

**Reflecting Christ**  
(22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026) – Sarah Butler

**Isaiah 61:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:7**

As we look around the world today I'm sure we all long to hear good news. We see there are many who live in poverty of one form or another. There are many who are broken-hearted. There are many who are captives and who sit in the darkness of oppression. There are many who mourn.

This is not God's vision for the world. Isaiah's prophecy that Victor read to us this morning looks forward to someone who is full of the Holy Spirit, who will tell of God's love, heal the broken-hearted, bring release from sin and everything that holds us captive, and shows the way to a new world of hope and peace. When Jesus read this passage to the people of his home town of Nazareth he told them that, as he was there among them, this prophecy was already becoming a reality. To use our modern jargon you could say he took those words of Isaiah as the basis for his mission action plan. But the incredible thing is that we too have a part to play in that plan.

We've been thinking about the core values that should be the foundation for all that we do, and when we discussed them altogether on St Paul's Day we felt that the value that underpinned all the others was that we should be reflecting Christ, both to one another and to the parish and the wider world.

Welcoming people seemed a good place to start. But what sort of welcome? As you come in through the church entrance you have to step over or walk across a stone that has a quote from Paul's letter to the Romans (15:7) engraved on it "Welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed you" (for the glory of God). Another translation of that verse is "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Welcoming is not just about the way we welcome people at St Paul's (although we do do that) but a reminder that the reason we do it is that God welcomes and accepts us. Jesus reflects God's character perfectly – God welcomes everyone without exception - and we aim to reflect Jesus, however imperfectly, so it's a sort of double reflection, just as when I go to get my hair cut next week, the hairdresser will hold up a mirror behind me and that is reflected in the mirror in front of me, so that I can see the back of my head.

During Experience Easter one of the scenes we acted out was when Jesus washed his disciples' feet at the Last Supper. One of the visiting adults, perhaps someone's Dad or a teacher had a foot washed, much to the amusement of the children. We explained that Jesus told his disciples that they must care for one another, and serve one another just as he had done by taking the place of a servant and washing the feet of his friends. We reflect Jesus when we care for one another. He always noticed when people were in need, and helped those who were especially vulnerable, or going through a hard time, just as we should do.

I like to take photos of reflections in water. They often make interesting shapes and are sometimes wobbly and wavering so that it's difficult to see exactly what the reflection is of. If the water is still with no ripples it can be a strong reflection but the image is never as clear as the person or thing being reflected. How can we be a good reflection of Jesus? It seems an impossible task. But St Paul helps us to understand this in his letter to the Corinthian church. He reminds them of when Moses encountered God. Moses came so close to God that his face shone with the reflected glory of God. It was so bright that he had to put a veil over his face until the effect wore off and the brightness faded. Paul then says:  
"And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit". (2 Cor 3:18)

So here's the thing: in order to reflect Jesus we need to be transformed. Then, instead of being something temporary that soon fades, followers of Jesus will start to reflect him more and more as they are transformed into his likeness – it's an ongoing process that happens not by our own will or effort, but because of the action of the Holy Spirit within us.

But Paul goes on to say "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." What does he mean? God has revealed the truth about who Jesus is but not everyone will recognize it. When people come to know Jesus it's like finding treasure or a light shining in a dark place. It is this treasure that Paul and his companions want to pass on to others. But he knows that some people will not accept it. Nevertheless rather than trying to promote themselves, they continue to preach Jesus with the power that God gives them. As we look outside the church building to our parish and beyond, we need to be able to say as Paul did "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (4:5)

Paul says this light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, is contained in jars of clay – in mere humans. A clay pot is a very basic and ordinary container, made from earth, but it can contain something precious. It's not the clay pot that is important, but the light within it. God has given us the precious knowledge of Jesus and his presence with us. He has given us the message of forgiveness and hope. This is treasure from God, so good that we want others to have it. We want to make Christ known. Like Paul we also want to encourage each other to know and follow Jesus more deeply and to help people with no faith to meet him for the first time. We can only reflect Jesus if we come close to him which we can do in prayer and as we worship.

If we are going to reflect Jesus we have to be prepared to go the extra mile, to learn to love as he loved and, as we near Good Friday, we are reminded that Jesus told his disciples "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." That is why we need to be led by the Spirit who brings freedom and transformation. God loves his whole creation so much that he sent Jesus to free us from sin and everything else that enslaves us. And then we

have the freedom to love God wholeheartedly and to love our neighbour who is made in the image of God.

He transforms us from within as individuals and as his body, the church. The death and resurrection of Jesus means that when God looks at us he sees people who are being transformed into the likeness of his Son.

To conclude: we reflect Christ, not because we here at St Paul's Beckenham have decided to have it in our Vision Statement, but because God is transforming us and the whole of his church and everything he has made, into a new creation, through Jesus. Quite simply: God's vision statement is one word: Jesus. The one who died for our sake and rose again. He is the Word of transforming love that God speaks to his world.

Thanks be to God!