

Epistle to Georgeham and Croyde

Tim, Priest-in-charge, called by Christ Jesus and affirmed by interview and licensed by the Bishop of Exeter.

To the church of God in Georgeham with Croyde, to those baptised in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people together with those from Woolacombe, Ilfracombe, Spreacombe, Buckland, Braunton, Chivenor and Saunton, and everyone who calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- their Lord and ours:

Grace, mercy and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

I daily thank God for you and the grace of God working in and through you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in many ways- in understanding of the gospel and our Lord Jesus Christ, in compassion and empathy, in loving service, in helping and hospitality. In action and character God confirms our testimony about Christ among you.

I thank God for your faith in Christ, and the love of God's people. This faith and love springs from the hope you have found in Christ Jesus. The gospel has already born fruit from your love. Our fellow priest-in-charge in Woolacombe; Sue Oldham a faithful minister in Christ speaks on your behalf and of your love introducing her to Jesus and support of her insofar that she is now ordained as a priest in charge in Woolacombe.

I am encouraged by the work of the Holy Spirit amongst us, obviously in some and gently and subtly in others. Do not be afraid to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God whose nature is peace. Be filled with the Spirit, and continue to sing together and worship our Lord Jesus Christ with psalms and hymns and songs of a spiritual nature. Make music from your heart to the Lord always giving thanks to God our Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our joy and privilege to worship God like this. The spark that was here before has become a bigger flame; I thank those who enable us all to worship in their diligence and sacrifice in making our worship services happen and leading us in this.

Not just our church services but our whole lives are to be worship to God. So therefore let us be with those who know God and do not yet know him, and let us join in with what God is already doing in and around our communities.

I commend to you Chris Coombs who tirelessly works for the gospel. I pray for those I cannot visit at this time. It is Chris who visits them. While Chris may break bread with them in their homes, the ministry of visiting the sick is not Chris' or the priesthood's alone. It belongs to the whole body of Christ which is the church. Go out and love those who are missing from our assembly.

For we were all baptised by one Spirit to be one body, and each of us should have concern for one another, for if one part suffers every part suffers with it, and if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

I commend to you Geoff, a true son of encouragement and Jan who, avoiding attention is also gifted in this manner with support love and encouragement. This gift is not just for the building up of the body of Christ but in their love of God's people who are not yet part of the church, others have come to know something of God. The gift of encouragement is not only for them; eagerly desire this spiritual gift; ask for it and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open to you. Ask again for the gift of encouragement. Geoff and Jan do not use deceit or falsehood, and they do not flatter; their words are rooted in Truth that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. By practicing this gift they have grown in it; they have been faithful with this gift of encouragement and more has been given to them. Therefore do not let unkind or flattering words escape from your mouths, instead ask God for the gift of encouragement to be increased amongst us so that we might build one another up and recognise God at work in each others lives- and even in the lives of those outside of the church so they may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ all the better.

Kind words are like honey- sweet to the soul and healthy for the body. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Therefore go out. Enjoy the communities we live in. Encourage Dan, Sean, Liz and Paul and all those that practice hospitality and love our community that meets in and around our homes. Be salt and light; do not be conformed by the patterns of this world but allow Christ in you to transform this world by being present in it. Love your neighbours. God loves us, treasures us and calls us his children. You are loved. Love yourself and love others as Christ has loved us.

Now concerning the matter of the church of England's stance on same sex relationships. Many have asked me to make a statement on this. Paul in his writings indicates there are many issues to different churches he intends to address in person and not by letter. This is true here. While we witness the issue develop and divide others within the structures of the Anglican Church I hope that we stay together for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. For some eat meat and some refrain, and some drink alcohol and some refrain I hope and ask us not to make each other stumble or do anything against our conscience and convictions rooted in the love of Christ and the gospel we hold dear.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

For three years, beginning in September 2023 the PCC; that is the leadership of the church has voted not to consider any new change or conduct a same sex blessing. Within those three years the persons of the PCC are to undertake

study, to the point that each is satisfied that they have considered recommended materials and come to a personal conclusion to then discuss and vote on the matter as a leadership team.

I am happy to speak in good faith on this issue in person. For many this issue will test the work of the Holy Spirit in us and cause us much anxiety and pain. We will be tested. Our love will be tested. Our joy. Our peace. Our patience. Our Kindness Will Be Tested. Our goodness and generosity. Our faithfulness. Our gentleness and our self control will be tested. But know this. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you not only on this issue. Therefore love one another as Christ first loved us, with sacrificial compassion and not accusations like the one who comes to steal and kill and destroy.

Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly.

Now about the collection of money. This must be counted by two persons. I am grateful to Bob for his diligence in this and Alison also, but a second person must be present and confirm the amount. While I completely trust Bob and Alison we need to support and encourage them in this task, in this case by them not being alone in it. Once again, this is a task suitable for any and all members of the church.

Pray for one another. At all times and in all places gives thanks to the Lord for this great company we keep. For did the Lord our God in Christ Jesus not perform his ministry with those who did it yet believe? So therefore it is a rare and precious thing to have brothers and sisters in Christ and I commend to you especially those in leadership, be it as part of the PCC, or in any other form. Each of us should use whatever gifts we have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in it's various forms.

In particular I thank Lorraine who, while she did not work in the winter season laboured twice as much for the church and for Jesus. Indeed I am grateful and pray for all the Upwards especially Matt who is often absent from Sundays services as he serves in the leadership of the young people and his parents who serve in many ways within the church. Please love Lorraine, as work demands increase as the season continues please look to support, serve and help her in this ministry as a Churchwarden and a pastor and shepherd to so many.

I thank the Lord for Anthony who also has given so much of his life for the work of the gospel in this church. I thank God for Jenny for her leadership and the whole Open the Book and Sing and Shine team. I thank God for Rachel who has taken on the role of safeguarding officer. I thank God for Alison whose diligence and hard work is often unnoticed as is the service of Roger and Julia Wines. For Carole, who does so much behind the scenes, under such challenging personal health issues. I thank God for all those in our church especially those practicing hospitality, particularly to strangers.

I pray that Catherine encounters our Lord God all the more in her study and as a result of it.

Please thank Archdeacon Verena for leading and sharing in the Lord's supper with you in my absence.

I write and submit this before our baby that is our second child arrives although I understand it may be read after the event. I pray I can be with you again soon, but I ask that you pray for the new child, Nathan, Billie and myself as we experience a time to microwave meals and a time to refrain from sleep for more than an hour at a time, a time to rest and a time to let the tv entertain Nathan, a time to embrace and a time to ask for favours for people to walk the dog for us. I thankyou for your prayers which have been a great encouragement in difficult times in ministry and now are of great encouragement in the exhaustion that comes with the wonder of new life.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen