Rector's Blog 26th November 2026

WHAT'S YOUR VERSE?....

There is a powerful scene in the film *Dead Poets Society* where John Keating, the new English teacher, meets his students for the first time. He gets one boy to read the introduction to their poetry text book. It outlines a very scientific way of assessing poetry based on assessing its literary features, rendering the assessment to a graphical metric – "the bigger the box, the greater the poem".

Having shown them the approach he condemns it! He insists that they tear the introductory pages out of the book (an act of rebellion the students find very difficult to engage with), which they reluctantly, and eventually do.

Keating then gathers them in a huddle and explains an alternative philosophy:

"We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion."

For Keating there is so much more to the expression of that passion through the words of the poets. To him it is a reminder *"That life exists, and identity. That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse."* The teacher then sets the boys a challenge….

"What will your verse be?"

It's a challenge to all of us. What will your verse be? What will the indent on the life of our community, family and friends be? Maybe there are different verses for different seasons.

"God's Mission in Sanderstead" is the standing item on the PCC agenda. The task is unfinished. There is always more room on the page for a new verse.

What's yours?

What's ours?

In Psalm 92 this morning we read these words:

"Such as are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bear fruit in old age; they shall be vigorous and in full leaf. That they may show that the Lord is true, he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him"

There is no shelf life on God's call to mission. To pray for revival, for the souls of those amongst whom we live and love. To speak well of our Creator and Saviour and to enthuse others into curiosity about this thing we call faith.

Everything we do is about writing new verses that make a difference.

And that may mean something other than "business as usual".

The other Psalm this morning was Psalm 96:

"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord and bless his name; tell out his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations and his wonders among the people"

We sing to the Lord AND we proclaim his wonders to the people. Telling out his salvation (and their need for it!)

What's your verse?

PCC received a paper this week that outlined some of the new things that we could do or have already started. These are all to complement the good things already happening. They included:

- **Family Carols** with the Gresham Primary School Choir to complement our Carols by Candlelight later in the evening (making each service a bit smaller, more comfortable and safer!) – we hope to welcome many local families with children in the choir and others.
- **Family-focused services of blessing** (and baptism) – starting after Easter 2027 on second Sundays; reaching out to our priority - *families with children* (per the Parish Profile)

- **Weekly Intercessory group –** to pray specifically for and over the mission and ministry of the churches – *"do not be anxious about anything but in everything with prayer and petition…"*
- **Deeper teaching sessions –** especially about the doctrine of the church and what this means for day to day life and witness to build further our confidence in the Gospel we proclaim
- **Training and equipping –** in sharing our faith story, prayer ministry, leading worship and other aspects of mission and ministry
- **Bereavement support –** establishing a support group for those who are bereaved as well as running *The Bereavement Journey,* an extremely helpful set of sessions for those who have lost loved ones
- **Evangelism courses –** running both *Alpha* and *Christianity Explored* through 2027 at different times of day and in different locations – we need to be inviting people to these courses and will need hospitality support, prayer cover and people to help support discussions (NB: **this is key** to bringing more people to faith which grows the church)
- **Local projects –** we were approached by two separate people running projects; firstly, a Community Interest Company running courses to build confidence in young people through music, forming rock bands and learning instruments and musicianship – we will be partnering with them to provide premises (all profits from the venture are put back into the venture); secondly, those that run the *Life Courses* we advertise (currently held in Purley) have approached us to be a delivery centre – supporting need in our community (this will be in the first half 2027) (NB: I am sure it was no accident that these came to us in the same week!)
- **Community day –** we noted that the obvious presence of members of the church (with Red t-shirts with our emblem displayed) as part of the Community Day team at The Rec was both warmly welcomed by the organisers but also a public witness of service to the community; we can press into this principle more in coming months and years
- **Sunday lunch –** is recognised as an extremely valued and valuable outreach; while nothing is in place to continue in January, efforts are active to replace with something similar as soon into 2027 as we can

- **Celebration 800 –** we have 3 agreed and defined projects being pursued, each with their own groups to plan and organise these; each supports one aspect of our mission statement and **we all need to get behind all three** so that they all bear witness to the mission of the church and growing as disciples marking 800 years of worship in what is now the Parish of Sanderstead
- **Communications** – work continues to bring our new website to operation, to agree a recognisable image (the printed version with the red banner may differ from the website for technical reasons) including a plan to advertise Christmas by ordering a series of Christmas card invitations to our services to be distributed as widely as we are able
- **Future mission** – several years ago the option of a Pioneer Associate Minister for the P arish was suggested. Sadly Diocesan finances very clearly do not currently stretch to that possibility (in fact the real possibility of reductions in clergy posts is being assessed). However, alternative options to support ministry here are being actively pursued. This is a positive opportunity not only for us and our community but also as a mark of the support we have from the wider church for all that we seek to achieve here.
- **Opportunities in using the building** – one small thing which we can experiment with is the orientation of the chairs in the north aisle. They currently sit parallel to the main body of the church meaning that people sitting there are at 90 degrees to the service leaders. We will try turning them round so that they face the pulpit and lectern. This consequentially may provide an alternative for the choir to "sing over" the congregation in some services. Let's try it out and see if it gains more than it loses (or vice versa).
- **Financial challenges** – please note that we face significant costs to repair and maintain all our buildings and that there is currently a significant gap between all we need to do in the next five years and finances available; anyone with time and expertise (or at least enthusiasm) to support sustained income generation including through grants, please let us know!

- **Timescales** – last week's blog named one of the "elephants in the room", which is that I will only be here for a limited time (2031). So that raises the question not only of **what do we do together** in that time but **what do we together hand on** to my successor?

Lots to think about there and I look forward to our congregation meeting on Sunday *'Be part of the conversation'*. Please do bring any observations, encouragements, comments and concerns that we can share together. This really is a conversation **everyone** is invited to be part of.

Even better, especially with concerns, get in touch beforehand or separately. Love to hear from you to help shape our direction over the next few years.

Again, asking yourself.

What is your verse?

What are our verses?

Wishing you every blessing

Your brother in Christ,
Doug
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