

Vicar's Bulletin (6) January 2009

DO NOT STRIVE

for what you are to eat and what you are to drink and do not keep worrying.

Luke 12:29

It is funny how some words stick in your brain (and others don't!). This particular translation of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount uses the word strive. A chorus which never caught on also picked up on this idea of not striving and the idea has stuck with me. In essence Striving is about making great efforts (Oxford English Dictionary) and the challenge that Jesus is doing here and what I have tried to do in the first few sermons of this year is to ask us what are our real priorities and how do we keep a true perspective on life.

The news at the moment seems to be particularly gloomy, not just in the bad news of wars and redundancies and so on but in that they seem to rejoice in predicting that it will get much worse. Also the effects are being felt everywhere from places far away to members of our own church, it truly is a global village. It can be very easy in these circumstances to end up focusing on the negative, to end up striving in the wrong way.

The verse I have used is Philippians 1:21 –

for to me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

The first half reminded us of our clear **priority** in life – Jesus.

Living is Jesus and Jesus is life. Anything else is an illusion.

Thus we are challenged to think about how we spend every moment and every penny, does our life place Jesus in his correct place, at the centre of our life?

This doesn't mean talking about Jesus or going around Bible bashing. It does mean allowing Jesus to so soak into our lives that what we are and do is affected. We are then less likely to end up striving after the unhelpful things and instead will find ourselves more content with ourselves and with others.

The second part of the verse puts all our striving into **perspective**. We live in a temporary world, yet we don't act like it. From anti-ageing cream to life support machines we strive to prolong our time. Some of this is right and proper but so much is blowing in the wind. Recognizing what we gain in death helps us to keep our feet on the ground and our head lifted to Jesus, the author and perfecter of the faith.

I have a confession to make at this point – I have fallen into all the wrong practices that I am talking about. Last year with all its achievements became *for me* (and many around me because of my actions) a year of striving. Some of this was necessary as we reshaped our buildings but it was too easy for work and action to become the focus. Thus my hours and others in the church became quite ridiculous and surprise, surprise at Christmas I came down with colds and sore throat and am struggling to shake it off. I was not a good role model!

Those with good memories will remember me arriving and saying we need to do less better. More than ever I need to hear this along with I suspect many of us, including what we do as a church. We do have many, many possibilities for worship, service, fellowship, sharing and so on. But we are spread too thin and things are often not taking root in the right way. I have found myself starting things and then not getting time to complete them satisfactorily. In order to stop this in me and in the church we need to spend quite a bit of this year working out the vision for the next few years.

We cannot do everything therefore we must spend time in prayer, reflection and discussion discerning how to write the next chapter of building God's kingdom here in Boldmere. It will mean that what we want as individuals will need to come second to what is right for St. Michaels as a whole (including those in the parish).

The consequence of recognizing we cannot do everything is that some things will not happen, even some current activities may need to change or die. Let us approach these moments with humility and grace. Equally, new situations may arise and again these are times for being grateful for what we can do.

I know that this year will not be easy for many of us but I rejoice in God and each other. There will be good times to celebrate this year. From the number of births in church families going up (must be something in the water!) to our regular worship services. As well there will be tougher times from members dying to redundancies and less money all round.

On this latter note we balanced the books last year despite all the works because of your great generosity and God's provision. I pray that despite the current economic climate we can sustain our giving so that the work we are doing does not need cutting back because of financial difficulties. We are not looking to expand, that would not be right this year, but we must not go backward.

I am looking forward to this year despite the doom and gloom as I know that living is Christ and dying is gain. Will you help me to live this truth as I attempt to help you?

May Christ who for our sake became poor
make us rich in everything –
in faith, speech, knowledge, giving and love.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. Amen.

To help us refocus we are going to be relooking at the Apostles creed over the coming months in our morning services. The sermons should become available on our media site (www.stmichaelsmedia.org.uk) and there will be midweek activities at various points to help us as well.

We believe in God,	Feb 1st
the Father almighty,	Feb 8th
creator of heaven and earth.	Feb 15th
We believe in Jesus Christ,	
his only Son, our Lord,	Mar 1st
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,	
born of the Virgin Mary,	Mar 8th
suffered under Pontius Pilate,	
was crucified, died, and was buried;	Mar 22nd
he descended to the dead.	Apr 12th
On the third day he rose again;	
he ascended into heaven,	
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,	
and he will come to judge	
the living and the dead.	May 17th
We believe in the Holy Spirit,	May 24 th , June 7 th , 14 th , 21 st
the holy catholic Church,	July 5 th
the communion of saints,	July 12 th
the forgiveness of sins,	July 19 th
the resurrection of the body,	
and the life everlasting. Amen.	July 26 th

(Dates subject to change as life delivers us a curve ball!)