a formalised Church. It is a day of hope for the future and joy for the present. In hope for the future, and joy for the present, what would you like to see happening here? What are we, the Church, not doing that we should be doing? What things or areas would you like to learn more about? What ideas do you have for sharing the Good news of Christ with those around us? Is there something we ought to be doing to strengthen our prayer lives and knowledge of Holy Scripture? Where is the fire of God's love leading us as a Parish and as individuals?

But if we are to be able to do anything on our wish list, or indeed simply be able to offer the level of ministry and pastoral care we already receive, we need to be able to pay for it. Last year our parochial income took a huge hit. With our buildings closed and gatherings prohibited we were unable to rent our halls or undertake our usual fundraising events. Mercifully our planned giving remained consistent which kept the wolf from the door. But for the first time in living memory we defaulted on paying our Parish Share – our contribution towards the cost of Ministry in this place. We missed the target by some £50,000! And this has caused the PCC to re-evaluate our sources of income. It is simply not sustainable for us, as a Parish of this size and significance, to rely on fundraising and hall income to plug the gap in our accounts. We need a new, more sustainable model that is not subject to the kind of disruption we've seen during the pandemic. We need to be able to meet our costs ourselves instead of relying on externals to help bankroll us. In short, we need to be putting more into the plate as our giving – 23% to be blunt!

Over recent months our Treasurer has written a series of excellent articles in our Magazine highlighting our financial position. He has rightly thanked you for your generous giving to date: most years we pledge in planned giving approximately £72,000 – which is a phenomenal amount but sadly it doesn't cover the cost of Ministry – and hasn't done for the last 30 years! Chris also thanked you for your fundraising. I don't think I've ever come across a parish that is as good at raising money for specific projects as this: the organ, the hall, the roof, the boilers, our proposed webcasting technology. You're great at it! And I am so thankful to you all for all of this. But we still come back to our regular giving not covering the cost of ministry without relying on other income streams. We are good at funding things where we know what it's worth, so I ask: What is God worth to you?

Chris recently walked past a coffee house to discover a large latte costs £3.45. We know many people have multiple cups a week...possibly even a day. So I ask... Is God worth the cost of a large latte each week? Is God and his Church worth sacrificing the caffeine hit and adding that £3.45 to your weekly offering towards the

Mission of the Church? If you do not currently give in a planned or regular manner, could you sacrifice a large latte each week and pledge that amount to the mission and ministry of God's Church here? What is forgiveness in Christ and receiving of him in the Blessed Sacrament worth to you? What is our fellowship, our buildings, our custodianship of the Gospel, and our commitment to future generations in this place worth to you? If you are not a regular giver we have a whole host of easy and simple ways to give from Direct Debit, to weekly envelopes and legacy giving. Details of all these schemes are available on your way home. If you are already a regular giver, when did you last review your financial contribution to the Church? Are you giving what you believe or know God to be worth?

Of course we hope that the effects of the pandemic and resulting restrictions are passing and soon we will be able to re-open our halls and undertake some fundraising initiatives. But this income should not be seen as a way to plug the gaps, to make ends meet, but rather as a way to fund those projects that we really want to see get-off the ground: work with the young people of this community; greater attention to our vulnerable and isolated – the house bound or homeless; out-reach days; music funding! Fundraising and letting income should be a bonus! As a Church community of over 200 people we really ought to be able to pay our way. So, in the power of the Spirit I ask you pray: pray about your level of giving; pray that we may be able to respond to God's overwhelming generosity in the person of Jesus with our own overwhelming generosity; pray that we may all share in providing the resources necessary for ministry and pastoral care here; and then, over the next few weeks, to pledge anew to giving regularly to the Church.

Ministry/ God's Church is costly. In former years – and still today in various places around the world – the cost of faith was often one's life. I pray that will not be required of you here. But there is still a cost. And that cost can be met through the refreshing, encouraging, and empowering of God's Holy Spirit today. Together, we can commit anew to proclaiming Christ's message of love and forgiveness to this and every community and to ensuring we are properly resourced. But none of this is possible if we are not properly and adequately funded. So I leave you with that question: What is God worth to you?