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**Briefing 61: Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2021.**

Dear Friends,

Last week I gave some brief reflections on our commitment to evangelism and discipleship. This week, as part of my contribution to a 10-year review, I want to reflect a little on where we are in fulfilling the mission Jesus gave his church to love one another and to grow in holiness.

In John chapter 15, Jesus gave this command to his disciples: *“Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”* Earlier that evening Jesus had wrapped a towel around his waist and washed the feet of his disciples. The next day he died for the sins of the world, demonstrating the depth of his love. That, Jesus said, is the standard to which we should aspire. That is what true Christian love looks like.

So to what extent do we love one another like that? Do we put the needs of others first? Are we willing to humble ourselves in willing service, bearing one another’s burdens, offering costly hospitality, giving of our time, forgiving one another despite the hurts which we can often experience? Jesus said that the quality of our love for one another would show that we truly are his disciples. Can that be said of us?

If we are honest, the answer has to be no. We do not love one another like that, but I’m sure no church can fully achieve that. So perhaps a better question is this: ***are we loving one another more like this?***

Looking back over the last 10 years I know there have been times when I haven’t loved others in the church family as I should. There have been times when I have been selfish, impatient, perhaps even unkind. There have been times when I haven’t listened as well as I should, when my words have not been as gracious as they might have been. There have certainly been times when I have been too busy on tasks to talk to people and visit people. That’s been especially true over the last year when we haven’t been meeting together. I do recognise my failures in this area, and for that I am truly sorry.

I can say, however, that I want to love more, and that I want us to be a church which not only speaks about loving one another but that does it week in, and week out. And very often we do. As Rector I get to hear of many acts of kindness, love and mercy that are done within our church family, and I dare say there are many, many more I never hear about. Very often they are small things; a phone call, a text or email, help with shopping, an invitation for a cup of tea or a walk. Little things that make a huge difference because they demonstrate that we do truly care.

Jesus said that we serve him when we show practical kindness to others in his name, so how might you demonstrate your love for others in the church family over these coming weeks, months and years? How might we work together to look after those who most need God’s love? How does the Lord need to change our hearts?

Loving one another is just one aspect of the transformation of the Holy Spirit who works in us to make us more like Jesus. That is God’s aim for you and me. We can, of course, come to him as we are, with all our mess, all our problems, all our sin and shame, and when we repent and place our trust in Jesus, God washes us clean and begins to reshape us into the character of Jesus, growing in us the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

It is often hard to see whether our own lives have changed in that regard. Are we, am I, more like Jesus now than I was a year ago, or 10 years ago? I hope so, I believe that God’s work in me has not been without fruit, but I’ll leave that for others to judge. We often don’t notice when we change physically, and spiritual changes can be harder to spot, especially when we are not spending time with one another. But this must be our goal. So is it? Really?

As always, the test of our desire to do something is the time and effort we put into it. Part of me would love to be able to run a marathon, but it’s never going to happen. I don’t want it anywhere near enough to put the time and effort in that it would require. Growing in holiness, becoming more like Jesus in our character is the same. It will

take time and effort. It will mean a closer attention of God's Word and a greater willingness to submit to it. It will require a close examination of our heart and actions and priorities, and a willingness to change. It will demand confession and repentance, and it won't be without pain and struggle. But even more than completing a marathon, the result will be wonderful for our families, our colleagues, our church family and for our witness in the wider community.

How might we pursue that aim together more effectively? Is the preaching practical enough? Is it challenging enough? Is becoming more like Jesus a priority? And who might help you turn your desire to change into a reality?

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

## IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**Come +  
pray!**

**Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm.** Bring a Bible, and join us to pray for ourselves + for the church.

**Private Prayer in St Nicholas Church THIS WEEK.**

Tuesday (27<sup>th</sup>) from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday (28<sup>th</sup>) 12noon-2pm and Thursday (29<sup>th</sup>) 10am – 12 noon.

**Next Tuesday from 7am-8am.** Our regular early morning prayer meeting. Contact Mike Wilton for a link.

**LITTLE LAMBS** – The St Nicholas mums and toddlers' group, meeting Friday mornings from 9am-10:30am, will be restarting towards the end of May under the leadership of Jeannette Parker. Jeannette would love to hear from anyone who'd be willing (covid restrictions permitting) to join a rota to provide refreshments. Could you serve in this way? If so, contact Jeannette on [enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) Thank you!

**ST MARY'S APCM:** Hilary Thompson and Eunice Sirkett were elected as Church Wardens, Adrian Sirkett and Tsung-Yin Lewis were elected to serve on the PCC. Dave gave a verbal report to the meeting and a copy of his Report is available to read here: <https://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Rectors-report-to-APCM-2021.docx-1.pdf>

**BIBLE BY THE BEACH COMES TO STEVENAGE:** For the last few years, a number of us have gone to this conference in Eastbourne. This year it is on line, FREE! and just for one day: Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May. The final session from 7:30pm will be shown on the big screens at church but the rest of the events can be watched at home. The programme and live stream can be found at <https://www.biblebythebeach.org/> To book a place for the evening contact Mike or Karen.

**PENTECOST EVE PRAISE AND PRAYER: Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May from 7pm-9pm.** Weather permitting, we shall start outside with some sung worship then move inside for prayer for an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon our churches and town. Put the date in your diary and come and join us!

### **OTHER WAYS TO SERVE IN GOD'S CHURCH FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND PRAYER.**

If God is prompting you to serve, please don't wait to be asked - please get in touch. There are plenty of ways your God-given time, talents, skills and energies can be put to use in the church. Take a look below:

**1: Catering and refreshments coordinator for St Nicholas.** We'll soon be able to open the kitchen again – can you put together a team to offer refreshments after morning services, and be able to coordinate food for other events such as Newcomer's Lunches, Christianity Explored courses, etc. Is that you? Are you willing to play a part in these? There is no kitchen at **St Marys**, but we love refreshments after services, so would you help provide these?

**2: Helpers and teachers for Sunday morning children and youth work:** Be part of the team helping to teach our children and young people the good news of Jesus. Patience, kindness and a DBS check required. Parents of children- would you please consider serving as a helper in a different group to your children? **We need people now!**

**3: Evangelism Team.** We want to re-establish our team doing door-to-door visiting across the benefice, expanding it to include running termly enquiries courses for those investigating the Christian faith. Is God calling you to serve in this way?

**4:** We also need more **welcomers and stewards** (contact Karen Walker), more **musicians and singers** (contact Judy Brown) and more people to help with the **audio visuals** (contact Anthony Taylor, Edward Kaahwa or Paul Drakes)

**5: Treasurer for Graveley:** Praise God! We have someone to take on this role!