

## Matthew's weekly musing 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021

You may want to brace yourself for this!  
I'm quite enjoying these days of uncertainty in our parishes.  
Shock, horror.

The source of uncertainty (in case you haven't heard) is that our group of parishes is saying farewell to St Michael's West Andover who will to join the Andover group of churches; and the remaining six (Monxton, Ampport, Quarley, Grateley, Nether Wallop and Over Wallop) will join with the three churches of Abbots Ann and the Clatfords.

Why, I ask myself, am I enjoying the uncertainty?  
Well the most significant answer is that it is within *uncertainty* that I most easily find God at work. Of course uncertainty can be difficult and uncomfortable – but on the other hand I really enjoy seeking and finding the hand of God more clearly.

Here's a verse from this week's readings:

### 2 Corinthians 1

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, <sup>4</sup> who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

Long ago, when I was beginning to explore God, I knew Him as teacher and imagined Him as someone I needed to please. I also knew him as saviour, or rescuer, from the ways I got life wrong.

Gradually as the Bible began to influence me, I began to mature in my understanding. God is not only the remote and awesome God outside time but also the Father. He is the 'Father of mercies', the God of all consolation, seen in His Son Jesus, and available to us through experiences of the Holy Spirit.

I noticed that I began to change the way I started my prayers. I had been praying "Almighty God" and "Holy God". I began to start my prayers with "Heavenly Father", and "Lord Jesus", or simply "Father".

Looking back, I see I was beginning to engage with God as a loving being rather than a remote power.

I discovered the quoted verse from Scripture at theological college. I found those years in Nottingham to be days of great uncertainty. I had lost my identity as teacher and as co-leader (with Jane) of the student group in my Edinburgh church. At college, Jane and I were mourning the loss of the first friendships we formed as a couple. I was trying to get to grips with the new syllabus needed to become a vicar.

Yet gradually, God came to me in new ways. He came in mercy and consolation. As Father, he was patient with me in my feelings of loss of identity. As Father he was alongside me as I began to enjoy the consolation of new friendships, new studies, new plans for the future.

Jane and I also found this God who is Father, in the depths of affliction. On one frivolous outing, I damaged my back in the muddy depths of potholing and in the weeks of lying on my back to recover, I found a new reality in prayer as I sought to relieve boredom. Much more seriously, we found consolation in the Father's love of us in the midst of critical illness. This led to Jane losing the possibility of bearing children. We discovered the privilege of joining Jesus in His sufferings. (We do, though, still weep over this loss.)

So, as I muse on these days of uncertainty in our parishes, I realise that they do open up the possibility of God being able to speak to us in new ways. As Father he will lead us into new relationships between our parishes, and nourish us with new insights into His nature when we meet with other Christians.

There is a temptation in days of uncertainty to try to resolve the uncertainties, namely, to cling to the past rather than let go. Jane and I could have given up on Nottingham and returned to Edinburgh, but would then have missed out on all that we have been given in my forty years since ordination.

Even more seriously, we could have clung on to control of our lives, and we would have learned less of trust in the Father of mercy and God of all consolation.

My prayer for all of us is that we will embrace the uncertainties of the coming months and expect to see God at work as Father, as we grow into our new future. I have a firm hope and trust that He will not disappoint us.