



Anglican Parish of St John

NEWSLETTER - JULY 2026

MESSAGE FROM REV'D SAM

The Gospel of Matthew is written in the later part of the 1st century, likely after 70 A.D. This period of the early Church was a really important time because it was around this time that we saw the first real persecution of Christ-followers. It was during Emperor Nero's reign (which ended in the late 60's) that both Peter and Paul were martyred for their faith. Following Emperor Nero was Emperor Vespasian in 69 A.D., who was the one who destroyed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews through the Ancient world. The Church, up until this point, had grown rather easily with little to no push back from the Roman Empire. Christians did not, usually, cause rioting and revolts and so were mostly left alone. However, many of these new Christ-followers were Jewish. And so with the persecution of the Jews came persecution of the Christians. This persecution brought about an important shift in the life of the Church. It was no longer as safe to be known as a Jesus follower. Turning from the cult worship a person grew up with, to follow after Jesus could be viewed as turning away from your own family, friends and culture. Being a Jewish Christian would place one at odds not only with family and friends, but Rome as well.

The author of Matthew's Gospel, then, is writing into this new, not so safe world of the early Church. Writing to those Jewish Christians, presenting Jesus as the new and improved Moses, the fulfilment of all that the Jews had been waiting for. As we come to Matthew 10:24-39, then, it is important to keep the context of persecution, family and religious/cultural strife in the forefront of our minds.

Usually, when we think about what we are taught about Jesus in the Bible it has a strong focus on love, humility and compassion, right? On reconciliation - a focus for our diocese. But this is not what we see in this Gospel reading. Here in Matthew 10 we are met with division, with the recognition that life is not as *rosy as we might want it to be*. *We even have this strange statement, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." This seems to sit at odds with Jesus' entire ministry. Even when we see the disciples gather their swords before Jesus is arrested and Peter takes a strike at one of those there, Jesus' response is to heal, rather than encourage violence.*

I wonder, in light of the context of Roman persecution, how might we read Matthew 10:24-39? In what ways could this, if at all, align with what we know of Jesus and his ministry? More than this, how could this speak into that Roman persecution? What might the author of Matthew be wanting his readers to take away from this?

Firstly we need to look at the two words used: "peace" and "sword". Peace is harmony. It is a state of people who have been brought together and are flourishing in relationship with each other. A sword, on the other hand, is a pretty universal symbol for division. It cuts into two pieces and leaves lives broken apart. It is a contrasting, then, of two different states, a state of harmony and a state of division. Having had almost 4 decades of relative peace, following the ascension of Jesus, it must have been disillusioning to be hit with this persecution. "Surely this is not what Jesus intended for his Kingdom". "Surely, this Kingdom of God was going to grow and naturally, through peaceful means, take over the World." But, no, these Jewish Christians were facing the same struggles, the same persecution as those who did not follow Jesus. Maybe the Good news of the Kingdom of Jesus was not all it was made out to be? Jesus speaks directly into this question, "My kingdom is not one that can be broken and killed by physical means." "My kingdom does not rise and fall in the same way that human kingdoms do." "In fact, if you lose your life because of your faith in me you will actually find life."

The author of Matthew's Gospel is not only making a metaphysical statement about eternal life, I think, more importantly, they are making a statement about the *value of following Jesus*. *They are stating that the life we will experience following Jesus (no matter what happens), is of infinitely more value than life without following Jesus; even if it leads to our death.*

To see the value of a life following Jesus, I think we need to look at the life of Jesus. In the life of Jesus we see a person who is able to flourish in all four overarching relationships. Jesus flourishes in his relationship with God through his reliance on the Spirit and his continual conversation with the Father, to the point that he is able to follow the will of the Father over and above his own will in the Garden of Gethsemane, before he is arrested. Jesus flourishes in relationship with himself as he stands firm in his own identity, even in the face of hours of false accusation. Jesus has no need to raise a single rebuttal. Jesus flourishes in his relationship with others. We see this throughout his ministry as he speaks life in the lives of all those who are marginalised. And calls those in religious power to account. Jesus flourishes within creation as he is seen to be someone who enjoys creation and recognises its goodness and beauty.

The hope of the Gospel is that we become Spirit empowered people who are enabled to live in healthy relationship with God, ourselves, with others and with creation. And that as we do this, we participate in the life of God (Father, Son and Spirit) here on earth.

WARDENS' REPORT

Greetings one and all.

We are blessed, as we settle into a new season of parish life and liturgy, and into a new rhythm of worship and works for God, through the grace of God and the leadership of Reverend Sam.

The Bible is open once again, and God's word is being spoken and interpreted for us, so we can apply it each day and flourish as we grow in God's truth and light.

Our combined service at Christ Church Kihikihi was heartening, with so many parishioners gathering together as the community of Christ.

Feedback on winter-time 10.30am services held in Old St John's church has been good, with parishioners appreciating gathering in the warmth, of the smaller church. And word has it that our Treasurer Murray, is happy with the reduced heating bills!

A reminder that if you haven't already completed your update of/application to join, the Parish Roll, please do so now. It is very important moving forward, that we have an accurate, up to date record. The 3 main reasons being; 1) it helps improve communication across our large parish spanning 5 churches and 4 geographical locations; 2) it gives parishioners eligibility, to vote on parish affairs, at the Annual General meeting; 3) it gives parishioners eligibility, to be elected to office, at the Annual General Meeting.

As we progress into wintery July, and all that we face into, let us be assured by God's word "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will counsel you and watch over you." Psalm 32:8.

Thanks be to God.

Your Wardens, Coral Loomb and Helen Stubbs (covering for Christine Bryant).

Services for July

<p>5 July 8.00am Old St John's (1662) 9.00am St Paul's (Eucharist) 9.15am St Saviours (Morning Prayer) 10.30am Old St John's (Eucharist) 4.00pm Old St John's (Taizé)</p>	<p>12 July 8.00am Old St John's (Eucharist) 9.15am St Saviours (Eucharist) 9.30am Christ Church (Morning Prayer) 10.30am Old St John's (Eucharist)</p>
<p>19 July 8.00am Old St John's (Eucharist) 9.00am St Paul's (Morning Prayer) 10.30am Old St John's (Eucharist)</p>	<p>26 July 8.00am Old St John's (Eucharist) 9.15am St Saviours (Eucharist) 9.30am Christ Church (Eucharist) 10.30am Old St John's (Morning Prayer) 4.00pm Rangiaowhia Service</p>