

You might have spotted that you've got a kind of ticklist in your service sheets today—I realised that I throw quite a lot of ideas around in this talk, so I thought I'd give you some pictures to tick off along the way – if you want to, have a look at them now and make sure you've got a pencil ready so you're ready to tick off the picture when you hear that word – we'll see how you did at the end....

Well, Happy St Swithun's celebration Day everyone – actually St Swithun's day is on Thursday and as far as google can tell me, there's a 43% chance of rain on St Swithun's day this year, so we might be looking at some wet days ahead of us.....

I don't know if you knew that I'd been in isolation last week? One of the children in a class at work tested positive for covid and so everyone who'd been in that class had to shut themselves up in their houses for ten days. All the children and staff are fine, but can you imagine me in isolation? Let's say it doesn't feel very natural to me to stay behind closed doors and not interact with people face to face for ten days.

But we've all had strange times like this recently, haven't we, and we've all been finding ways to get ourselves through.

And probably like many of you, as family, we've been trawling through Netflix and Disney plus to find family films, and here's a quote from one of my favourites that I decided to inflict on my family recently.

What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same and nothing that you did mattered?

Wow! That's a pretty gloomy way to start what should be an uplifting, spiritual talk in church – especially on this – our special day – St Swithun's Day – the celebration Day of the Saint our lovely church is named after.

Well, just before we go on, I'm going to remind you about St Swithun's Day – just for the people who maybe don't know – if you have heard this before - - you can spend the time while I'm explaining it trying to guess which movie I took that quote from before.

So the idea is that if it rains on St Swithun's Day then there'll be 40 days of rain straight-away after that – I mean weird but.....with some of the weather we've been having recently that doesn't seem so far-fetched....if you're desperate to find out more about the man himself, there's plenty of information online...

Right, so that's our St Swithun's Day recap done – has anyone guessed the movie I quoted from earlier? It kind of goes along with the weather idea .....

What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same and nothing that you did mattered?

It was Groundhog Day – the reason for this apart from the fact that it is a pretty awesome film that pretty much stands the test of time, is that the idea behind the film Groundhog Day has been mentioned quite a lot during these strange times.

So, the ritual of Groundhog Day is a bit more elaborate than our St Swithun's Day idea, basically, if the Groundhog puts its head out of its den and sees its shadow, then it will go back into its home and

that will be the start of Spring. If it doesn't see its shadow then there'll be six more weeks of Winter .... So similar to our St Swithuns Day idea then – but a bit more elaborate.

But in the film, the main character – a weather man called Phil Conners played by Bill Murray - doesn't just get stuck in 6 weeks of Winter, he has to relive **exactly the same day** over and over and over again. Just him – stuck in the same day with exactly the same events going on around him.

So the alarm clock goes off, he wakes up and he's in the same day as he was yesterday – everybody's doing the same things except him. He gets to the end of that day, he goes to bed, alarm clock goes off, he wakes up and he's in the same day as he was yesterday, - everybody's doing the same things except him and he gets to the end of that day, he goes to bed wakes up....and well, you get the picture....

And that's why people started mentioning the film – as we went into our second year of lockdown, and the days stretched before us in what seemed to be an endless unchanging way, people started to talk about Groundhog Day – they felt that just like Phil Conners in that film. It seemed like each day they were living was pretty much the same day over and over and over.

So what's special about this film – and what can it teach us as a church community?

On the surface of it, and certainly at the beginning of the film there seems to be very little we can learn from it. You see, Bill Murray's character. Phil Conners, starts out as kind of an awful person. And as he lives the same day in the same place over and over and over again, he realises he can do anything and there will be no consequences... he goes and deliberately smashes up cars, robs a bank and eats the highest fat hugest breakfast he possibly can, knowing that whatever he does, he won't have to suffer for it because he'll wake up the next morning and get to live the same day, no matter what he does.

Well, what about us during these times of corona virus?

I mean, we didn't go to the extremes of Phil Conners in GroundHog day, - well, I don't think any of us committed bank robbery or had any car chases during lockdown, but just like him, at the beginning of the crisis, we focussed on ourselves – and how this strange new situation was affecting us personally - Do I have enough toilet paper and hand-sanitiser? - How many bottles of wine/ teabags/ bags of self-raising flour should I get to see me through to next Tuesday.....? It is so easy to jump to self-preservation in circumstances that seem out of our control.

So, let's take a look at today's reading and see how what we learn in this passage from John links to all of this.

Well, in today's reading, Jesus says, *'If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.'*

There is a whole lot of love in this reading – in fact, who can do a really quick count to see how many times the words love and loved comes up in the reading? I counted 9.

And what would you say the big command is in the reading?

Yeah – not just **love each other**- easy enough – **but love each other as I have loved you**. Love each other as Jesus loves us- Maybe – not quite so easy? What do you think?

Well, a few weeks ago we heard the story of Jesus and His disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee – and who can remember what happened to the boat?

And who can remember what Jesus said to the disciples then?

*He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”*

Remember, we need faith the size of a mustard seed to be able to follow Jesus’ ways.

And in the film, the hero eventually becomes a more selfless person – he realises that the only way he can stay happy in this strange new existence is to make other people’s lives better through his actions. It is a story about the incredible, painstaking, patience-testing process of learning and failing. He realises that the only way to survive in this never-ending time-loop is by kind actions, is by being a part of a community, is by starting to work not to benefit himself, but for the benefit of others – as he gets to know and care about people, he guides them through relationship problems, helps them with health issues, and listens and cares and he becomes happy.

And doing that takes commitment and it takes time but it also takes the faith to know we can love others because we are loved by God. If we know we are loved we can learn to share our gifts. Before her PT exam, Juliet was telling me about some of the exercises she could be tested on – did you know there’s a type of push-up called the inchworm? It looks like a pretty amazing test of strength-I didn’t even know there were different types of push-ups. But here’s the thing – I’m guessing there was a day when just doing a one or two normal push-ups was tricky for her, but she did it, and now she’s helping so many people with their fitness goals and answering their questions about God along the way.

So let’s go back to our GroudHog day quote:

What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same and nothing that you did mattered?

In the film Phil Connors develops the faith to realise that tiny acts of love can make huge differences realising that his actions, however small, do matter.

Juliet’s first push-up was an act of faith – a first action, and without action there cannot be change. If we don’t take action, driven by our faith, we’ll be stuck in our own GroudHog Day and tomorrow is going to look a lot like today.

With the tiniest changes we can be shown the power of our faith, we can be guided by Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit. We can’t help being filled with His love. And we can’t help making every day meaningful by passing that love on to others.

.....Amen