

Coming up at St Mark's...

If you have never been **baptized**, then we will be filling up the pool on 15th June, at 9.15 and 5, for anyone who would like to do so. Please see one of the leadership team about getting ready...

Confirmation. There are seven people being confirmed on Thursday 19th June at 7.30pm. It would be great if you could support them by praying and coming along...more information about the candidates will be released in the next few weeks.

Sanctuary. This Tuesday morning Francis from St Andrews will be talking from 9:30 AM about "1000 miles at 60". Not to be missed!

Vision 4 Mission Day, 14th June. This day will showcase a huge range of different forms of fresh expressions. Stewards are still needed for the events and if you are able to help out please sign up in the welcome area. Thank you.

Drama at holiday club. If you're able to be involved in helping with the holiday club at the end of July that would be fantastic. Please fill in your details in the welcome area. In particular we're looking for someone who will coordinate the drama for each day. You don't have to be Martin Scorsese, but just have a bit of imagination and a sense of fun!



Please pray for...

Please pray for those **being confirmed** on Thursday June 19th at 7.30pm: Rob Swales, Peggy Redfern, Kay Hatfield (renewing baptism), Kate Walker, Millie Greenwood, Grace Glover, Anna Walker, Georgia Skitt

There are 21 people going to **Soul Survivor** at the end of July – pray that God will draw them to Himself, and set them on fire with love for His kingdom.

Over the last few months a team has been developing plans for growing our **youth and children's work** – pray for wisdom in taking this forward.

Pray for our **new PCC**, meeting this week, as they oversee the church's vision.

Pray for the **safe return of the schoolgirls abducted in Nigeria**. Pray for the families of those affected by the **mining disaster in Turkey**.

Pray for **Mo and Andrew Clarke and Hedley Gibson**, in need of healing and strength at the moment...

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

This month we are praying for **Christian Aid**. Pray that our Christian Aid collectors may feel God's presence as they knock on doors to collect donations from around the parish.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 18th May 2014

Worship/reflection:

Watch Andy's report on worship at St Mark's at <https://vimeo.com/95307250>
Please pray for whatever God places on your heart through it.

Luke 5: 27-39. Jesus calls Levi and eats with sinners...

From the book 'Children's letters to God': 'Dear God, Are you real? Some people don't not believe it. If you are you'd better do something quick. Harriet Ann.'

If He did would we notice? Our Gospel reading today contains a farcical situation. Why would anyone fast and pray? Surely to get closer to God? If you could sit right next to Him and talk and listen while you ate and drank at a meal with Him – would you do that rather than fast and pray? This is the point Jesus makes when He speaks about the Bridegroom. The mistake the Pharisees and scribes made was that they were so focussed on the 'means' they missed the 'end'!

All the religious or spiritual activities we are involved in have as their aim a deeper relationship with God, but there seems to be a very big danger that they become ends in themselves. Try this litmus test – after a service how often do we think or talk about the content of the service – the songs, the sermon, the notices, the temperature, the noise before the service, the length of the service and how often do we think or talk about what impact that service had on our walk with God?

Don't misunderstand, just as Jesus did not say fasting was pointless, but said that fasting was important at the right time, I am not saying that the elements that make up a service are unimportant, clearly if you can't hear the sermon it can't assist your walk with God, the practicalities are important, but we must get them in perspective.

A personal example – the evening service on an Easter Sunday. When it was first proposed to have a performance of the Messiah in the evening, I was strongly against it. After all it was Easter Day, which means you should have a stomping good time of praise and worship with a rocking sermon on the resurrection. Why? Because that's how you meet with Jesus on an Easter Sunday evening. How on earth could listening to the Messiah deepen anyone's walk with God? Sounds farcical now to have had that attitude, but at the time it seemed obvious to me. As obvious as it seemed to the scribes and Pharisees that you didn't deepen your relationship with God by eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners in preference to fasting and praying. But rather than condemning them for their attitude Jesus tells them a parable.

He gently gets them to consider that if you want your experience of God to grow you have to be prepared for that to happen in a way that you have not been familiar with up to now. He acknowledges that this is difficult for us – we have tasted the old wine, it is familiar, we know we like it and it will take time to acquire a taste for the new wine, but if we try to put the new wine into old wineskins, to try to make any experience of God fit in with the way we have decided things should be, that will lead to disaster. He uses quite a powerful metaphor when he says that the new wine will damage the old wineskins and also be lost. I am sad that a number of people I know who were fervent Christians when we were younger have turned away from their faith, even though I would have found that possibility very unlikely when I knew them. Others have different attitudes now, often more tolerant! Their experience of God and their expression of their faith have changed; they have learnt that maybe we constantly need to be willing to change, to adopt new wineskins (the 'means') to contain our changing experience of God (the 'ends'). Maybe even by accepting the Messiah on an Easter Sunday evening.

Now for those who might have the slightest hint in their minds that we are sailing into 'woolly liberal theological waters' here – there are three things that don't change:

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever – the person to whom we are seeking to relate does not change. If at heart our overriding desire is to know Him more and more we have an assurance that He is faithful, always.

He is always calling us to 'Follow Him' – as He called Levi He is constantly calling us on in our following of Him, which, as we considered last week, is what discipleship is about. We are on a journey throughout our lives; we have not 'arrived' if we are 8 or 80, so there is an ongoing challenge to consider how appropriate our wineskins are for the new wine of our life with Jesus.

He knows we get it wrong – sadly when Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' they might have thought He wasn't speaking about them – one of the new wineskins they needed to adopt, and so do we, is that we cannot make God love us any more, or any less, by our actions. He already loves us with an eternal love that never changes. So we do not need to hide from Him when we know we've messed up, nor think of ourselves better than others when we see them mess up!

To respond to the call of Jesus, as Levi did, means, in one sense, leaving everything – it may be that the hardest thing to leave is the desire to decide how God can and should act and to allow Him to surprise us – as He did the tax collectors and sinners when Jesus ate and drank with them. 'Are you real? If you are you'd better do something!' - Let's not miss it when He does.

Study

Luke 2:52 – Jesus changed as He grew, how does that apply to us?

2 Cor 3: 15-18 – how are we being transformed? What do we make of Paul's assertion that the Law alone cannot accomplish that transformation (it is still veiled)?

Rom 12:1-3 – what part does our mind have to play in this?

Rev 21: 1-6 – how does this description of 'journey's end' make us feel?

Living it out (Application)

What old wineskins are you holding onto?

What is your equivalent of my closed attitude to services on Easter Sunday evening?

Could you at the next 4 services you attend focus on the ends (your walk with God) not the means (the service content)?