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| **Tim First Sermon at St Boniface**  **16 September 2012** | | |
|  | It is good to be here with you all this morning. I have looked forward to this day, ever since first meeting some of you way back in May at the interview day. Beth and I were impressed then by the warm welcome we received and the number of people who turned up to take part in the day, and to check us out! And we've been really touched by the many cards and letters and gifts we have received since. Thank you for your prayers and support. It is truly humbling, and we would ask for your continued love and care.    This morning I want to share with all of you the three priorities I presented to the interview panel back in May. Three key areas in the life of our church communities, that I think we would do well to focus on. And I'd like to look at these three key areas in the light of today's gospel reading. They are:    welcome and worship    growth in faith and hope and love    community engagement and pastoral care    But before we do, can I invite the young people to come forward and help me to discover some of their own hopes and dreams for the future, for the parishes and villages in which we live and work and worship.    And we're going to do this using 3 prayer lanterns.    First of all, I'd like you, the young people, to take these and start to write or draw some of your own hopes and dreams for the future on to the lanterns. It can be as simple as one word: love, joy and peace, or you might like to draw a picture of something that makes you happy. And then if you could once you've all had a go bring the lanterns forward and place them on the altar, so that as we come up later to receive communion, some of us who are more advanced in years might like to write our own hopes and dreams on the lanterns too.    At the end of the service we will light the lanterns and set them free, and it would be nice if we had a representative from each of the three church communities: here at St Boniface, but also from St Jude's and from Calveley to release them. Our hopes and prayers drifting heavenward across our beautiful villages and farmland. Please be assured I have got farmer friendly ones.    So I hope that makes sense? I wonder if Kim and some others would like to help and supervise some of the little ones, and perhaps some of the YC's could help out the little ones too?    Now whilst they do that I'd like to reflect a little on those three key areas:  - welcome and worship  - growth in faith and hope and love  - community engagement and pastoral care    Firstly, welcome and worship  My hope and prayer is that we will be churches that are welcoming to all, places where people can find friendship and community, and still be able to make room for people who are different.    I'm reminded of the Bishop's sermon on Friday when he commented on how easy it is for us to forget how difficult it can be for people to come through our church doors. I pray that just as our beautiful doors are large and wide, our own hearts and minds will be too.  We'll  no doubt make mistakes and get things wrong at times - we're a work in progress after all, but it's how we treat each other and handle the difficulties that will set us apart. As the hymn puts it: so let us learn how to serve; each others' needs to prefer    or as the gospel puts it: - renounce self, take up the cross and follow Christ's example.      The Bishop spoke on Friday about treating every person we meet as if they were royalty. I rather like that, our challenge is to see the Christ in everyone. We are all children of the same heavenly father.    I pray too that we will provide an experience of worship that meets people where they are and uplifts and transforms them, whatever their preferred style. At this point I apologise to those who would have preferred to have had an 8 o'clock this morning, or been at St Jude's or Calveley, or to those who feel they are missing out on their normal family worship service. Let me assure you I am deeply committed to all forms of worship, both traditional and contemporary; and to each congregation and their different integrities. My prayer is that we will have the necessary grace and love to respect each other's needs and styles and let every expression of our faith flourish and prosper, even when at times it may not be our own cup of tea. Thank God we are not all the same, but we are all equal.    Secondly, growth in faith and hope and love.    One of the real joys of ministry for me has been to see people learn to tell their own stories of faith with integrity and confidence, and to nurture and resource those who consider themselves Christian but who don’t necessarily see the point of church. To provide an environment where it's ok to express your doubts and misgivings, where you feel safe and you're not going to be judged for it, but carefully and tenderly nurtured. A friend who came to support me on Friday night, said 'Tim you look so small, in such a large and majestic church' and I do confess i did feel like my daughter Rose at times, as she started school last week, wearing a cardigan that is two sizes too big for her. But that's ok! Just as Rose will grow into her clothes and flourish at school, I pray too that i will grow and adapt and flourish into the role of Vicar.    However, a word of warning: we must n't confuse growth with success - success is not the aim. Sometimes we will not even know what success looks like. But if our goal is to enable each and everyone of us to grow and develop and discover our gifts and our parts to play for the whole - then it's ok to make mistakes; it's ok to take risks. Sometimes we will experience what looks like failure. But again, that's ok! Remember the gospel reading: 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel's will save it.'    Any parent or grandparent who watches their children grow, know that along the way there will be setbacks and failures, but that these are all part and parcel of life and of the process of growing up and they in time help us to become the people we are. And likewise in our faith, we will inevitably experience difficulties and our own dark moments, where everything around us no longer feels the same, where our long held hopes and dreams feel like they've been taken from us. And it's at those times we need each other, we need to help and support one another, because the good news, the gospel we share is that love wins. Light overcomes darkness, new life follows death.    Finally, community engagement and pastoral care.    Ordinary people, in particular places, living lives to the full, are what the gospel is all about.    My prayer is that our faith is not just for Sundays, but that it shapes and permeates all of our lives.  Again, our gospel reading: 'what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?'    My prayer is that our faith and common life together will make us community minded and passionate about the issues concerning our villages, and that we will find various ways in which we can all get involved in making this bit of God's world a better place - i know so many of you already are. And i want to encourage you to keep on putting others first. It was good to have the local MP and representatives from the county and parish councils at my induction, and it's lovely to see some of our local councillors here this morning. I look forward to supporting you in all you do and finding ways in which the church can better serve the needs of our communities.    So there we have it, three key priorities    welcome and worship    growth in faith and hope and love    community engagement and pastoral care    It's just a start - an introduction to what i hope is the beginning of a long and fruitful conversation we will have over the coming weeks and months. What will be our shared vision? What will be our priorities? How will we lose our lives in this place, in order to find them?    Now how are we getting on? Have you managed to put down some of your hopes and dreams…    If I may, I’d like to close with a prayer:  We pray for our own communities. May they be places of welcome and care, where the sorrowing find comfort, where the lonely find fellowship, where the faithful find grace.    May Christ walk with us, and bear with us, in all our journeys through life. May his presence enable us to face whatever the future holds, whatever might await us; and may we hold fast to his reassurance that he will attend us and abide with us, even to the ends of the earth.    Amen.    **Tim** |  |