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**Briefing 123: Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.**

Dear friends,

Over these weeks, we're looking at the life of the early church, hopefully seeing some lessons and challenges for us in our benefice. This week we're thinking briefly about their **perseverance under persecution**.

When my cousin was very small, he had a strong fear of dentists. So much so, that he would refuse to open his mouth, would force his way out of the chair and run around the room – and on one occasion, I seem to remember he even bit one of the dentists! The fear got too much for him, and he did anything he could think of to escape the dentist's clutches.

Whatever you feel about dentists, most of us do whatever we can to avoid pain and suffering, and generally follow sound advice to keep out of trouble and to stay safe. But what if trouble comes simply from being a disciple of Jesus? What if belonging to a church carried with it the threat of prison or torture? What if sharing our faith might lead to arrest, beatings or worse? What would we do then?

For us living in the UK today, where we enjoy many religious freedoms, that isn't a real possibility. But for millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, that is a reality. And it was a reality for the early church too. The threats of violence began in Acts chapter 4 after Peter and John had been brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin. These threats accelerated in chapter 5, when, fuelled by jealousy, the Jewish leadership arrested the apostles and put them in jail, only for an angel to lead them out! How did they respond? They went back to the temple courts and continued teaching the people about Jesus! Brought before the Sanhedrin again, the apostles were ordered not to speak about Jesus any longer and were flogged before being set free! You might have thought that this experience of real persecution would be enough to see them running for cover, but no! Acts 5:41-42: *"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house-to-house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."*

But rather than putting them off, silencing their voices, or sending them into hiding, the persecution they faced actually served to invigorate the early church and make it bolder! And even when, after the stoning of Stephen, the persecution reached such a level that many in the early church fled for safety, Acts 8:4 says that *"those who had been scattered preached the word everywhere they went."* There was a time to be wise and run and preserve one's life, but there was never a time the church kept silent.

What does this have to say to us, I wonder? After all, we don't face similar threats in the UK today.

I think it challenges us to think about the value we put on the gospel of Jesus. To these early Christians the gospel of Jesus was the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field, and nothing, and no one was more important to them than Jesus. And so they spoke about him everywhere and were willing to suffer for his name. Is Jesus as precious to us as that? If he is, then we will speak and not be silenced. And if we are rejected, we will keep going. And if we will suffer, we will rejoice, that we, too, have been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the wonderful name of Jesus.

Are you ready for that? Are you using your freedom now to tell people about Jesus and the hope he brings? Times are getting harder, and persecution of Christians is growing, even here in the UK. Will you stand firm and speak up?

Passages like this should also remind us to pray for those of our brothers and sisters who do face intense persecution, and to do whatever we can to support and encourage them in practical and spiritual ways. St Nicholas Church supports the work of the Barnabas Fund, who work with persecuted Christians around the world. Why not visit their website, [www.barnabasfund.org/gb/](http://www.barnabasfund.org/gb/) or look up **Open Doors**, **Release International** or **Christian Solidarity Worldwide**? Persecuted Christians are part of the body of Christ; will we stand with them as they stand up for Jesus?

Grace and peace, *Dave*

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

This Saturday it's the **CHURCH FAMILY BBQ** at the Vicarage

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July: from 4:30pm to 8pm.

**Call Dave+Judy - 01438 213587- if you're coming but haven't yet booked!**



## TIMES TO PRAY...

Wednesdays at 7pm-7:30pm Quiet Evening Prayer: All welcome

Benefice Prayer Gathering at St Nicholas: TONIGHT (13<sup>th</sup> July) at 7:45-9pm

Next Early Morning Prayer Zoom - 7am-8am Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July. Contact Dave for link

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

**CABARET EVENING AT ST NICHOLAS** - The Church Wardens would like to invite you to a Church Family Evening to say thank you and an informal goodbye to Dave and Judy on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> July from 7.00pm to 10ish, refreshments will be available or bring your own bottle - (if you would like to take part in the cabaret with a song, monologue, sketch etc please contact Martin Bailey who is coordinating the cabaret). We would very much like you to come along and take part in the evening.



## Gents of St Nicholas + St Mary's...

You are invited to join us for a round of crazy golf at Graveley Fruit Farm at 6pm- followed by a curry in the Old Town.

If you're interested, please sign up in church or email Dave at [revdmbrown@gmail.com](mailto:revdmbrown@gmail.com)



**YOU CAN ALSO SIGN UP IN EITHER CHURCH FOR BOTH OF THE ABOVE EVENTS!**

**DAVE AND JUDY'S LAST SUNDAY** will be on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August. On this day we will join together for a joint service at St Nicholas at 10:30am, after which there will be a bring and share lunch. Please save the date and come along.

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

17<sup>th</sup> July: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

24<sup>th</sup> July: Hebrews 5:11-6:20

31<sup>st</sup> July: Hebrews 7: 1-28

**WE NEED A NEW BENEFICE LINK PERSON FOR BRIDGE BUILDERS:** Hosting Christmas and Easter Journeys has become a regular part of our church life and for the last few years, Judy has been both the link person between our churches and Bridgebuilders and the Journey Co-ordinator to make sure the events run well. Do you have the skills and enthusiasm to take on this role? If so - please speak to Judy asap.

**SUMMER READING: BOOKS for just £1.** Don't forget to pick up a book or two to read over the summer. 4 titles are now available in both churches. Which one (or 2!) will you pick up?

**REVISION OF THE ST NICHOLAS CHURCH FAMILY LIST** - We are about to have a complete revision of the St Nicholas Church Family List. This is the list of people for whom St Nicholas is their home church, and where they attend as regularly as they are able. The names and contact details of those who make up this 'Church Family' are shared with others on this list for ease of contact and as a reminder to pray, but we will not share this list with anyone else. If you are part of the St Nicholas Church family and would like your name and details to be on the new list, please let Alison know by 20th August, making it clear you would like to be on the Church Family List.

If you would not consider yourself to be part of the St Nicholas Church Family, but would like to receive our regular emails and news, you can opt to just join our Emails/News mailing list. Your details will not be shared with anyone else, but you will continue to receive the emails and updates. Please also let Alison know by 20th August, making it clear you would like to be on just the Emails/News List.