

# WEEKLY SERMON

[communicate@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:communicate@blackburn.anglican.org)



## Be stirred up to help others this Christmas

*Christmas is coming the goose is getting fat,  
Please put a penny in the old man's hat  
If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do  
If you haven't got a ha'penny, God bless you.*

Christmas is most definitely coming, we are into the season of Christmas Fairs and Christmas Markets where people can buy all those essential things they never knew they needed; the perfect Christmas present for that person who is oh so difficult to buy for and, of course, sample mulled wine and street food, without which no Christmas market is complete.

This coming Sunday in the church Calendar is the last Sunday of the church year and was once known as 'Stir up Sunday', and the special prayer said on that day began, 'Stir up O Lord the wills of thy faithful people....'.

It is said that in Victorian times the cooks and housekeepers who were at church on that day took that as a reminder to go home and make the delicious Christmas puddings. It was usually a day of family celebration with the children joining in the stirring, and making a Christmas wish. Of course, the prayer isn't really about stirring puddings, but about stirring up people to look at how they live their lives.

In one of the Bible readings for this Sunday Jesus talks about giving to the poor and the needy, and reminds his listeners that giving to those in need is something we must do for our fellow human beings. It is an indicator of how we are responding to Christ, his love for us and our relationship with him.

Throughout the Christian Church we are encouraged to 'respond to human need through loving service'. Christmas can be a difficult time for many, and that is nothing new. The rhyme I used at the beginning is probably Victorian and talks about the charity of the Christmas Season, particularly for those who couldn't afford the customary Christmas Goose.

In those days people begged by holding out their hats for a penny from people walking by, if you didn't have a penny then you could drop in a half penny (ha'penny). If you didn't have even a ha'penny, then you were as poor as the beggar and needed God's blessing. A scenario we are still familiar with today, as people struggle to put food on the table in a 'normal' week, never mind at Christmas.

Christmas is coming, a time to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, and in preparation we pray 'Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people', that we may all receive what we need, and give what we can, and that God may bless us abundantly; whether or not we have a ha'penny.

**Rev Carole Garner, Associate Priest of the parish of Oswaldtwistle**

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