

Choral Evensong 10 June 2018

Psalm 37:5

“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”

We are today celebrating a very important moment in the history of our parish.

The announcement today that the Reverend Dr Mike Branscombe, the Associate Rector of St Martin in the Bull Ring, Birmingham, as Priest in Charge of St Andrew's, Cobham has brought to an end an interesting time for the parishes of Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon.

There has been much uncertainty since Robert Jenkins retired in January 2017. The advertisement to fill the vacancy as rector of the United Benefice attracted varying levels of interest and when, at the second attempt, an offer was made, we all held our breath and were disappointed when the successful candidate declined because of personal reasons.

Mike Branscombe will be Priest in Charge of St Andrew's, Cobham, and when the necessary arrangements have been made he will become the Vicar of Cobham and I will become the Rector of Stoke D'Abernon. Last Tuesday the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee recommended the proposal to the Bishop to separate the benefice to allow Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon to become separate benefices and the proposal will go out to PCCs for consultation shortly. Along with this we will be suspending presentation of the patronage which will expedite matters.

So where does that leave us and what does it all mean?

Well, the artificial and unpopular union between Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon will come to an end. I suppose you could liken it to a marriage that was one of convenience and has now come to an end to both partners entire satisfaction. We will remain good friends and will probably continue to do things together like Churches Together and Messy Church. There will be no ecclesiastical barbed wire down the middle of Tilt Road but there will be a sense, in both parishes, that our new- found freedom will be good thing for the working out of the Kingdom of God. We have never been united since the imposition of the arrangement was forced upon Stoke D'Abernon and it could have worse but for the steely and determined negotiations of the then Wardens, Anthony Elliott and James Vickers, to whom a debt of gratitude is owed by us all.

It means that we are going to have to look very closely at all aspects of our church life as we show the Diocese that we can exist alone. We have done very

well so far but there is no room for complacency or a false sense of victory. This measure has come about through pastoral need and I believe the time is right and that it is the right decision.

We are in a good place- the Hall as an outlet of parochial activity and community focus is beginning to bear fruit. The Befriending initiative is gaining in momentum each time it is held, our parish lunches are popular and the Hall Communion service held before lunch attracts those who find it difficult to get to the church from the lych gate (although this problem is now solved by the gift of the golf buggy which is proving popular!)

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The Vision Day objectives are beginning to be met. Not only has the Befriending initiative begun but we are now working with some of our young people and their parents as we prepare them to receive Holy Communion prior to Confirmation. Classes of preparation are being held on Monday evenings looking to admit the five young people at the Family Service on 8th July. Our relationship with Parkside is growing closer as we explore ways of working more closely. Work among and with young people is important and particularly with our singers as Robert introduces some young singers to our choirs.

The music aspect is very important to St Mary's and no more so than today. We are very privileged to have such a rich musical heritage, and as a part of our vision programme we have instituted a series of lunchtime concerts and more musical treats which will attract new people to St Mary's, to say nothing of our growing relationship with the Yehudi Menuhin school, whose next concert here you will see advertised in the pew sheet you were given when you arrived. This evening's Choral Evensong is an example of how much importance we place upon fine music and look forward to them being part of our regular pattern of worship. Thank you to all who have given us this magnificent service this evening.

“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”

Why is all this happening almost at once? I have no answer to this but am sure that things happen in God's time and not our time. If you think me naïve, so be it! I make no apology and offer no answer.

The Edwardian era, whose church music we remember tonight, was an exciting period in British history. Gone were the dark days of the end of Victoria's reign.

A new and bright era dawned. So, in a sense, we in Stoke D'Abernon find ourselves in a bright new era beginning today.

We know we have a challenge before us the Edwardians did as they faced the challenges of the 20th Century.

As the psalmist reminds us;

“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”

Amen.