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Briefing 29: Tuesday 8th September, 2020.

Dear friends,

We will be celebrating our harvest festivals this weekend, and singing (or listening to) some wonderful harvest hymns. The season is, of course, about being thankful, but more specifically, harvest is about thanking God for all we have, because everything we have, life and food and lasting eternal hope, comes from Him.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of us in the West struggle to remember that these days. When we want our daily bread, we head down to Tesco or Asda or Sainsbury's or Aldi. Even those of us who have vegetable gardens and can grow some of our own food (and my beetroot and potatoes have been excellent this year) actually consume a very small proportion of what we (or our neighbours) grow locally. And so we've lost sight of the link between sowing and reaping, and how harvest and livelihoods can be threatened by drought, floods, or pests and disease.

But in the days of Jesus, people ate what they, or their neighbours grew. Others lived off the wages they received for daily work. And they knew that unless the LORD sent the sunshine and rain in proper proportions and held back the locusts, there would be no harvest to be gathered in. Unless the LORD provided the work, and the strength to work, the family would go hungry. The people then knew, as we must, that they were dependent on the LORD for everything.

Realising that God is the great provider of all things, including our daily needs, should lead us to pray, "*Lord, please give me what I need,*" each and every day. And that's what Jesus taught his disciples to pray. It is a prayer of total reliance upon God, spoken by a child who knows that their Father is both willing and able to provide for them.

But to pray this part of the prayer properly requires a willingness to accept God's provision and be satisfied with what he gives. It's praying for what God knows to be **enough**, not for an abundance. It's praying for what we **need**, not for what we want. It's placing our **trust** in God day by day by day, seeking first His kingdom, and trusting that all other things will be ours as well. It's praying, "*Lord give me what I need to survive and thrive in the life that you've given me, that I may serve you with thankfulness and joy for as long as I have breath.*"

It's a prayer that leads to thankfulness when God does provide. And as we thank God for all that he gives us, our joy and thankfulness for his goodness increases, and our confidence in his love and goodness for the future grows all the more. This in turn makes us more aware of God's wonderful provision, and that leads to even greater peace, thankfulness and joy! Richard Sibbes – the English Puritan – put it this way: '*Our whole life should speak of nothing but thankfulness; every condition and place we are in should be a witness of our thankfulness. This will make the times and place we live in better.*' We live that life when we remember that every good gift comes from God, and when we take time to pray for our daily bread, and thank God for what he gives.

How might you pray 'Give us each day our daily bread'? Why not start with something like this...

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a good God and generous Father, who loves to give good gifts to his children. Thank you for all that you provide for me: my food and drink, my home and shelter, my family and friends, my life and my eternal hope in the Lord Jesus, who is the true Bread of Life. Forgive me when I forget that you are the ultimate giver of every gift, and help me always to remember that every gift comes from you.

Heavenly Father, you know what I need today, better than I know what I need myself. Please give me today my daily bread: enough food to eat, work to do, a place to rest and shelter, and people to love me and for me to love. Open up your Word to me, that my soul might also feed on your wonderful truth. And as I receive your gifts, give me, I pray, a thankful heart and a contented spirit to accept whatever comes from your hands.

And merciful Father, I pray for those who will go to bed hungry and thirsty, for those without shelter, without a safe place to rest, and without anyone to love them. Draw close to them I pray. Remind them of your unfailing love and mercy for all who call upon you, and fill their hearts with hope for a day of justice, plenty and celebration, when the Lord Jesus comes again. And until that day, Father, help me to share what I have more freely and willingly, that I might be a means by which others receive their daily bread. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

OTHER NEWS:

PRAY WITH US! At St Nicholas Church from 7:45pm this Wednesday evening (*tomorrow*) we'll be listening to God's Word being read as part of the Bible reading Marathon, and praying along silently as we listen. Do come along and pray with us! **Next Tuesday** morning we'll be praying again via ZOOM from 7am-8am. Contact Dave for a link.

OPEN DAY: Please do come along this Saturday from 10-4 and join in our open day. It would be particular nice to have a good-sized crowd at 12 noon (socially-distanced of course) for the ceremony with Bp Michael.

BIBLE READING MARATHON: There are now just a few spaces left for later in the week. Don't miss the chance to be involved! Contact Dave to book.

TODAY: 5-6pm

WEDNESDAY: 8-9am, 9-10am, 1-2pm

THURSDAY: 10-11am, 2-3pm

FRIDAY: 11-12noon, 12-1pm

(full timetable attached!)

INVITATION TO THE OFFICIAL RE-OPENING OF ST NICHOLAS CHURCH STEVENAGE

SATURDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2020.

After 12 months of major refurbishment works, we are delighted that the work is complete and that St Nicholas Church is now open once again. Come along and celebrate with us!

- Church open from 10am to 4pm.
- Display of the work including many fascinating archaeological discoveries.
- Free refreshments being served outside all day.
- Opening ceremony with the Bishop of Hertford, Rt Rev'd Dr Michael Beasley at 12 noon.

For more information contact: enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk

HARVEST FESTIVAL THIS COMING SUNDAY will be harvest festival at both churches, and it will be wonderful to have both churches decorated with fruit and vegetables and flowers as we give thanks to God for his great kindnesses to us. Any food items brought will be donated to the foodshed (St Nicholas) and the Haven (St Mary's). At St Nicholas, if you'd like to make a cash offering instead, all donations will be passed on to our CMS mission partners, Jimmy and Cathy rocks in Brazil. Please make sure your gifts are in an envelope marked Jimmy and Katia Rocks

The 9:30am service at St Nicholas will include a celebration the Lord's Supper whilst the service at St Mary's at 11:30am will be a Service of the Word. At both services our readings will be Ezra 6:1-12 and Matthew 10:9-15. This will be the second of 3 weeks on a theme of '**Going out with the Good News!**' Please pray that it will stir all our hearts to love and serve the LORD more through our sharing of the gospel.

If you are yet to book in, you can do so here: <https://forms.gle/fjf3tDNcx2v6mwa38> If you're not able to make it, do make sure you join us either live on Facebook or catch up later.

CALLED TO SERVE: Thank you to those who have volunteered to fill some of the vacancies we have on our rotas. Whilst many of the vacancies I mentioned last week still remain, I'd like to highlight 3 of the vacancies that remain. If you have the skills, and a willingness to serve, please do come and talk to me.

- St Mary's AND St Nicholas **Website managers** – helping to keep our websites and '*a church near you*' sites functioning and our information up-to-date. [1 or 2 per church] *See me*
- **AV operators** – setting up and operating the sound and visual systems during services. [4-8] *See Anthony*
- **Social media managers:** making sure our benefice has an effective social media presence [1 or 2] *See me*
- **Church sitters:** so that St Nicholas Church can be open during the week for visitors and those seeking solace and somewhere to pray. *See Steve*

BENSON AND MIYA: Benson and Miya, well-known to the St Nicholas Church family, will be starting their training at All Nations Christian College this month. They've sent a prayer letter and I've asked if I can pass it on. They said yes so the link is here: <https://prayforbenensonandmiya.wordpress.com/> If you'd like to support them, either financially or in prayer, do get in touch with them directly.

REMINDER: ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETINGS: St Nicholas APCM will be after church on Sunday 20th September and St Mary's APCM on the Sunday after, 27th September.

There will be a short further update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

Dave