**Together in Prayer April - May - June 2017**

**Revd Lesley Valiant Diocesan Chaplain Trustee**

The Mother’s Union theme for this year is ‘Faith in Action’. What is faith though? It is a word with many meanings, and can mean faithfulness, trust like those who come to Jesus for healing. It can mean confident hope or belief, and St. Paul uses the word closely with salvation. Faith is a gift God gives us because He is saving us, so we have a relationship with Jesus and become more like Him.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by the water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse- who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings*. Jeremiah 17: 7-10*

Faith in Action is being free to serve. As Christians we are free to do what is right and to glorify God through loving service to others. God brings gifts into our lives much the same way as fruit appears in an orchard- things like serenity, affection for others, compassion, commitment, holiness, and being able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

It is the purpose of the Spirit to nurture ‘the fruit’ in us as we abide in Jesus and maintain a close, day to day relationship with Him.

If we allow God to do this in our lives what a difference it will make to our lives and communities.

**Meditation for the 3 months is Galatians 5: 13-26.**

Prayer: Spirit of God, You place faith within each one of us, faith which is such a simple trust in you, that it is possible for all to receive it. Enlighten us within, O Christ, even in the opaque regions of our being. Amen.

**April - *Love***

The first fruit of the Spirit is ‘love’, and it is the chief distinguishing mark of God’s people. Love, St. Paul tells us, is greater than anything else- miracles, faith, service and so on. Every other fruit proceeds from the first fruit- LOVE.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. *1 Corinthians 13: 4-8*

Love originates, not with us, but with God.

In English the word Love has several meanings. When St. Paul writes in Galatians 5 that ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love’, the word he uses for love is ‘agape’. This is the love that we are invited to experience and demonstrate when we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, it is not a ‘general feeling’ kind of love but a specific kind of love that comes from the heart of God and is seen exemplified in Jesus. Agape love is not a give and take kind of love, a love that is reciprocal: it is a love that descends from above and is showered on the deserving and the undeserving. Everything God does is motivated by love. As we dwell deeply in God we find we are changed so that Love becomes the compelling motive and passion in our lives.

As we approach Easter, meditate on these words:- For God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*. John 3: 16*

Prayer: Father God, help me to receive, grow and rest in your love,

so that I in turn may pour it out on others. Amen.

9th April: Palm Sunday

14th April: Good Friday

16th April: Easter Sunday

27th April: Cathedral Prayer Time 12 Noon in St Gabriel’s Chapel.

**May** - ***Joy***

The second fruit of the Spirit is ‘joy’, an exuberance about life. The nine qualities listed in Galatians 5 for the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ are not natural attributes that we can manufacture ourselves but supernatural ones which grow and develop in our lives when we allow the Spirit to work in us.

The cross is at the heart of our Christian faith, and sometimes it is difficult following Jesus, but set this against the fact that the second fruit of the Spirit is joy. Many of us have faced suffering to some degree; however we possess a spring of joy within us, which if we allow it, will burst up out of us even in difficult times.

Joy like love is the essence of our faith in God. After celebrating the glorious Easter morn when the empty tomb takes away the empty gloom, we have every reason to rejoice at what God has done for each one of us.

Christian joy is independent of circumstance as it is there in the believer even when facing life’s trials, strength and health are failing, or loneliness comes. It is there in those enduring pain or persecution. That joy can prove triumphant, is a glorious fact. We may not initially feel or know it, but it is there upholding and supporting us and will eventually break through.

Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

*Ps 30:5*

Jesus said: I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*. John 15: 11*

Joy comes from being right with God, close to Jesus and His JOY.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that your Spirit touches the depths of my life, which allows me to experience joy even in the midst of struggles. I know that when joy has its roots in You then its fruits will eventually appear. Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

20th May: Pilgrimage from Canterbury to Chilham

25th May: Ascension Day

 Cathedral Prayer Time

**June** - ***Peace***

The third fruit of the Spirit is ‘peace’. It corresponds to the Hebrew word *shalom*. The word ‘peace’ here is not about the absence of war or hostilities but about completeness and harmony, confident assurance in any circumstance. This peace is divinely infused - a glorious consequence of God’s presence in us. The peace of God moves into our hearts and lives to restrain hostile forces like fear, sin, uncertainty… and offers comfort in place of conflict.

Jesus offers this completeness to every one of His followers:- Peace I leave you; my peace I give you….Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. *John 14: 27*

Christian peace is not about passivity or withdrawal; it must be a living peace. The word peace appears in the New Testament 88 times, and appears in every book except one. This makes it a book of PEACE.

The peace that Jesus brings into our lives:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus… And the God of peace will be with you*. Philippians 4: 4-7, 9*

Prayer: God of mercy, you are calling us to be bearers of peace, of love and of joy for those around us. Make us faithful to this calling, and trustworthy ambassadors for Christ in all we say and do.

May we know your closeness and presence now as we go out today in your name and for your glory. Amen.

4th June: Pentecost

11th June Trinity Sunday

29th June: Cathedral Prayer Time 12 noon.