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Briefing 99: Wednesday 26th January, 2022.

Dear friends,

We turn again to Philippians 1 verse 6 for some encouragement in pursuing the things of God and seeking to grow in faith and Christ-likeness: **'I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'**

Last week we noted how we can be confident that growth will happen and that change will come, because of the change that God has already wrought in us through faith in Jesus. Since we are now in Christ, these things are naturally part of the life of the true disciple of Jesus. Today our focus is on God's faithfulness- that he always finishes what he starts- no matter how long things take.

So think of Abram. God called this childless, elderly wandering Aramean to follow him and promised that he would become the head of a great nation, too numerous to count, who would inhabit a land flowing with milk and honey. He was 75 when God gave him that promise. He was 100 years old before Isaac, the child of the promise, was born. And it was generations later that his line became a great nation and conquered the Promised Land. But what God began, he sees through to completion. So it was with Abraham, so it will be with us.

Think of David. The young shepherd boy anointed King while Saul was still very much on the throne. Through his victory over Goliath and his military prowess, David's fame and renown grew, along with Saul's jealousy. Forced to flee for his life, it looked like God's promises would come to nothing. But God finishes what he starts. He always keeps his promises. So it was with David, so it will be with us.

Think of the great Old Testament prophets, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Although much of their writing is taken up with warnings to God's Old Testament people about God's anger over their sin and the coming judgement unless they repent, they also pointed forward to the coming Messiah: The Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Their words of prophecy, predicting Christ's arrival were given hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. Yet every one of those prophecies came true. Jesus, the Messiah finally came because God finishes what he starts. He always keeps his promises. So it was with the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, so it will be with us.

And then think of the life of Jesus, particularly his 3 ½ years of ministry: Healing the sick, calming the storm, feeding the hungry, forgiving the sinner, raising the dead, bringing comfort, hope freedom and new life. The Gospels give us a glimpse into the mindset of the disciples and the crowds, how they thought Jesus was the one, how they thought God's kingdom would be established through him, and how devastated they were, how broken, bereft of hope they were, as Jesus was arrested, tortured, crucified and buried. In the darkness of Good Friday and Easter Saturday, it looked as if God's salvation train had come off the rails. It looked as if evil had won. But then came Easter Sunday, the 1st day of the week, the 1st day of a new life, a new world, as Jesus broke the bonds of death and rose from the grave. Not even a conspiracy between Judas, Rome and the Jewish religious elite could derail God's great plan of salvation. God always finishes what he starts. It was that way with Jesus. It will be that way with us.

God always completes what he starts. He always keeps his promises. And if you can think of anything that God has begun that has not yet come to completion, then remember this: that is only the case because we haven't yet reached the end! Brothers and sisters, the work that God has begun in you he will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. So don't give up. Don't lose hope. Don't take your eye off the prize nor your shoulder from the wheel. Continue to pursue the things of God, continue to dive daily into God's word and with his help, put into practice what you read. Continue to meet with God in prayer. Continue to meet regularly with your brothers and sisters in Christ. And God will change you more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

What God begins he always finishes.

Dave

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

EVANGELISM TRAINING ON SATURDAY from 9:30am-2pm in the Parish Room at St Nicholas – A team from London City Mission are coming to help train us to get better at sharing our faith with family, friends, neighbours and -well, anyone! Lunch and refreshments will be provided. Please let Karen Walker know you are coming.

PRAYER GATHERINGS: Our next Prayer Gathering is **tonight** from 7:45pm. This will be in-person only at St Nicholas Church. Our next 7-8am early morning zoom prayer will be on Tuesday 1st February. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along? The church will also be open for **visitors and private prayer** on Tuesdays from 2-4pm, Wednesdays from 12noon-2pm and Thursdays from 10am-12 noon. If you'd like to join the band of church sitters, please speak to Karen Walker.

UPDATED COVID PROTOCOLS: from this Sunday, masks are no longer legally required to be worn in church. However, since a number of people may well still feel more comfortable wearing a face covering and sitting with others who also do so, designated 'face-mask wearing zones' will be available towards the back in both churches. We will also continue to have hand sanitiser available and ensure that our churches are kept clean and well ventilated. Please remember that you **should not** come to church if you are unwell, and that government advice is still active to wash hands, maintain distance, and to take a **lateral flow test** before meeting lots of people. We have some free kits in church. Why not take one and use it either on Saturday evening or first thing Sunday morning before you come?

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

30th January: Matt 22:1-14 6th February: Matt 22:15-22 13th February: Matt 22:34-46

FLOWER ARRANGING: If you'd like to join the Flower Arranging Team at St Nicholas, please see Chris Chambers – full training is given. Sessions are on Thursdays 10am-12pm, and 7-9pm at St Nicholas.

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH. The LLF consultation is now drawing to a close and we have until the end of April to make any comments on whether the Church of England should change its belief and practice surrounding marriage and gender. To help us think through these issues again, we're going to be running a **2-session course from 6pm-8pm on Sunday 27th February and 6th March.** We'll be looking at some of the LLF videos and materials, looking at the scriptures and considering how we might respond. If you'd like to come, please let me or Martin Bailey know.

If you'd like to take part in the full 5-session course, various courses will be running around the diocese, including an on-line course led by the Bishop of Hertford. The sessions are all on Wednesday evenings, from 7.30 pm – 9.00 pm. The dates are: 26th January (**TONIGHT!**); 2nd February; 9th February; 23rd February and 9th March.

You can follow this link to book a place: [LLF Eventbrite booking with more details available at Living in Love & Faith - Diocese of St Albans \(anglican.org\)](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/living-in-love-and-faith-tickets-31234567890). www.stalbans.anglican.org/living-love-and-faith/

Last year the PCC reviewed the course materials and had this advice for anyone seeking to engage with it.

- 1: **do it with someone else from the church** so you can chat things through afterwards.
- 2: **do it with your eyes open to the internal biases of the course** such as the use of emotion in its storytelling, etc
- 3: **do it prayerfully.** Seeking wisdom from God and his unchanging Word.

If you do sign up for the online course or something else in the diocese, do please let me know how you get on.

ST NICHOLAS PCC MET LAST NIGHT: As well as receiving reports from the Rector, Churchwardens and Treasurer, we spent time discussing recent reports into abuse within the wider church, and how aware and well equipped we are to prevent such abuse happening here, and how we would respond to any allegations that did arise. Do chat with us if you'd like more details. We also made some plans for our away morning in early February. More on this later.

LENT LECTURE: WHY WOMEN MATTER SO MUCH TO GOD. St Thomas Becket, Northaw at 7:00pm on Wednesday 23rd February 2022. The speaker is Ros Clarke, a Christian teacher, speaker and writer, and the author of the Lent devotional book *Forty Women: unseen women of the Bible from Eden to Easter*, copies of which will be available to purchase at the lecture. More details including how to book can be found here: [Annual Lecture 2022 | Northaw & Cuffley \(norcuff.com\)](https://www.norcuff.com/annual-lecture-2022-northaw)

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: If you'd like to see the video report of this year's project, click here! [A Celebration of Operation Christmas Child \(samaritans-purse.org.uk\)](https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/operation-christmas-child)