



**ASHFORD TOWN PARISH  
MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM RECTOR  
September 2021**

*'... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 3.13b-14)*

September began for me with a 'Vision Day' for our Parish Leadership Team. We started out with the question: "What does God want our parish to be like in 2026 – how different would this be from now?" Having shared our responses to that, we went on to explore together a vision for our parish five years from now, and what kind of priorities would follow from it. More on that another time!

The global pandemic that continues to unfold has taught us to be cautious about making plans for the future. Some humility about the limits of our knowledge and control is a good thing. James has some stern words on this subject in his letter: 'Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that"' (James 4.13-15).

The danger is that the pandemic has also sapped our capacity for hopeful imagination, and closed our minds to the new things that God may be wanting to do with us and through us. We easily become fearful, anxious, and discouraged. But that's not how we are called to live as followers of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever happens, we are to keep 'straining forward to what lies ahead', as Paul puts it. So what is this 'goal' we press on towards? Paul has explained it a few verses earlier: 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead' (Phil. 3.10-11). We need to have our eyes fixed on that hope – being with Christ, fully and completely.

For Paul, there's no tension between hope for life with Christ beyond death, and rejoicing in life with Christ here and now – they go together. Can we say with him, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection?' If so, we might also be led to ask: what would our lives look like – in our churches, in our parish, if we knew Christ and the power of his resurrection, more fully, more deeply, than we do now? And it's perhaps there that we should be looking for the answer to the question with which we started our Vision Day. That's the change God wants to see in us, in our churches, in this parish.

It will be a change. Yes, the ways in which God has been at work with us and spoken to us in the past help us to see the future God has for us; he is faithful. But what God has prepared for us is so much more than anything we have known before. We don't need to be burdened by nostalgia, or regret about the way things used to be.

And the good news is that 'the power of his resurrection' is stronger than Covid-19, stronger than all that's wrong with the world, stronger than the things that weigh us down and get us down day by day. In that power, we can keep pressing on towards the goal, and keep looking forward with joy and with hope to all that God has prepared for us.

**The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen**