

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020



January is here again with its promises and regrets set alongside that sense of new beginning: perhaps deepened this year as we move into the 2020s.

For the third time in recent years, January also brings an opportunity to celebrate and pray for the unity of Christians throughout the world in the Octave (eight days) of prayer for Christian Unity, beginning on Saturday, 18th January.

Each year, a different part of the Christian world has a hand in designing the Octave and for 2020, the churches in Malta have taken the lead. They have chosen to use their connection with St Paul as a way to highlight important themes for the Christian – and indeed non-Christian world: remembering those at sea, encouraging hospitality and commemorating enlightenment, generosity and letting go of things we're attached to. Paul – by that time a prisoner – was being transported in shackles by sea to Rome when his boat was shipwrecked on an island reputed to be Malta. Along with the other occupants of the boat – Roman guards, prisoners, sailors, Paul was welcomed to Malta with great kindness and proceeded to bring the Christian faith to the Maltese people.

By repute, Paul was a man of extremes – a persecutor of Christians when he was “Saul of Tarsus”; before his conversion on the road to Damascus. And an equally fervent Christian once he had (literally, as we understand it) “seen the light”. He had the privilege of being born a rabbinical Jew and a Roman citizen; and yet after his conversion, he travelled extensively and lived very frugally, relying on the hospitality of the poor.

Is St Paul a saint for our times: rather too fervent – “shouty” and lacking in tolerance?

Of course, St Paul's life was much more nuanced than this. He was always faithful to his Jewish roots but pressed strongly for the early Christian church to embrace the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. And his writings to the communities he visited around the Mediterranean show great tenderness and real care for them.

In the Mease Valley, we will mark the Octave with parishioners of the benefice praying alongside our Catholic friends in Haunton and parishioners from All Saints in Lullington. We plan a joy filled celebration **starting at 4.00pm on Sunday 19th January 2020 at St Andrew's church, Clifton Campville**. After our service, there will be refreshments served for you in the church. You would be so very welcome, and we look forward to seeing you.

Please put this date in your diary. If you haven't been to church for a while, this is an opportunity to join what we hope will be a large number of like-minded people in a service where everyone is a visitor.

Anthony Mason and Revd. John Grice