

Dear Friends,

This is my first chance to greet all the readers of Seek since becoming Vicar of St Mark's on the 6th September. First, may I thank all who have given me and the family a warm and supportive welcome, both in the church, and in the wider community. (For those whose first encounter with us was when we were desperately searching for our straying dog, one Sunday afternoon, you may be interested to know that he had taken himself to The Red Bull, where he had already discerned that a friendly welcome is to be found!). It is a great privilege to be moving to such a lovely place - a village within the city - and we look forward to our life here very much.

I know there is a long tradition of St Mark's being a church that is at the service of the community, especially through the use of the Community Centre. I should like to make sure that tradition is continued, whilst always asking the question, "Who are the neediest in our community? Are there ways their needs are being overlooked, or could be better served?" If you can help me and members of the Church hear the answers to that question more clearly, I shall be very grateful. I realise that Newnham is, generally speaking, a pretty privileged place - as is Cambridge, as a city. I think it possible that for this reason some areas of need or pain may be more easily overlooked, in the general sense of well-being. Of course, I also realise that there are many active and vigorous forms of social care and voluntary service going on all around us, and Christians have no monopoly on concern. If we can offer what we have - both material, and in terms of time and prayerfulness - in cooperation with others, I believe we shall be carrying out the command of Jesus to love our neighbours.

The other great command for Christians (and Jews, Muslims and Hindus, too, of course), is to love God. St Mark's stands on Barton Road in a very visible place as a "signpost" to this dimension of human life. Sometimes loving God, or even believing in God, is very difficult, or seems meaningless in contemporary life and thinking. And yet, people feel a need to touch something "deeper". This desire shows, often, at times like weddings and funerals, a quest for something "more". We are here to be of service to parishioners at those times, as at all others. We are here to enter into dialogue with the very real doubts and questions there are around, not to bombard people with beliefs in a doctrinaire way, whilst yet witnessing with integrity and humility to what we discover through Jesus Christ, and believe to be true. If this helps some people to discover, or rediscover, Christian faith, that will be a matter of great joy.

I hope the people of Newnham (including its many temporary and international residents) will continue to find St Mark's, above all, a place of welcome during the time of my ministry here, as during the time of previous vicars. Do look out for our notices around the area, and feel free to slip into the church building if you want a time of quietness, even if you wouldn't think of yourself as a "religious" person. If you come to services, I shall do my very best to make sure that people feel at ease and "at home" through the way they are conducted, and I know that the "church family" will extend a very real and warm welcome, too.

I very much look forward to getting to know more people, and to know you better in the months ahead, as I go around the community.

With best wishes,
Your friend and vicar,