

## CLERGY LETTER – April 2011

*'I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'* (Ephesians 3.17-19).

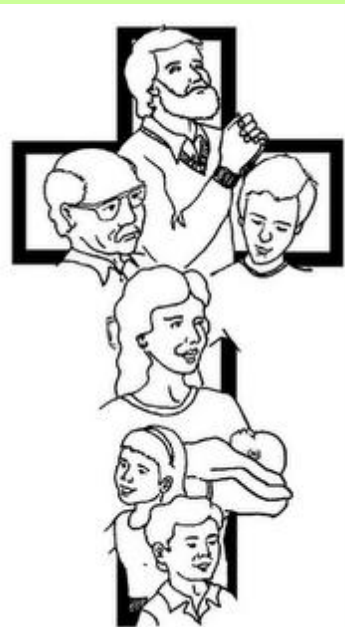


As Lent progresses to Easter, and as the vacancy in this parish progresses towards its end (see page 2, and pages 14-15 for an article by our Rector-to-be Rev John Bleazard) we can learn much from St Paul's prayer for the Church in Ephesus, from chapter 3 of his letter to the Ephesians. In particular, he prays that they – and so we - may be able to grasp how **'wide and long and high and deep'** the love of Christ is.

**How wide...** So wide that all types of people are included, throughout the world, all personalities, all kinds of lifestyles. It is so easy in a church to become accustomed to our way of doing things ('because we've always done it that way'). One of the joys of our involvement in the Life Expectancy Wirral initiative (for more on that, see John Smith's article on page 5) is that we can learn from the church we are linked with - Laird Street Baptist – who are ministering in a totally different social context, how they approach things differently from us.

God's love in Christ is so wide that it embraces people whatever their age, race, gender, sexuality, churchmanship, political opinion, background. May our life as a church be truly inclusive of all. Let us ensure we remove any barriers we maybe inadvertently place in people's way, to allow all to experience a true welcome within our churches, so that we can increasingly show to others and experience for ourselves how wide the love of Christ is.

**How long...** So long that it lasts for all of eternity – you can't get any longer than that! In a world where fashions for clothes change every season, where the prevailing length of women's skirts go up and down almost annually, where computer and telephone technology moves ahead so rapidly that within five years equipment is regarded as completely out of date. In such a rapidly changing world, it can feel as



though we want to hang on to the way things used to be done in the church as the only bastion of traditionalism, forgetting that what we see as 'traditional' today was a new innovation just a few decades ago. But God's love lasts for all eternity. That is a time-frame way beyond what we can conceive or imagine. That is a tremendous constancy amid whatever change and upheaval the rest of our life brings. Let us increasingly grasp that for ourselves.

**How high...** There is a mysterious quality to the love of Christ, which makes it hard to describe in words or to pin down. It reaches right up to the highest heavens. Let us ensure in our prayers, in our worship, that we do not limit our

expectations of the enormity of God's grace at work within our day-to-day lives.

People have often commented how there is a special quality to the atmosphere in our churches, whether there are other people around, or whether the buildings are empty. This can sometimes be called a 'numinous' quality. Something spiritual, quite different to anything logical or anything emotional, something which is of God, is sensed in a place where Christians have prayed and worshipped for centuries. Let us ensure whatever we do that we value, and never lose that numinous atmosphere.

**How deep...** God's love is so deep that it digs right down to the darkest recesses of our hearts, and it goes beneath any divisions people have placed in their lives or in the life of the church. That includes divisions between different perspectives within the Church of England, sometimes called 'churchmanship' (such as 'Evangelical', or 'Catholic', or 'Liberal'). It also includes divisions between different Christian denominations. It also includes divisions that have appeared recently in the Church of England over the legislation allowing for the ordination of women as Bishops (which our PCC will be discussing in May, in order to report to our deanery synod, who in turn will feed back to our Diocesan synod). God's love is so deep that any distinctions between traditions or between ways of expressing our faith are meaningless in comparison to the impact of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf on the cross. Indeed, the whole reason Christ died on the cross – and rose again – was to wipe away the need for such divisions and distinctions. For, as Paul wrote in a different letter, in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female' (Galatians 3.28).

Therefore, as we approach Easter, let us draw close to God in a fresh way, that we may increasingly grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - so that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

*Tina Upton*