

**16 July 2021**



Dear friends

### **Inter-Diocesan Golf Day**

Let's start with the good news. Congratulations to Rob Bewley, Adrian Morton, Peter Angus and Paul Adams for another successful Inter-Diocesan Golf Day, and in particular to Rob for winning the best overall score, which makes him Champion Golfer of the Church of England, and Adrian Morton who won the handicap-adjusted score.

### **Freedom**

**A Barthian small-print excursus, to be ignored if you wish!**

I am resisting the temptation to launch into a major Bible study on "freedom", starting with John 8:31-36:

*<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' <sup>33</sup>They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?'*

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup>The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever. <sup>36</sup>So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

One thing I disliked about the 1992 Maastricht Treaty was that we Britons stopped being "subjects" and became "citizens." I felt more secure as a subject of her Britannic Majesty than as a citizen of the European Union. That is not meant as a nationalistic or anti-EU statement at all: I prefer union to isolation (or "independence" which in its modern guise is as nonsensical and dangerous as "freedom", both stemming from enlightenment ideas of autonomy). I am trying to reflect on the nature of and relationship between authority, government, society, freedom and individual rights. Citizenship in the European context is too tied up with the French Revolution and other excesses of the enlightenment. It encourages individual autonomy, which the Bible describes as everyone doing what is right in their own eyes.

True freedom is described in John 8:31-36 (above), and true citizenship in Philippians 3:20:

*But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The freedom we need is freedom from sin and from the judgment it incurs: the freedom of knowing, following, and serving a Lord and Saviour who loves us beyond measure and makes us his own, and whose service is perfect freedom.

The Prime Minister is now encouraging us to approach "Freedom Day" on Monday with great caution: very sensible perhaps, but also a bit like telling students they can do what they want, though it might be wise if they were back in their lodgings before dark. The rules have gone, but the new advice looks very similar to the old rules.

What does this mean for churches? It is now entirely up to the incumbent and PCC. That is reasonable in a way, as context can vary so much; but it exposes you to the opposing demands of strong personalities in the over-cautious versus utterly-reckless culture wars. You as incumbent become piggy-in-the-middle. I'm sorry about that. I could protect you, and so could the national church, while we were playing by imposed rules. Now all I can do is point you to the latest guidance, which has no enforceable authority behind it. And (I hope it goes without saying) I'm happy to discuss thoughts with you, and will always defend any decision you make in good faith. You have my prayers and support.

The latest Church of England advice is [here](#). It will continue to be updated from time to time, so make sure you are using the latest revision. (That is just my advice, of course.)

### **Living in Love and Faith Taster Day – 16 September**

We have arranged a half day online session for clergy and laity, introducing the LLF course and the materials available. This is aimed at those who may be leading the engagement in their church. It will offer the chance to discuss the course material, your hopes and fears, and anything else you wish, with your fellow clergy and lay leaders. Eeva John, the national enabling officer for the LLF project, will lead the session, which is on 16 September from 9.30am to 1pm. For further information or to book places please email [Alex Tolley](#). There is no requirement to attend this session if you are not comfortable doing so; all the information you need is on the Online Learning Hub accessible via the diocesan website [LLF page](#).

### **Sermons and Psalms**

I have now recorded sermons on the Sunday Gospel readings, and midweek meditations on psalms, through to the end of September. These will continue to appear on the diocesan website and on [my YouTube channel](#). Advance copies of the sermons are available from [Rachel Lomas](#) in my office.

### **Summer Holidays**

I hope you can get away. As I wrote in May, take time to recover, take as long as you need, even extra time off this summer. I'm not counting your days. Have a good time. If necessary, seek my permission (which will be forthcoming) to close church down for a few weeks so you can have a break, or simply offer online material to your people. And, if time off doesn't heal you, talk to a bishop or an archdeacon, or a doctor or a counsellor. We want to help.

With love in Christ

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