**Prayers online 16-8-20**

Ever loving Father, Creator of all things, we give you thanks for all your goodness towards us. We thank you for the great love you have for each one of us, shown through the life and death of Jesus your Son, love which is always reaching out to us. We thank you that you are a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps but with us at all times, keeping us in your loving, watchful care. Thank you for being in the midst of our everyday life, revealing yourself in different ways; thank you for being there in our time of sadness, never leaving us to be alone; thank you for bringing us fullness of joy in the high moments of life. And we thank you for your Spirit, our guide, our inspiration, our helper, our comforter.

Living God, we pray for your Church of which we are all part, that she may be a light to all people, dispelling the darkness that often surrounds us; that she may be like salt, preventing the decay of society from all that would bring harm. Pour out your Spirit afresh upon your Church, Lord, that hope may be brought to our troubled world.

We pray for the nations of the world and their leaders that they may bring lasting peace to troubled lands; and we pray for Christian Aid and other charities seeking to bring help to the poor affected by Covid.

We pray for all those finding life difficult just now for whatever reason, may you light up the path ahead for them; in a moment of silence we bring to you our loved ones, close to home and far away…surround them with your love.

And, Lord, we pray for ourselves that we may hear afresh your call to follow Jesus and to head into the unknown with him on life’s biggest adventure.

Hear these our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Where are we going?**

**Mark 1: 14-20 (Jesus calls four fishermen)**

“Where is our world going?” Tensions with China, America whose President is almost farcical, Disaster Emergency Charities crying out for help for the poor, Coronavirus turning any sense of normality into a spin. Such scenarios and more mean that “Where is our world going?” is a valid question for our time once again. During these recent months many of us have asked more questions as we contemplate our lives: “Where are we going?” What is life all about? What does life mean? Is there more to life than this mortal life we lead? How best am I living my life? Sadly, all too soon we can lose our focus but we do well to hang on these questions and wait with God for some answers, and if not answers then some guidance.

We have to ask too in terms of the Church, “Where are we going?” The national Church and radical reform is a partnership we have yet to see cemented. I want to ask the question of us at our local Church, “Where are we going?” It is an important question, for the longed-for hope of a better world and a more relevant national Church, begins in the local, it begins with what we can do and be. The world changes and the Christian message bears fruit where people in their communities share the love of God and love their neighbours, and from there it spreads. We feel so helpless in the face of the problems that face our world, but what we can do is our best in our small corner. We can pray for peace in our world and live out that peace with each other; we can help to achieve an end to world poverty by doing our best to support the likes of Christian Aid; we can help to reform our national Church by reforming ourselves and doing all we can, in the strength of God, to be the people and the congregation he would have us be. So I ask again, “Where are we going?” We have faced that question before, but it seems more relevant now than ever before and the time for us to answer that question is now.

There is a song which says…

I’m going on a journey

And welcome companions,

But don’t ask me

How we’ll survive, where we’ll go,

Or who will come with us,

Or what we’ll be doing.

Just join me in travelling

And learn all I know.

I believe God is urging us to change and reform, to encourage the leaving behind of some well-known, and in some cases, well-loved, traditions; to seek a new approach and a new way of caring for one another within the Church; a resolve to bring an edge and variety to our worship; a new resolve that clearly marks us as a congregation who wants to show the love of God to those in need in our community. If any of these words sound rather sketchy then it is deliberately so, for we must take on board the sentiments expressed in the verse of that song – Jesus is going on a journey and he welcomes us as companions on that journey if we choose to go with him – but he will not give us assurances on where we are going exactly or how we’re going to cope or who our fellow travellers will be – or how exactly this Kingdom of his is going to be built – but we are asked to travel along life’s way with Jesus, to continually learn from him and simply to follow him and to trust him as we do so. The calling of the fishermen in Mark’s Gospel is a familiar and simple story to us. Jesus preached in Galilee: “The right time has come and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!” To the fishermen he said, “Come with me, and I will teach you to catch men.” At once they left their nets and went with him. “Where are we going?” A good question. Who wants to return to the safety of what we know and who instead will join Jesus as companions on a journey?

This is not new to our faith; some would say it has always been thus. The Bible is littered with stories of God’s people on the move, travelling, leaving the familiar, coping with change, being transformed as they moved on, and in a very real sense becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Another hymn says…

Lord, your summons echoes true

when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you

and never be the same.

In your company I’ll go

where you love and footsteps show.

Thus I’ll move and live and grow

in you and you in me.

These recent months may have been uncertain days, and the future that lies before us may be just as uncertain. Now is not the time to recoil in fear, now is the time to experience God in a new way, now is the time to reimagine the future.

“Where are we going?” Don’t ask me, ask Jesus! And you know what he’ll tell you, don’t you?”

Amen.