



Welcome to our Ninth 'Together News'.

Receiving more than one copy? Know someone who is not getting a copy?  
Not given us your email address? Please let Suzanne know.  
[benefice@newforestparishes.com](mailto:benefice@newforestparishes.com) 02832 283175

Welcome to our ninth (yes ninth) Together News.



In a week when this became this it was good to see that the Prime Minister and his team are 'on message' with its emphasis on 'being alert'. Writing to the 'refugee' Christian Church, dispersed across northern Asia Minor, with its very existence in doubt, he says, '**Keep a cool head. Stay alert.**' He reminds the dispersed church that it is vulnerable and at risk if it chooses to ignore the guidance God gives them through his letter. He acknowledges their struggle, addresses their fears, challenges their doubts and encourages hope. Why? Because the devastated church was at risk of destruction because [like a virus] . . . *'The Devil is poised to pounce and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world. So, keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last forever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are!— will have you put together and on your feet for good.'* (1 Peter 5 v8)

So, the Bible really does speak today!



Next week, after Sunday morning's 10.30am service (May 17<sup>th</sup>), I will be taking my post Easter leave. So, there will be no live streaming through the week (see 'This Weeks Services' below). The Priest in a Pandemic will be repeats of earlier recordings selected by Kate. However, Denzil's fans will be pleased that we have recorded next Wednesday and Friday's Collective Worship for viewing via our Website or YouTube.

It remains my greatest privilege to be called to server God in our Benefice for such a time as this and I am thankful for all the messages of encouragement and wise counsel to take care of myself!! So, I'm heeding advice and looking forward to getting stuck into the garden, learning a few more chords on the Ukulele and enjoying uninterrupted conversations with Ann, Clarrie and Denzil!

So, let's **STAY ALERT**, **KEEP THE FAITH** and **TRUST IN GOD**, being confident that he will not disappoint us!

*David and Ann (not forgetting Clarrie & Denzil)*

Revd David, The Vicarage, 5 Forest Gardens, Lyndhurst SO43 7AF  
07468 527820 / [potterton.david@newforestparishes.com](mailto:potterton.david@newforestparishes.com)

## This Week's Services, ONLINE (Recorded and LIVE)

All **LIVE** services are accessed via **Facebook**. Where files are not too large, these will also be uploaded afterwards and be available via our website **www.newforestparishes.com** and **YouTube**.

**Please see amended services for this week whilst David is annual leave.**

<b>Sunday</b> 17th May 2020	<b><u>10.30am</u></b>	<b>Service of Holy Communion and Sermon from the Vicarage</b>	<b>LIVESTREAM via Facebook</b>
<b>Tuesday</b> 19th May 2020 (Every week)	<b><u>10.30am - 11am</u></b>	<b><u>IMAGINE Online Forum</u></b>  Meeting ID & Password are the same for each week	Go to <a href="https://zoom.us/join">https://zoom.us/join</a> <b>Meeting ID: 230 576 5983</b> <b>Password: IMAGINE</b>
<b>Thursday</b> 21st May 2020 (Every week)	<b><u>9.30am</u></b>	<b><u>STILL Online Prayer Meeting</u></b>  Meeting ID & Password are the same for each week	Go to <a href="https://zoom.us/join">https://zoom.us/join</a> <b>Meeting ID: 230 576 5983</b> <b>Password: STILL</b>
<b>Sunday</b> 24th May 2020	<b><u>10.30am</u></b>	<b>Service of Holy Communion and Sermon from the Vicarage</b>	<b>LIVESTREAM via Facebook</b>
<b><u>Daily Priest in a PANdemic</u></b>	Repeats for this week.	<b>A Daily Reflection and hymn</b>	<b>Recorded. View via Facebook or Youtube</b>
<b>Every Wed &amp; Fri</b>	Timings are dependent on upload speeds.	<b>Collective Worship with Denzil Reception &amp; KS1/2 children</b>	<b>Recorded. View via Facebook or Youtube</b>

**FAO Church Wardens: The scheduled catch up meeting on Friday 22nd May at 10:30-11:10 has now been booked in on Zoom. Please go to <https://zoom.us/join>. Meeting ID is 230 576 5983 and Password is: BWARDENS. \*This is for Church Wardens Only\***

## This Week's NEWS from the Diocese of Winchester

This week the House of Bishops agreed a 'phased approach' to revising access to church buildings. This means that permission is given only to the Parish Priest to enter church premises in order to say 'Morning' and 'Evening Prayer' and to Record/Live stream services. Secondly, whilst discussion are ongoing, it was suggested that the timing of when changes are implemented may be made by individual Diocesan Bishops, depending on their local situation. The Bishop's Staff Team are reviewing this decision and we will be issuing revised guidance to parishes in the Diocese. Please pray for + Tim, +Debbie and + David as they work at producing guidance which provide clarity and confidence. It will of course be down to the Church Wardens in each Parish to work within these guidelines and determine with Revd David how opening their respective churches for services etc. will be managed safely.

## Our Churches remain closed

Despite the recent updates throughout this week, **we remain closed to the public**. We are following the guidance of the Church of England which is inline with the Government. We are following updates regularly and you will be the first to hear when we get some solid dates. In the mean time, please join our IMAGINE meeting which takes place on Zoom, an online 'virtual' meeting space. It's easy to join the weekly meeting which takes place every Tuesday at 10:30am for around half an hour. IMAGINE has been started to look forward and discuss the future ministry and mission after the lockdown period is lifted and we return for a 'new' normal.



Go to <https://zoom.us/join> ~ Meeting ID: **230 576 5983** ~ Password: **IMAGINE**

## Daily Hope phone line - \*Update\*

The line – which is available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind.

Options available include materials also available digitally by the Church of England's Communications team such as [Prayer During the Day and Night Prayer](#) updated daily, from Common Worship, and a recording of the Church of England [weekly national online service](#). A section called 'Hymn Line' offers callers a small selection of hymns, updated daily. An option entitled 'Hymns We Love', provides a hymn and reflection and is based on an initiative by the Connections group.



## St Michael's now has a TEXT to donate service.

St Michael's has joined both Christ Church and All Saint's with the TEXT Donation service. You can now text **STMICHAELS to 70085 for a one off donation of £5.00**. If you wish to donate more or less than £5, add any amount between 1 and 20 after the words STMICHAELS. For Example, a donation of £10 would mean sending the message **STMICHAELS 10 to 70085**.

As a recap; for **All Saint's** - text the words **AllSaints** from your mobile phone to the number **70085** for a **one-off donation of £5.00**. If you wish to donate more or less than £5, substitute 5 with any amount between 1 and 20. **Christ Church** - text the words **XChurch 3** from your mobile phone to the number **70085** for an instant donation of £3.00 and a monthly, reoccurring payment will be made of £3 to Christ Church. If you wish to donate more or less than £3, substitute 3 with any amount between 1 and 20. You can cancel the reoccurring payments at any time.

## Funerals

Peter Watsons funeral is taking place on Friday 22nd May at 2.30pm. General attendance is currently not permitted but if you would like details on the LIVE stream, please contact Test Valley Crematorium via <https://www.testvalleycrematorium.co.uk/>.

Our dear friend of St Michael's, Joan Pritchard sadly died this last week. Details of the funeral to follow.

# SPOTLIGHT PETER BENNET

TREASURER FOR  
ALL SAINT'S CHURCH, MINSTEAD



## **What do you do when you're not helping out at church?**

Activities at the moment involve cycling, dog walking, gardening, general household maintenance, reading and feeding my wife with tea and coffee as she is working from home sitting in the office so I am relegated to the kitchen table. When not in lockdown I also enjoy sailing and golf. I am also involved in running Minstead Social club, though there is not a lot to do there at the moment.

## **What made you want to help?**

Although I am not a regular attendee but I love the building and graveyard. The Church has always been part of my life and our church here in Minstead is no exception. Apart from being a place for contemplation and prayer it is steeped in history and I always come away feeling more at peace. It is also very much part of the village and having already lost our shop the loss of the church would be devastating. My children were christened here and I hope to have my ashes interred here, in these times that has come more to the fore in our thinking. I am also a bell ringer so the church is also crucial for that.

## **What do you enjoy most about it?**

Being treasurer has been a fascinating learning curve and has helped to keep my mind active in retirement. As well as the financial side which has been challenging enough there is also the way the C of E works with its own laws, language and systems. So yes I do enjoy it, you can't stop just because you have stopped regular work.

## **Is there anything you have enjoyed during Lockdown?**

While missing the human interaction it has been great have the forest more to ourselves and to be able to walk and cycle on the roads without diving into the hedge every 10 seconds.

## **What one thing would you like to see happen, in light of the changes from Lockdown?**

I am not sure I can answer this one yet, there are several things that would be nice but so much depends on how we are allowed to come out of this which is not likely to happen fully till we have a vaccine.



## **Useful Information**

**Easy Fundraising** - Easy Fundraising donate by giving a percentage from what you buy online. For example, 1.50% percent of Amazon Online purchases or 2.5% of things you buy from Debenhams could be going directly to your chosen church. There are no hidden costs and it's easy to set up. Simply visit [www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk) and register, find your 'Cause', searching by name and then carry on with your shop. Please keep this in mind when you're shopping online.

When searching for your 'cause' type in the name of your parish church (St Michael's Lyndhurst or Christ Church, Emery Down, or All Saints, Minstead). Happy shopping!

If you have any problems or need help, please contact Kate.  
[communications@newforestparishes.com](mailto:communications@newforestparishes.com) / **07776 221663**

**Thank you for providing your contact details** - We are still receiving contact details from you. **PLEASE DON'T STOP!** If you or if you know someone who would like to be on our mailing list for the latest Newsletters, please email their details to Kate on [communications@newforestparishes.com](mailto:communications@newforestparishes.com). Everyone who receives emails from us can view our Data Protection Policy by visiting our Website [www.newforestparishes.com](http://www.newforestparishes.com) and everyone is given the opportunity of unsubscribe with each email sent.

**Lay Pastors** - If you know any member of the Benefice who would welcome a phone call and a chat, please let Peggy and Peter Nichols know on **023 8028 2378** who are coordinating the Lay Pastors at St Michael's who are making calls to folk in the parish who are isolated. We are happy to extend this ministry across the Benefice. Thank you to everyone who is calling folk in Emery Down and Minstead. There is nothing stopping any of us calling those who we know are isolated or in need. Chatting really helps! Who have you called this week? If you are thinking about someone, wondering how they are, why not pick up the phone and find out. You may be the only person they have spoken to that day. Perhaps this is why the Lord has placed them on your heart. Let's together keep fellowship real, faith alive and hope strong!

**Life Events** - Suzanne is in regular touch with those who had baptisms and weddings in the diary but who have had to postpone. Please note that sadly, no more than ten family members are permitted to attend a funeral during this coronavirus pandemic.

**Weekly Offering** - If you are not giving regularly it would be a great help to the PCC if you were able to do so. Please speak to your PCC Treasurer or David.

If you have any questions about your regular offering to the church, please don't hesitate to speak to your own PCC Treasurer or call the Benefice Office. If you have access to the internet, you can also donate to your Parish Church via our website [www.newforestparishes.com](http://www.newforestparishes.com), click on '**DONATE**' and follow instructions.

## **PLEASE CONSIDER THIS OPTION FOR INCREASING PARISH FUND**

**Do you need any help at the moment, whilst in isolation** - **FOR HELP, CALL 02380 284 426.** The local volunteer run, Emergency group are available to run errands, collect essential shopping, collect medication, walk dogs or just have a friendly chat. Please leave a message if there is no answer. You can also email [lyndhurstcommunityresponse@gmail.com](mailto:lyndhurstcommunityresponse@gmail.com)

**Annual Parochial Church Meetings** - APCMs and meetings of parishioners ( which elect lay representatives on the PCC and Deanery Synod representatives and also elect Church Wardens) are usually held around this time of year and must normally be held by 31<sup>st</sup> May. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak the Bishop has now extended the deadline for both meetings for all parishes to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

### **Community News**

You may have noticed that you've not been receiving your copy of the What's on guide since lockdown. Did you know that you can still view it online via the Community Centre website? The direct link is <https://lyndhurstcomm.org/whats-on-magazine/> Look out for the latest copy for May, coming out next week.

### **NEW Parish Giving Scheme Telephone Service**

Available weekdays from 9am to 5pm. Calls will take less than 15 minutes and you will receive written confirmation afterwards to confirm the details. At any time you can call the service to make amendments to your direct debit.

Call: 0333 002 1271

### **Show them you love them**

If you know or even suspect that your neighbour cannot access email, or the internet, why not offer to make a copy of yours for them. Being a 'dispersed church' can result in spiritual isolation so we want to keep faith alive and hope strong across the Benefice. By delivering 'Together News' you are helping to do this. If you are delivering to a neighbour, please let Suzanne know.

### **How to access videos via the Benefice website on YouTube or Facebook**

To follow us, visit our website [www.newforestparishes.com/social-media](http://www.newforestparishes.com/social-media) this will take you DIRECTLY to our Social Media area/tab. You can simply click on the Facebook and YouTube Logos where you will be taken straight through to the Benefice Pages. These are completely free services and also, lots of fun to connect with friends, especially at a time like this.

If you have any problems, please contact Kate [communications@newforestparishes.com](mailto:communications@newforestparishes.com) or on **07776 22166**

## **SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP FROM THE VICARAGE on 24<sup>th</sup>**

### **Father, we love You**

We worship and adore you  
Glorify your name in all the earth  
*Glorify your name*  
*Glorify your name*  
*Glorify your name in all the earth*

Jesus, we love You  
We worship and adore You  
Glorify your name in all the earth  
*Glorify your name etc.*

Spirit, we love You  
We worship and adore You  
Glorify your name in all the earth.  
*Glorify your name etc.*

### **Reign in me**

Sovereign Lord, reign in me  
Reign in me  
Sovereign Lord, reign in me  
Captivate my heart  
Let Your Kingdom come  
Establish there Your throne  
Let Your will be done  
Reign in me  
Sovereign Lord, reign in me  
Reign in me  
Sovereign Lord, reign in me

### **Holy Spirit, living Breath of God**

Breathe new life into my willing soul.  
Bring the presence of the risen Lord  
To renew my heart and make me whole.  
Cause Your Word to come alive in me  
Give me faith for what I cannot see  
Give me passion for Your purity.  
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

Holy Spirit, come abide within  
May Your joy be seen in all I do—  
Love enough to cover ev'ry sin  
In each thought and deed and attitude.  
Kindness to the greatest and the least  
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.  
Turn my striving into works of grace.  
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, from creation's birth  
Giving life to all that God has made  
Show Your power once again on earth  
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.  
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.  
Lead us on the road of sacrifice  
That in unity the face of Christ  
Will be clear for all the world to see.

Spoken word following last verse:

Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me and Christ in me, Christ beneath me and Christ above me, Christ on my right and Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down and Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the 'threeness', through confession of the oneness of the Creator of all creation.

**Come down, O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,**

and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;  
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,  
and kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, til earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;  
And let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,  
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,  
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;  
True lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part,  
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
For none can guess its grace, till they become the place  
where-in the Holy Spirit finds a dwelling.

**Breathe on me, Breath of God,**

Fill me with life anew,  
That I may love what Thou dost love,  
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Until my heart is pure,  
Until with Thee I will one will,  
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Till I am wholly Thine,  
Until this earthly part of me  
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
So shall I never die,  
But live with Thee the perfect life  
Of Thine eternity.

During Holy Communion

**Here is bread, here is wine**

Christ is with us, he is with us  
Break the bread, drink the wine  
Christ is with us here.

Here is grace, here is peace  
Christ is with us, he is with us  
Know his grace, find his peace  
Feast on Jesus here.

*In this bread there is healing  
In this cup there's life forever  
In this moment, by the Spirit  
Christ is with us here.*



Here we are, joined in one  
Christ is with us, he is with us  
We'll proclaim, till he comes Jesus crucified.

### **O thou who camest from above**

The fire celestial to impart,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love  
On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn  
With inextinguishable blaze,  
And trembling to its source return  
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
To work, and speak, and think for thee;  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up the gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
My acts of faith and love repeat;  
Till death thy endless mercies seal,  
And make the sacrifice complete.

### **Thursday 8.30pm NO Taizé Service this week.**

### **This Week's Reflection by Luke Augustyn**

"It wouldn't be wrong to say that I am looking forward to worshipping in church again. I miss the beauty and presence of the space and the real sense of togetherness that online media does not provide for me. Perhaps this is true for you too?

Having said that, it is good to be reminded by scripture that "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, ***does not live in temples made by man***". (Acts 17:24)

but: "You know Him, for ***He dwells with you and will be in you***. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you". (John 14:17-18)

Thank you Father for reminding us that spaces dedicated to you for worship, fill us with awe and a real sense of your presence, not because you dwell there, but because you dwell in us and with us, you are present there.

Thank you Jesus, that through Your presence in us, we meet each other in Your presence whether in buildings, parks or online".

## **Text of Sermon preached by David Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020 - John 14 v 1 - 14**

This is such a wonderful passage, not least of all because it records a conversation Jesus had at a time when most of all, the disciples needed comforting. Prior to this chapter, we learn hear Jesus giving everything other than comforting news.

He has told them, "I'm leaving you and where I am going, you can't come", that 'they would desert him', that 'one of them would betray him' and Peter had heard that he would deny ever knowing Jesus. Having already dealt them some significant body blows – he now says that any discouragement they may be feeling at this precise moment will be multiplied as the events of that particular night and the following day unfold. There would be an intense prayer meeting in Gethsemane followed by his betrayal by a kiss, his arrest and trial. The disciples would witness injustice, the denial of Pilate to save him, mocking of the crowds and abuse at the hands of the Roman soldiers followed by his death by crucifixion.

And so, knowing how they were feeling now and how they were going to feel when they were without him for three days and three nights, Jesus, their friend says, 'Don't let your hearts be troubled . (v1), which on the face of it, given the context, sounds like just one of those phrases we can sometimes use as Christians to impart comfort to another when we clearly have no idea of the pain and distress they are enduring.

Some of you may be familiar with what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8 v2

'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

This is of course a great verse of scripture when properly understood alongside the rest of scripture with all that God says in his word about his comfort, his grace, his presence and purpose for his people, especially those who are 'troubled'. But this verse can be used with devastating insensitivity when it is just thrown into a conversation, with a 'slap on the back', and a very clear implication that if you were a better, more mature and faithful Christian, your heart would not be troubled and therefore any distress you may be feeling is down to you! And rather leaving you feeling comforted and reassured, you are left feeling as though you were guilty of a crime against God and your agony only increases as you can see no comfort coming your way, any time soon!

But clearly, this is not what Jesus is doing or even meaning here. When he says, 'do not let your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me., he is pointing them straight to the heart of their own spiritual experience and making a comforting connection between the disciples' belief in God and in himself.

As we continue through this Covid 19 scenario and some, clearly are fearful about what the Prime Minister will say to the nation at 7pm tonight – afraid that he will relax lockdown too soon, afraid that he won't - we all feel a measure of anxiety, we're understandable all troubled and looking for some comfort which is why I'm pleased that this is our reading for today. So, let's unpack it a bit this morning

Firstly, if you say you 'believe in God', but that your 'belief in God is no comfort or help to you during this current crisis, then I'm not sure that what you 'believe' is what Jesus had in mind when he offers comfort to his distressed disciples in that upper room in Jerusalem with the words 'You believe in God, believe also in me'.

The truth is that you and I believe in many things – at a most basic level, we believe that certain things exist. We believe in our own existence and that of our family and friends (perhaps more so during this time of enforced separation). We may no longer believe that the world is flat, but we believe that the world exists in its beauty and complexity. We believe in geography that places are located and that the weather is going to be better tomorrow. Like others (perhaps only men!) I believe that when the light on the dashboard is flashing indicating that the fuel tank is empty (and that as the cars warning systems are screeching at me to stop and get some fuel), they are exaggerating! So, I believe that any suggestion from Ann that I find a garage as a matter of urgency is an overreaction as there's always 'just enough in the tank – despite evidence to the contrary - to get me to the garage where fuel is .1 pa cheaper than the three garages we have just passed!

You know, there are some beliefs that no matter how well founded or strongly held will prove to be no comfort to us when it is comfort we need the most. And comforting was just what the disciples needed in that upper room, and I'm sure that comfort is what we need in whatever rooms we are locked down in at this present time.

You see, when Jesus say's to his disciples 'you believe in God, believe also in me – the word he uses which we translate as 'believe' is the word better translated as "TRUST'. Jesus says, 'You trust in God, trust also in me'. More accurately, Jesus is saying, "friends, you have entrusted yourself to God, now, entrust yourself to me."

It is important that we understand that to entrust ourselves to another is not the response to a passive or notional belief in someone [thing] thing that is without consequence to our troubled lives. But to trust is to invest all our hope in another who will not fail or disappoint us in the worst of times. When we lean on the one we trust, we need to know that they will be able to bear all the trust we place in them. And here is Jesus saying to his precious yet perplexed friends, not 'there may be trouble ahead' but that trouble is coming, and the only comfort for them is that they put their trust in him.

Think of it this way. Jesus say's in effect, 'I'm telling you some difficult things, I pointing to further distressing events, I'm reminding you again that you are about to experience confusion and darkness like never before. Anger, pain and grief will be yours like never before, and not only grief over my death, but some of you will die too. And if there is to be any comfort for you then a casual, 'Yes, I believe in God, I mean, who doesn't?' will not cut it. And unless you trust me, as you trust God, you will not receive the comfort you seek to sustain, strengthen or even save you.

In our brief reading from the Acts of the Apostles, (7 v55- end) we find ourselves witnesses to the murder of Stephen, not long after his appointment as a Deacon. His bold insistence in his preaching that God had raised Jesus from the dead, resulted in him being dragged out of the city by the leaders of the Jewish Temple, and stoned by their own hands, as they gnashed their teeth in angered determination to put an end to all this talk about Jesus being risen. *'But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* <sup>56</sup> *"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." and as the rocks rained down upon him, there in v59 Stephen prays "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v55-56)*

What is so powerful, and helpfully so, is what we read in v60. 'Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep.' As I read this, it is clear that Stephen trusted in God and in Jesus, and such was his comfort, that in his moment of greatest agony and distress, he thinks not of himself, but of others. Such is the reality and strength of his own comfort in the moments of his own death that even in his all-to apparent discomfort he

can only think of the comfort of others – even those who were in the process murdering him. Perhaps Stephen was present in the Upper Room (in the background with others) when Jesus comforts his disciples, but Stephen clearly trusts in God and in Jesus, his Son, and as he looks up to heaven, perhaps seeking comfort, who does he see? He sees the now ascended



Jesus at the right hand of God and trusts himself to God and to Christ. What a comfort his faith was and what a reward for his trust! Stephen knew at that moment what you and I must believe, that when we trust in God and in Jesus Christ, his Son we will not now, or ever be disappointed. Romans 9 v33 reads, whoever puts their trust in God will never be ashamed to have done so! (We will never be embarrassed when we put our trust in God). And so, Stephen receives the greatest possible comfort that you and I can ever know, when we entrusted ourselves into the purposes and power of Christ at the moment of our greatest trouble.

This comfort not only made Stephen and members of the early church fearless, but also selfless in seeking the comfort of others. And it is all about the comfort that we receive, not from the from our belief that Jesus lived on planet earth some 2000 years ago, but a comfort that comes from our trust in his constancy, that he will not abandon us in life or in death, 'come hell or high water!' Amazingly, having been comforted with the sight of Christ at the right hand of his Father, he seeks no further comfort for himself, but prays 'comfort' for those who were murdering him! He asks God not to condemn them for taking his life, but to comfort them with the forgiveness and hope that comes from trusting in God and in Jesus. He is almost asking God to give them time that they may discover the source of his own comfort for themselves! Amazing!

So, can I ask you, with Stephen looking up to heaven, as you look to heaven in your greatest trouble, do you see your friend, Jesus, preparing a place for you and all who trust in God and in him? The fact is that whilst Jesus came into the world alone, he was determined not to return home empty handed! In his homeward journey, he takes his disciples, Stephen and all who have invested every hope in his victory over sin and death. He takes with him, all who believe that whilst they might yet face disappointment, danger and even death, when they, with Stephen lift up our eyes to heaven, they will see Christ standing at the right hand of the Father – such a comforting vision – a vision not only of home, but of Christ, our homemaker, waiting to receive and celebrate our trust in him!

Perhaps you are wondering what someone who knows the comfort of Christ looks like? I think we need look no further than Stephen himself, whose personal trust in Jesus caused him to speak fearlessly about Jesus, with everything to gain and serve others selflessly with nothing to lose.

Then may we know this comfort, which gives us confidence in the face of great and previously unknown troubles which may yet come. May we be those who seek comfort for ourselves only but work selflessly for the comfort of others, even those who persecute us. My friends, I encourage you who trust in God and in Jesus, to look up to heaven with the eyes of faith and see such a glorious vision of Christ at the right hand of the Father as gives you the greatest comfort today and in the days to come, whatever the reasons are that you seek it.