

Sermon on community

Revd John White

Preached on 21 September 2025

Theme: - Valuing community

As I was writing this sermon, I was reminded of the most beautiful community of all, the community of the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three persons but one God in complete unity. So, today's sermon is focussing on the significant role of community within our Christian life rather than our individuality, because our strength and purpose are found not in our isolation but in our fellowship with one another. I am going to use our readings from Psalm 122, Jeremiah chapter 29:1,4 to 11, and St Peter's letter chapter 2:9 to 11, in support of valuing community.

Verses 3 and 4 of king David's Psalm reads, "Jerusalem built as a city that is bound firmly together." "To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord." King David was writing a song about the community of Israelites. The Israelites stayed as a nation because they valued and supported their community. In verse 6 David instructs the people to pray for peace and prosperity of Jerusalem, because in its peace and prosperity lies their peace and prosperity. Living and working as a community is without question the most effective way to live.

Turning now to chapter 29 of Jeremiah, verse 7 reads, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your

welfare.” The same message as in David’s Psalm, but more succinct. Jeremiah was writing to the Israelites who had been taken into exile in Babylon, and although the Israelites think that their exile will be short, Jeremiah knows that it will span generations, before they return home to Israel. Jeremiah offers profound wisdom for those who want to live a meaningful and joyful life while living in exile; he is urging the exiles to seek the peace and prosperity of the area and country they now live in.

We too are to pray to the Lord for our local community that we live in, and for our country, because in its peace and prosperity we will find our welfare. In our daily prayers we are to pray for our hospitals, hospices, surgeries, care homes, and in our case the day centre, and the Community Care scheme, and for the countless people who help and serve others selflessly day by day. We must also pray for our local council leaders both here and in Bracknell and for our own MP Mr Swallow that all our leaders will have wisdom and integrity, because they have great influence over our peace, prosperity and welfare.

Verse 7 reminds us that our prosperity and happiness is profoundly bound up in the well-being of our area, country, and now in this global world that we live in, the rest of the world. When we invest in the wellbeing of our community, whether it is in our acts of kindness, promoting justice, or advancing peace and harmony, we create conditions that nurture our own sense of fulfilment, happiness, and wellbeing; true fulfilment and happiness comes from helping other people.

The message in verse 7 challenges us to look beyond ourselves and to focus on actions which support and advance the

wellbeing of the whole community of which we are an integral part.

However, in verse 8 Jeremiah warns the exiles not to accept the philosophy of the local people they live with who would deceive them, which for us, means do not embrace the way of life of people, which is contrary to our faith, but instead stay faithful to Christ.

As ambassadors of the Christian faith, we must demonstrate our faith, and we can best do that by coming to church regularly and living the Christian life as best we can, because it is by our example that people will come to embrace the Christian faith themselves. We must value the Christian community because it is collectively that we will make a greater difference in our town and be more effective in spreading the gospel, and in consequence get a better sense of fulfilment and happiness.

Turning now to 1 Peter 2, 7 to 17, but firstly to verse 7 and 8 where Peter wrote, “To you then who believe, he is precious; but to those who do not believe, The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” and “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.” Peter is addressing Christians in what is now modern day Turkey telling them that the majority of people living around them do not believe in God.

The reason they do not believe in God is because it is too difficult for them. Quoting from St Paul’s letter to the Galatians chapter 5, the difference between a Christian and non-Christian can be stark. The non-Christian is led by our human nature which indulges in sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery;

idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. Fortunately, today our country has been influenced by generations of Christians, and although we occasionally hear of excessive bad behaviour on our news programmes the worst of those excesses are still rare occurrences. Whereas a Christian will endeavour to live by the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The proportion of Christians to non-Christians in Turkey at the time of Peter may well be similar to our situation here today. With a population in Sandhurst numbering about 25,000 thousand people with the vast majority of people being non-Christian or non-practicing Christians.

In verse 9 Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people who he has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.” We are a chosen race, a community of Christian people with one leader, Jesus Christ. And Peter wrote in verse 11, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.”

We are also aliens and exiles living in a predominately non-Christian community, and the desires of the flesh are all those attractions which are not of God and which we are told to abstain from. Peter is urging them, and us, to stay loyal to the Christian faith and not to adopt the practices of the non-Christian population with its various attractions and pressures which leads them away from Christ. Peter is also addressing how we, as Christians, are to live in our generation when we

know that we are living in a population where more and more the culture is becoming non-Christian. As the body of Christ in Sandhurst we are not to get sucked into the things which we know are not of Christ, but rather we are to live and make known the gospel.

It means acting honourably among non-Christians and continuing to come to church to glorify God, because it is by our example that others will join us, and this is the same message as in Jeremiah, because God's message has not changed.

In our case here at St Michael's our stated purpose as a church is Knowing God for ourselves, Growing as individuals and as a church, and Showing God's love in the world. So, to be a true witness to Christ in our community we must know Jesus and above all the message he gave his life for, because until we all know the message, we cannot pass it on.

I started to go to church regularly about 60 years ago and it was about 40 years ago when I started to go to a house group, which is when I found my Bible and started to read it regularly for the first time, and unless I'm different to other people I think that is probably a typical situation.

Last Tuesday in our house group we asked ourselves a very profound question, "Who am I?" We discussed this question for two hours so I will have to cut this very short, but basically are we the designer clothes we wear, or are we the gourmet food we eat, or are we the cars we drive and are these and other images of ourselves dependable. Many people do not know who they are because what they thought they were had let them down. My father's family 150 years ago lived and worked on a

big estate in Hampshire and had done for generations. They knew precisely who they were because of their history, but today few people now live where they were born. If I want to see my children and grandchildren I have to go to Cheltenham, Leicester and to Dubai, and I know that some of you have to go to America. So, I ask myself, who am I? I answer, 'I am a Christian. I belong to a community numbering millions of people worldwide and Christ is the head of our community or fellowship, and he knows everybody intimately, and our community is as dependable as a rock.'

Just recently I preached on the Lord's prayer as shown in St Luke's gospel chapter 11, and I said that the last three petitions in verses 3 and 4 are, 'give us, forgive us, and bring us,' emphasising the community of faith of which we are a part, rather than our individuality. The Lord's prayer demonstrates that Jesus requires us to be in fellowship with each other and with him.

We are a community with Christ at its centre, and to be a true member and a disciples of Christ we must all know Jesus and especially the message for which he gave his life. It is in community and fellowship with Christ and each other that we will be most effective in helping other people on their journey of faith and salvation, and when we will experience true happiness and fulfilment as Christians.