

That promise of Jesus to give us a Counsellor, a Comforter, in the person of the Holy Spirit still stands, it is a promise to each successive generation of disciples that are his Church. Today we live as his Church with the disruption caused by the virus to our everyday lives, and not only that, but to the very life of the Church, and we feel the stress of living in the disrupted “now” but are also beginning to worry about how the future of our own lives and that of the church will look in the months and years to come. Neither will ever be the same as they were. But like those first disciples we do not live now on our own, nor do we walk into the future on our own. Uncertainty faced in the strength of the comforting consoling Spirit does not have to be feared, but rather approached boldly, open to new opportunities.

Jesus made it clear to his disciples then, and now to us in the same words, that he will never leave our side; he indwells each one of us by his Spirit to be our ever present counsellor and comfort. Whatever the future that lies ahead for us, both as individuals and as a church, we do not step into that future alone. Jesus abides with us by his Spirit and will be our strength.

DO MAKE USE OF OUR WEBSITE We do have a website for THE STODDEN CHURCHES. If you are looking for service information you will find it there. Please make use of it, and it is somewhere you can suggest people look for information who are new to the area or the congregation

VIRTUAL COLLECTION PLATE: If you wish to be able to give electronically here are the Stodden Churches bank detail: Stodden account number 10842168 sort code 20-74-81

VIRTUAL CHURCH: If you want to “virtual worship” users can watch live streams of services from a range of churches and the Church of England will be improving AChurchNearYou.com in the days ahead to make this clearer. There is **Prayer for the day** - each day the Church of England publishes **audio and text of the Prayer for the Day**. There is the BBC daily service and Sunday worship also available on BBC Sounds.

PHONE CHURCH: *Daily Hope* offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. 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.

The Stodden Churches **Prayers and Readings for the week beginning** **Sunday 17th May 2020** **The 6th Sunday of Easter**

Our Vision Statement: As the Stodden Churches we seek to move forward together in love and service, sharing the good news of Christ with our neighbours

From the Stodden Villages lease remember in your prayers : Teresa Allan, Pauline McManus, Steve Lemming, Trish Sizer, Frances Bratcher, Andy Langley, Andrew Seabrook, Rosemary Morgan, Anne Hauxwell. *If someone would like a visit or a prayer tell Stephen the Rector (709740)*

This week’s Psalm: 66:1-8

¹ Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

² **sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.**

³ Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

⁴ **All the earth worships you;
they sing praises to you,
sing praises to your name.’**

⁵ Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

⁶ **He turned the sea into dry land;
they passed through the river on foot.**

There we rejoiced in him,
⁷ who rules by his might for ever,
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let the rebellious not exalt themselves.

⁸ **Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard !**

The Collect for this week: God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ gives the waters of eternal life which is his Spirit: may we thirst for you, the spring of life and goodness. Amen

The 1st Reading: Colossians 3:15-17: ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The 2nd Reading: John 14:15-21: ¹⁵ 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,* to be with you for ever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Reflection We are living in unusual times; where much of what was certain is now uncertain, where the future may not be as firm and sure as we thought. We find ourselves in a struggle with an unseen and malevolent virus which, because it cannot be seen, allows a fear of the unknown to creep into our thoughts. Such a disruption to our everyday life creates stress; within us and sometimes with those around us. Being locked down with our nearest and dearest is not always a bed of roses. Living with such stress can be deeply draining over time and we can find ourselves casting around for some form of help, or consolation, or comfort. That brings me to our reading from the Gospel of John. In the few verses set for today we receive some of Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit. Jesus was wanting to give hope and encouragement to his first disciples who were soon

going to have to come to terms with two life changing moments in their relationship with him; the day after they would face the shock of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and death. They would have to come to terms with their sudden loss and end to what they thought was an assured future with Jesus' coming kingdom. Then they would have the joy his resurrection, and then only a few weeks later they would find themselves coming to terms with his final departure as he ascends to the heavenly throne room to sit down at the right hand of our Father in heaven. Again their world would be set spinning as they faced an uncertain future as his church without his reassuring presence at their side as they faced the opposition and eventual persecution from the Jews and the Romans. Over just a period of weeks those first disciples underwent some serious stress as they came to terms with the ups and down going on in their lives. The disciples needed help, consolation and comfort, and not just in that immediate period, but going forward as they came to terms with the ups and down of being Jesus' Church.

Jesus was well aware of their needs, both in the immediate future and in the months and years to come, which is why he says to them; *I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (verses 16 and 18)*. It is worth looking at Jesus' words in the traditional version as they convey more strongly the comfort that Jesus was promising to his disciples; *I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever...I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you."*

Jesus did want his disciples to feel lost, lonely and bereft of hope and encouragement so he is promising counsel and comfort through his Holy Spirit. The idea of a "comforter" is that they are a "stengthener", not just one who has come to put their arm around a shoulder but rather one who make us brave and strong to face the future by being brave and strong in us. The best way to console someone is not just to offer "tea and sympathy" but rather to offer strength to face the future.

Jesus knew that he would not be there as a physical presence for those who were to become his church; so in this last intimate conversation with his disciples before the trauma of his crucifixion he makes this unique promise of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate companion through times good and bad. It is a unique promise no-one else could make, because through the abiding, indwelling Spirit he could come to each of his disciples to be their help, their consolation and their comfort. Though his promised Spirit Jesus would make them brave and strong to face the future.

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