

Dear Friends,

During the Summer months, and especially on holiday, I enjoy reading books, particularly biographies and stories. I also enjoy reading about the history of the places that I visit, wondering “what was the reason why the buildings that we have visited have been built and developed in the way they have”? History is very important as we consider our Christian lives. The bible, notably the Old Testament, is full of history and stories to teach, admonish and encourage us by taking hold of the faith that they had and to follow their example of faithfulness, and also to learn from those whose faith failed them and ended up in a bad way. Hebrews 11 has a catalogue of the faithful ones who set us an example of faith, and St. Paul in Romans 16 ends up with a whole list of faithful people he thanks and prays for.

We are half-way through our celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the consecration of St. Andrew's Church, and our focus now moves to having a series of preachers between now and Advent who are either in senior leadership in the Diocese or have been in some way associated with St. Andrew's in its recent past and have now moved on in their ministries. It will be good to hear from them their stories as to how St. Andrew's helped them, how their ministries have developed since being with us, and what lessons they can draw on to help us in our walk with God for the next 60 years. The theme I have given our preachers is “Looking Back, Looking Forward”, and I will be interested to note what common themes the congregation can discern in the sermons as a whole, and to what lessons we can draw on for our church and its ministry.

When I was licensed to this church 16 years ago on 1st September 2003, I took as a church motto “**We want to know Christ**” taken from Phil 3:10. This is part of a bigger passage where St. Paul speaks of his single-minded focus on Jesus Christ.

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on ... toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:10-14)

St Paul makes the following of Christ and understanding the cross and the resurrection the primary purpose of his life, and then other things such as family, career and even ministry are put in their true perspective. As I said on Sunday 18th August; ‘The most important thing is to make “The most important thing”, the most important thing!’ We all have our stories of life and faith, and it would be good to share some of those stories as we approach this new phase of our celebrations. We all have our own experiences and callings, and God will use each of us in a unique way; taking account of our giftings and character. If the church works together well it will be like an orchestra – each playing their own instrument with other players but held together by the heavenly conductor Jesus.

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This song is often sung at celebration services when we look back and look forward and can help us as we reflect and recommit ourselves to following Christ in St Andrew's.

**Lord, for the years Your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.**

**Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us –
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.**

In Christian love,

Paul