

I pray that I may speak in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

At this time of the year in Cuckfield there is usually a lot going on. A few weeks back we had our Harvest Festival, last Friday was the Mayor's Election night and the Bookfest is planned in November. But of course this year it has had to be done differently. We couldn't have the mayor's procession, there will be no fireworks display at Cuckfield Park, and the Independent State's election of Iain Pringle as mayor was not the usual fun occasion. But it does stop us getting involved and making a difference even though sometimes it can be a struggle especially with all the current restrictions. So it's good to thank God for all those who have given and continue to give of their time, for all that is done for our common good, both for our Church congregation, the Community of Cuckfield and our neighbours in Haywards Heath. Especially I want to thank Clare Bellamy for what she has done with her time as mayor and for the work of the Independent State. May we all take time to remember and help those whose struggles are far worse than ours and who need our help.

Our bible readings this morning are bit of a history lesson of past empires and tell of people who were chosen by God to carry out their appointed tasks. Jesus in our Gospel is asked a very loaded question by the Jewish Leaders about paying taxes to the ruling Roman authorities in an attempt to get him arrested and stop him from fulfilling his appointed task.

The Old Testament reading from the book of Isaiah concerns Cyrus the Great. He founded the Persian Empire in around 560 bc. 20 years later he defeated the Babylonians who had taken the people of Israel into exile and it was Cyrus that issued the edict which allowed the Jewish exiles to return home and later he supported them in the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Although Cyrus was a foreign emperor and didn't believe in the God of the Jews he seems to have been influenced enough for the writer of Isaiah to call him anointed to help rebuild the Jewish community and support the rebuilding of the Temple.

I hope you will forgive me for reminding you at this point of something Brian Cutler said at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting last week, that our church building is also in need of a bit of TLC and we too will need quite a lot help to sort it out.

The Gospel story tells of an incident where the Jewish leaders (the Pharisees who were ardent nationalists and opposed to the rule of Rome) and the Herodians (who supported the Roman rule of the Herod's) joining forces to trap Jesus in what he might say by asking a question about paying taxes to Caesar, a family dynasty that stretched from Julius Caesar in 27BC to eventually Nero in AD68.

The tax was collected through a census or registration on agricultural yield and property throughout the Roman Empire but had only been a reality in Judea since the census in 6 or 7 AD when Judea came under strict Roman control. The resentment of taxation contributed to the unrest that culminated in the revolt in 70AD that lead to the destruction on the Temple.

The tax was paid with the Denarius, the common roman coin of that day which had the image of the emperor Tiberius Caesar on one side and the inscription in Latin “Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of the Divine Augustus”. So when Jesus asked them to show him the coin used to pay the tax he introduces a simple visual aid that highlights their insincerity, as they seemed to have no qualms in using this pagan money or even bringing the coin into the holy precincts of the Temple. Instead of entrapping Jesus, they are trapped by him. Jesus' answer is “Give to the emperor the things that are the Emperor's and to God the things that are God's”. Jesus doesn't elaborate on what are the things of God but I rather like Tertullian's take on it. He was a Christian writer who lived around 200 AD in Carthage which is in modern day Tunisia. He wrote if the coins with the image of Caesar belong to Caesar then we human beings who are created in God's image must belong to God whether we recognise it or not!

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Church was probably written from Corinth after his first visit in about 50 AD. It is widely accepted as being the earliest Christian Text written just 20 years after Jesus' ascension in to heaven.

The Romans had built many great roads to connect their empire and Thessaloniki stood on the Via Egnatia linking the Adriatic with the Black Sea giving it both commercial and strategic significance. It had a real cosmopolitan population and it was here that Paul together with Silvanus and Timothy had helped establish a new church.

Paul reminds this newly formed congregation of believers that they are beloved by God and that their faith despite their struggles and difficulties had become an example to other groups of believers throughout the region.

As a result the Christian church spread throughout the Roman Empire. Since then it has spread across the globe and across the centuries. Today there are 2.4 billion believers, that's about a third of the world's population. But we live in uncertain times, this is a strange situation for us who are used to certainty.

Now our Lives are subject to an every changing set of rules, the rule of 6 seems here to stay for a while, life still goes on although not as we're used to. In this coming November we will be holding an Act of Remembrance albeit outside, thanking God for all those who have given their lives for this Country and our annual service of thanksgiving for those that have made a difference to our lives, the life of our community and are with us no more. Who knows what Christmas will bring ? but we will celebrate it none the less.

Our faith allows us to have a different view of life as St Teresa of Avila audaciously expresses it, when we look back from heaven to our life on earth even the most miserable earthly life will look like one bad night in an inconvenient hotel.

To help us enjoy our time on earth, God gave the people of Israel the rule of 10 which Jesus simplified to the Rule of 2 which are based on the very essence of God which is love.

May we all experience the love that God has for each and every one of us and may we learn to love God and our neighbour as ourselves, Amen. [1161]