

Saints ALIVE

The magazine of:
All Saints, Leighton Buzzard
St. Nicholas, Hockliffe
St. Michael's, Eggington
St. Michael and All Angels,
Billington
The Good Shepherd, Sandhills

March 2022

70p



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All Saints Leighton Buzzard

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This our story...

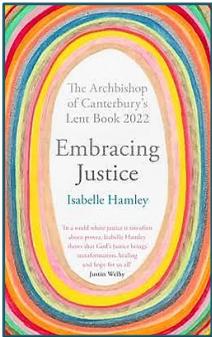
By Rev'd Cate Irvine



This month we begin our journey through the season of Lent. Lent is such a special time as we prepare for our Easter celebrations by a time of self-examination, penitence, self-denial, study and acts of service. In the words of an ancient hymn:

*“Now is the healing time decreed
for sins of heart and word and deed,
when we in humble fear record
the wrong that we have done the Lord.”*

It is a time when we strive to order our lives and pattern them on Jesus, uniting ourselves to his suffering and death so that we can share with him in his resurrection life. We seek healing for ourselves and for the world through our repentance and desire to change our lives.



This year at All Saints we have chosen the theme “This is our Story” to lead us through Lent. I hope that it will be a reminder to let the story of Jesus shape our lives. But Lent is not just about connecting our lives to the life of Christ, it is about a deeper connection to the world in which we live, the world for which Christ died. Our Lent book this year, “Embracing Justice” by Isabelle Hamley, makes the point really well. She reminds us that stories confront us with the particularity of people’s lives. It is much harder to ignore acts of injustice when you really think about the individual people who are suffering because of them.

Sometimes when we make generalisations we can forget the people whose lives are touched by our actions. That may be directly by things that we say and do, or it could be in the way we choose to spend our money, the food and clothes that we buy, things that connect us to people that we will never meet. The same is true for our charitable giving. We may never meet them, but real people can have their lives improved or even transformed by our generosity.

So as we go through scripture in Church and in our Lent book this year we will be thinking about all those connections between our lives as we pledge ourselves once again to live lives of humble service for the sake of the one who gave up everything for us.

I pray that this Lent will be a special time for you, a time for spring-cleaning our souls as the days lengthen and we look to the future. May the story of our resurrected Lord draw you ever deeper into his love and give you the courage to follow him into the wilderness. May you find the strength to make real change in your life as we begin to see that the stories we share connect us to one another, the world we live in, and to the love of God that makes and keeps us all.

Mother Cate

Our present pattern of services across the Ouzel Valley Team

All Saints

Sundays:

Please note new times which allow for cleaning between services

8am Holy Communion

9.30am Parish Eucharist

11.30am

1st & 3rd Sundays: All Age Service

2nd & 4th Sunday Holy Baptism

6pm Said Evening Prayer

3rd Sunday: followed by Benediction

Weekdays:

Holy Communion

7.30pm Tuesday

(Service of Healing on 3rd Tuesday)

10.00am Thursday

9.00am Saturday

Morning Prayer: St. Hugh's Chapel

9.00am Tuesday – Friday

St. Barnabas, Linslade

Sundays:

8am Said Eucharist

10am Parish Eucharist

6pm Evensong

www.linslade-parish.org.uk

St. Leonard's, Heath & Reach

Sundays:

8am: Holy Communion

11am Holy Communion (in church & via Zoom)

1st Sundays: Family Service

Tuesdays: 7pm Holy Communion

Morning Prayer via Zoom:

9.00am Monday - Saturday

www.saintleonardschurch.com

St. Michael's, Eggington

9.30am 1st & 3rd Sundays: Holy Communion

St. Nicholas', Hockliffe

9.30am 2nd Sundays: Family Communion

4th Sundays: Holy Communion

St. Michael's and All Angels, Billington

11.15am Holy Communion

Good Shepherd, Astral Park Sports & Community Centre, Johnson Drive, Sandhills, LU7 4AY:

Sundays at 9.45am:

1st Sunday: Holy Communion & CGS Juniors

2nd Sunday: 'In the Community', at Astral Park

3rd Sunday: Family Service

4th Sunday: Bring and share breakfast and Holy Communion

Free pop-up café every Sunday from 9.45am

Sunday Saints: for age 3+ year olds, meets during 9.30am Sunday service at All Saints.

All Saints Toddler Time: All Saints every Wednesday during term time, at 9.30am & at 1.30pm. £1.50 per parent / carer & child; 50p extra per child; refreshments included.

ACTIVE: (Senior Youth Group for age 11+) **not meeting at present because of a lack of leaders. If you could help, please contact the office.**

Leighton Young Singers Club: for children in Years 2-6, meets on Fridays at 6.30 - 7.30pm.

Bereavement Café: a support group offering friendship and understanding.

1st Sunday of the month, 2.30-4pm The Spire Coffee Shop, All Saints

Choir Practice: Friday evenings, 6.45 trebles; 7.30 adults.

Bellringers: Practice on Monday, 7.30pm-9.30pm.

Spire Coffee Shop: Tuesday & Saturday 10am-2pm.

Contact Details on Page 2.

News Roundup

All Saints Holiday Club 15th - 19th August – “JUNGLE FEVER “

The leaders have met after 2 years and we are rebooting ourselves. At the moment we are looking for people to work in the groups helping the leader every day for 5 days. If you love children, making crafts, singing and games etc. etc. please do give your name and number to Lindsay in the office. More info for others wanting to attend will go out later. Do think about it, it is a lot of fun!

*** **

Lunch Club will resume from March but please note that as the first Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, for March only, it will be the second Wednesday - March 9th.



*** **

The Coffee Shop will be open for drinks and cakes only, on Fridays 10am – 12noon starting on Friday 4th March.



Worth a smile

A manager, an engineer, and a programmer were driving down a steep mountain road when the brakes failed. After a terrifying few seconds they managed to stop the car by running it against the embankment. Shaken by their narrow escape from death, they got out. The manager said, “We need to organise a committee, have meetings, exchange ideas, and then develop a solution.” The engineer disagreed, “No that never works. I will take apart the brake system, isolate the problem and correct it.” Then the programmer said, “You are both wrong. First, we need to push the car back up the hill, get back in, and see if it happens again.”



When a minister rehearses his sermon, is he practising what he preaches?



The minister came to see me the other day. He said that at my age, I should be thinking of the hereafter. I told him, “Oh, I do it all the time. No matter where I am – in the bedroom, upstairs, in the kitchen, or down in the basement – I ask myself, ‘Now, what am I here after?’”



A baby-sitter is a teenager acting like an adult, while the adults are out acting like teenagers.



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Parish Registers

Holy Matrimony, January:

No weddings

Holy Baptism, January:

9: Erith Lily Hardy; 23: Reggie Rox Terry Wisdom; 30: Thea Pearl Nuamah

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'

R.I.P. January:

10: Charles Cope at Berton; 11: Andrew Wood at St. Mary's; 12: Karen Summerfield at All Saints, Elizabeth Kicul at St. Leonard's; 18: Terence Spencer at All Saints; 19: John MacLennan at St. Mary's; 21: Gwenda Burley at All Saints; 25: James Hewstone at St. Barnabas; 26: Martin King at Berton; 27: Rosalie Preston at Berton

'Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'

Years Mind, March:

2: Frederick Fleming, Cecil Cleverley; 3: Madge Taylor, Betty Wille; 4: George Perry, Mary Dimmock; 5: Bunny Winter; 7: Beryl Button, Ivor Prewett, Audrey Cooper; 8: Alfred Bolton; 9: Norman Rumbelow, Richie Prince, Raul Montanana, Dorothy Cleverley; 10: Florence Waddington; 11: Marian Wallis, Julia Bicknell; 12: Margaret Nash; 13: Sylvia Allsop; 15: Arthur Robinson, Bertha Raymond; 16: Walter (Jim) Dell, Laura Fox; 17: Rodney Austin, Alfred Bates; 18: Amy Rumbelow, Angela Slade; 19: Paul Hayes; 20: Cora-Anne Ingram; 21: John James Frank Scammell, Laura Maskell, 21: Peggy Heyward; 23: Susan Lennard; 28: Beth Durrington; 30: Norman Barnard, Richard Greensted, Malcolm Alder



LEIGHTON BUZZARD MUSIC LIVE PROFESSIONAL CONCERTS Saturday 26th March 2022 at 7:30PM in Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre

A solo recital by the talented young Latvian pianist

Antonina Suhanova

Antonina is supported by Making Music's Philip and Dorothy Green Award for Young Concert Artists.

Programme to include sonatas by Beethoven, Prokofiev, & Berg



Please note: Tickets will not be available on the door, and must be pre-ordered either

at the box office downstairs in the library; or via [TicketSolve](https://www.ticketserve.co.uk)

Please see links on the website: www.lbmusic.co.uk

Leighton Buzzard Music is a registered charity no: 1183681

Pulford VA Lower School

Head Teacher: Mr Dave Heather

Office Manager: Mrs Alison Quick

Tel: 01525 372188

Website: www.pulfordschool.org

A church school for
a whole community



Once again, we're half-way through the academic year, returned and refreshed from the February half-term holiday. Looking back, we have had an "interesting" few weeks, with a number of staff and children being affected by COVID19. This has called for great flexibility across the staff team as people recover, but, thankfully, those infected have not been badly affected.



We have been blessed with being able to return to worship at All Saints church. Prior to Christmas, we had our beautiful services, including the lighting of Christingles for Key Stage 2. On 2nd February, we were able to celebrate Candlemas on the actual day, including a lovely candle-lit rendition of the Nunc Dimittis by a small KS2 choir. On both occasions, it was wonderful to be able to share the children's joy with so many parents able to join us in person.

The last day of half-term also saw us say goodbye to a much-loved and long-serving member of the staff team. Sue Bunn, who has been with Pulford School for twenty years, celebrated her retirement (and big birthday!) with a low-key coffee-and-cake celebration

in the park. We will miss her dearly and send her our love and best wishes for a long, healthy and happy retirement.

This term, we are delighted that Luke Dunstan, whom the children know well through PE, has taken on the lead role within our Little Saints before and after-school clubs. We have seen an increase in numbers, with Luke leading themed activities each week. Luke also took a small group of children to the local lower schools' gymnastics competition, where we were all proud of how well they did.

Looking forward, Pancake Day is eagerly anticipated. The children hugely enjoy the races on the playground, although personally I may be giving it a miss after a previous tumble!

Mr. Webb, Assistant Head





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email: eileennaples50@outlook.com

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On a musical note.....

*“Anything worth thinking about is worth singing about”
(Bob Dylan)*

Worship Leader Philip Nichols offers a musical view from Church of the Good Shepherd:

Do you know the deep secret of the church musicians? It matters not whether you have an organist, keyboard player, lead guitarist, or even if you just sing *a capella*. They are leading you through an exercise that you may well remember for the rest of your life. The theologian Karl Barth reputedly said there was “a song I learned at my mother’s knee: *“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”*

The musicians’ secret is that we are often influenced more by what we sing than by what we hear in the sermon, even if it does have three alliterated points! Many of us can quote (even if not sing) whole songs we have learned by heart either by love or simple repetition. Ask yourself if you can recall Sunday’s sermon points or if you are still humming your favourite tune from the morning?

Music is powerful: it’s strangely true that often I can remember advertising jingles from years past better than I remember the shopping list my wife gave me 5 minutes ago! Songs, tunes, hymns just stick in my head. Whether it’s wonderful poetic lines such as *“O worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness”* or just the simple chorus *“I love you Lord and I lift my voice”*.

Singing can be a theological exercise. As we sing we take on board knowledge that forms and shapes us just as it connects us to our fellow worshippers. In congregation we literally stand together, we sing together and we unite in a common purpose, whether we have chosen a traditional hymn, led on the organ, or the latest worship song played by the band. We learn that worship is a verb: not something done for us but by us. As Paul says in Colossians (3:16) *“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God”*.

When we sing we learn, we internalise: it’s written on our hearts. Even that great preacher Charles Wesley wrote hymns that taught his congregations. Because songs tell stories. Stories of God’s love for us, His promises, His victory, and our love for God and one another.

Now when we sing the 23rd psalm at Church of the Good Shepherd we will probably choose Stuart Townend’s *“The Lord’s my shepherd”* rather than the Henry Baker’s 1868 version *“The King of Love My Shepherd is”*, but they are both rooted in scripture and that unites us all as we sing and worship.

So my prayer is that whatever and however we sing, it won’t be the musicians but, as Graham Kendrick wrote, it will be *“Jesus (who) put this song into our hearts”*.

Philip Nichols

Calendar of Events

2nd March

Ash Wednesday All Saints Holy Communion 10am; Sung Eucharist 8pm



6th March

Services as usual including Messy Mass All Saints 11.30am

Bereavement Support Café Coffee Shop, All Saints 2.30pm – 4pm



9th March

Lunch Club in the North Transept, All Saints 1pm

Tickets £5.00 available from the Coffee Shop.



18th March

Crafty Natter All Saints 1.30pm - 3.30pm



20th March

Forest Church Pulford 11.30am



25th March

The Feast of the Annunciation to The Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Communion with hymns All Saints 11am



27th March

Mothering Sunday

Services as usual including All Age Communion All Saints 11.30am

Special Services for Lent and Holy Week

2nd March

10am and 8pm

The 8pm service will also be on our YouTube Channel

Ash Wednesday

Holy Communion with Imposition of Ashes



11th, 12th, 13th April

8pm

Holy Week

Holy Communion with sermon (*Preacher Bishop Richard*)

14th April

10am

7:30pm

Maundy Thursday

Holy Communion

Sung Eucharist of the Last Supper (*followed by Vigil*)

15th April

10:45am

12pm

12:45pm

2pm

Good Friday

Ecumenical Walk of Witness (*to be confirmed*)

Reflection and Music

Preaching of the Passion

The Liturgy of Good Friday - Holy Communion

This is our story:



In Lent we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness and his suffering and death on the cross. It is a penitential season that begins with Ash Wednesday when we use ashes to make the sign of the cross on our heads, remembering our sins in sorrow and recognising our complete dependence upon God. Traditionally it is a time of self-examination, penitence, self-denial, and study preparing us to celebrate the resurrection life of Christ that we celebrate at Easter.

You may want to take something up.

This could be extra time for prayer, reading the Bible, other books about faith or whatever helps you to spend more time with God. You might also find it helpful to keep a prayer journal using words or images as you respond to God.

You may want to give something up.

This could be something that you enjoy, or take for granted - it doesn't have to be food! It could be taking time away from your phone or the TV. The point is not to punish ourselves, but to recognise the things we fill our lives with instead of God and to rebalance our lives.

You may want to give back.

Charity may sound old fashioned, but it is about showing love to others. This might mean giving time, money, or both; we are trying to follow Jesus' example of love and service.

Using books and resources

There are lots of good Lent books with reflections to guide you through the season, do look on line or ask for more advice and guidance. You can also download apps for your phone such as the Church of England Daily Prayer and Reflections for Daily Prayer.

40acts.org.uk

40 days, 40 reflections, 40 challenges to make a difference. Join forces with a global, generous community of over one hundred thousand people who have completed the 40acts challenge during Lent.

Lent Groups

This year we are reading "Embracing Justice" by Isabelle Hamley, and there will be groups on Wednesdays at 2pm online, 4pm at the Vicarage and 7:30pm online. If you are interested you can contact the parish office and there will be sign-up sheets in Church. You could also agree to meet with friends to pray or to discuss this or another Lent book.

This month, St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

*and some of the challenges of
maintaining a small, ancient building
for an increasingly secular world*



The present generation is trying to meet the needs of an increasingly secular 21stC community, where few people worship regularly, though many like the idea of having the building available for their special life events – weddings, baptisms, funerals, and Christmas. All buildings benefit from regular use, and one used so rarely faces special challenges, keeping dry being chief amongst them.



Structural and topographical surveys have recently been completed, and in particular have located the course of drainage pipes, blocked over time, and in need of clearing to keep the building sound, and damp-free.

Inside, the timbers under the pew plinths have rotted; and the stone pillars supporting the timbers are disintegrating, causing the whole plinths to sink, taking the vertical boards below the pews down with them, and leaving a substantial gap at the top of the boards. In the light of this, work is being planned, and funds sought, to remedy the drainage, and start thinking about structural and window repairs.



The committee charged with managing all this is ably supported, not only by the church architect Jerry Lander, and Diocesan Advisers, but also by one or 2 local people – not church goers, but people who treasure the building, partly for its heritage and history, and partly because just being able to see it, still there, after all these centuries, brings a measure of comfort, an indefinable sense that all is right with a world that will continue to be, come what may.

Brian Speller & Bob Walters

Good Shepherd, Sandhills

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwarden:

Steve Nixon



**CHURCH of the
GOOD SHEPHERD**

This Shepherd's flock is on the move

After more than eight years at Greenleas School, the Church of the Good Shepherd is moving to Astral Park Sports and Community Centre.

The move will help the church to better meet its aim to 'be at the heart of the community and enable, create and build the wider community'.

Since October 2013, the church has been meeting at a lower school in the Sandhills estate. More than three years ago, the church trialled moving just the second Sunday Messy church event to Astral Park. This was so that mission events such as Messy Church could be held in a place where the community more naturally gathers. More recently, the second Sunday mission event has been the out and about café, which serves free coffee and tea to families and friends watching the Sunday morning teams play football on the Astral Park pitches.

The lower school on Kestrel Way has been a great home for us, with plenty of space and storage. However Astral Park has given us more opportunities to meet people in the wider community.



Rev'd Steve Marsh said "Our second Sunday mission events have been a great success and the Parochial Church Council discern that it is the right time to move all our gatherings to Astral Park. This will make us more visible in the community and allow us to serve the Football Families every Sunday."

From Sunday 6th March, all church gatherings will be held at Astral Park Sports and Community Centre, Johnson Drive, LU7 4AY. A free pop up café will also be available every Sunday morning from 9.45am.

Jo Bellamy

St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Tel: 01525 237633

Churchwardens:

Brian Speller: 210565; Roger Spalding: 07451 877501



What shall I write about?

Facing the terror of the blank piece of paper or the equally blank screen of the computer, brings on the eternal question facing the writer, both amateur and professional, "What shall I write about?"

"Write about what you know." (The advice of Mr Purbrick, English teacher.)

But I don't know anything... Well, I know that the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides. (Thanks, Mr Summersby, Maths teacher.)

But then having said that, where do you go from there? I mean, it was alright for Pythagoras, he had a ready-made audience for his geometrical musings; but I am not sure, dear reader of the parish magazine, that you are entirely riveted to your chair by the thoughts of a four-hundred-word diatribe on the properties of triangles.

I know: a quick perusal of the back copies of the parish magazine is bound to bring some inspiration. This is what I found:

The Nature of Good and Evil: I'm not really qualified, even though I can get pretty nasty if I miss lunch. Though, even that is nothing compared to wrath of TLOTH (the lady of the house) when deprived of her morning toffee latte.

The History of the Parish Church: Even I, master of short, sharp, pithy and elegant text can't manage that in four hundred words.

The Effect of Covid on Village Life: Terrible for those who have had this horrible disease and life disrupting for those who have not. I am thinking neither party really need to be reminded about this.

Growing Up IN X Y Z Village: This one is a bit difficult as I grew up in South London, a veritable concrete jungle. I did not see a live cow until I was given a week's holiday at my Aunt Mable's home in the countryside of Hemel Hempstead, as a reward for passing the exam for entry to The Boys Grammar School I attended.

A Reflection On The Lives Of Various Saints And What They Show Us About Our Lives: Well, who do you choose? There are so many. Even if you discard the ones whose halos are little tarnished, you are still spoilt for choice. And how do you encapsulate the significance of such lives in four hundred words.

And then there are the various articles for and against the use of technology in church services. I am in favour of a quiet life, so will not join the debate.

Therefore, Mr/Mrs/Ms editor, due either to a lack of inspiration or too much choice, I am afraid I will not be submitting an article this month.

Roger Spalding

St. Michael & All Angels, Billington

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Sandra Brewin 373644; Julia Haviland 850380



On 13th February Bishop Richard of Bedford visited St Michael and All Angels. The photograph was taken by Geoff Haviland of the Bishop, his wife Helen and the congregation still remaining in the church when we remembered that we wanted a picture of this notable and happy occasion. The service was a particularly joyful one; somehow everyone felt as if they had been let out of a cage and were free to really enjoy worship again. This must have been at least

partly to do with the presence of Bishop Richard and Helen who we immediately felt in tune with.

The Gospel for the day was from Luke chapter 11, his interpretation of the more familiar Sermon on the Mount. But as Bishop Richard told us, this is known as the Sermon on the Plain. One verse stood out which was taken as the theme for his sermon: *“Woe to you when all speak well of you for that is what the ancestors did to the false prophets.”*

This does not mean that we should stop honestly encouraging one another, we all need to be affirmed in what is good and right. It does mean that we should avoid seeking popular approval by speaking and echoing false ideas which make people feel better and look on us as bearers of good news when the opposite is the case.

Remember the story of the Emperor’s New Clothes? Cheats and profiteers persuaded the Emperor that the invisible garments that he was wearing for his coronation were rich and luxurious, and the crowds accepted these lies. It took a small boy with no axe to grind, no money to make that “The Emperor set out on his royal procession as naked as the day that he was born.”

Sandra Brewin



Coffee Morning
in aid of Florence Nightingale Hospice
Billington Village Hall
Saturday 19th March 10.30-12.30
Bring & Buy, Cake Stall.



St. Michael's, Eggington

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Tel: 01525 237633

Church Officers:

Carol Hart 384634; Paul Brown 751861



In our Churchyard

We have the grave of JOHN LAWRENCE HODGSON, who had lived at Eggington House and was an engineer, inventor and scientist.

He was born in 1881 in Frizinghall, near Bradford, and studied at University College, Nottingham, where he graduated in electrical engineering and then obtained a degree in mathematics. He went on to further develop a sewage control apparatus, which he had previously patented (could this be of use in Eggington?).

During his life, he was concerned with the design and development of apparatuses for the metering of air, steam, town gas and water, and between the years 1904 and 1931, he took out no less than 51 patents.

He was keenly interested in aviation and obtained his Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate in 1917, and invented a method of testing model propellers in a closed channel, which was widely adopted in 1916. One has to remember that this was the start of aerial combat and propellers were made of wood.

Before his death in 1936, he had devoted much thought to the possible engineering developments of the future including tapping into the internal heat of the earth, which is now being used.

On his headstone, the inscription says: *His purpose in life was to direct the great sources of power in nature for the use and convenience of man.*

Also in our Churchyard: Here's a little known fact (well to me at least), in 1967, Eggington won two silver birch trees as second prize in the Best Kept Village Competition. Lady Inglefield, wife of Sir Gilbert, the 640th Lord Mayor of London and at that time, President of the Leighton and District Preservation Society, planted them either side of the north churchyard path, but only one has survived (as can be seen in the picture).

Paul Brown





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What can I do with £10?

Stewardship of our money, time, and talents



This year we are looking at how all of us together can grow our church and community through generous giving and generous living. Giving and Mission are inseparable. As we give, we enable mission. Our mission enables us to share God's love in the world, and this church growth draws us into greater generosity.

"All things come from you, and of your own do we give you."

Everything that we have comes to us through God's grace. We are all given gifts of time, money and abilities but what do we choose to do with them?

Making the most of our talents!

The parable in Matthew 25.14-30 talks about three servants who were entrusted with their master's money while he was away. Two of them managed to double what they had been given, but one was afraid that he might lose the money so he buried it in the ground and returned his one talent just as it was.

Between 20th February and 15th May, we will be offering you £10 and asking you to see what you can do with it...



What could you do?

Here are some ideas for things that might make your £10 grow for the church, but don't let them limit you, feel free to be creative.

You could hold a coffee morning, have a craft or bake sale, host a dinner party or breakfast get-together, have a movie night, or teach or share your skills.

Or pool your resources, and think what you could do together!

Please don't: Increase your £10 by gambling or through any illegal or immoral activities.

Share your ideas:

If you want to let us know what you are doing we can put up information in church for others to see or get ideas. We would be happy to post things on our FaceBook page too!

Gathering our talents in:

On Sunday, 15th of May, we will gather in all that we have achieved together. If you can't be with us that day please bring your giving back before then.

For further advice, and to get your £10:

email our treasurer Mark Jeeves: treasurer@allsaintslb.org.uk
or contact the parish office: 381418; parish@allsaintslb.org.uk

***"The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,
and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.***





Encountering God in ...

... The Wilderness

A place to blossom

by Rev'd Canon Grant Fellows

*A series exploring some of the ways
we encounter God in the world and in our lives.*

Some years ago I led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and, indeed, some of you may have joined me on it. Our visit was focused on two specific areas associated with the life of Christ, namely Jerusalem and Galilee, but there was one place we passed through which, although it was not on the official itinerary, made a deep impression on me and that was the Judean Wilderness.



As you might expect this was one place where you hoped the tour bus would not break down! It's a very arid area with bare peaks and deep ravines and very little vegetation. Nevertheless, there was a stark beauty about it and it set me to thinking about how often this area, and others like it, are mentioned in the Bible.

Generally speaking, biblical writers did not regard areas of wilderness to be particularly inviting places. For many of them the wilderness was where you ended up if you had to go into enforced, or self-imposed, exile. It's the place where you were left to "stew" things over before you returned to civilisation again. For example, in the Book of Exodus, when the Israelites escaped from Egypt they were forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (Old Testament "speak" for "a very long time") as a punishment for their bad behaviour towards God. They remained there until He judged that they were ready to enter the land which He had promised to give to them.

Later biblical writers thought that one day all barren places would be a thing of the past when God established a new world order. Their disappearance would be a sign that people were now in a right relationship with God and so creation itself would be transformed. As the prophet Isaiah puts it:

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly...." (Isaiah 35 v 1).

But was the wilderness as barren and lifeless as some believed? Vegetation might indeed be sparse but perhaps the wilderness could still be a place for flourishing and growth, not in a physical sense, but in a God-given sense. Very often in the Bible, it's the distance from human civilisation that makes the wilderness a place of divine encounter.

Consider again the story of the Exodus from Egypt. It's in the Wilderness of Sinai that Moses leads the Israelites to their meeting with God. It's as a consequence of their wanderings in the wilderness that they come to realise their dependence on God and what it means to be called his Chosen People.

In the New Testament, it's in the Wilderness of Judea (the same one that I passed through on pilgrimage) where John the Baptist called people to repent of their sins so that they could renew their relationship with God. It was to this wilderness that Jesus went at the start of his own ministry to consider the nature of his Messiahship and to discern the will of his Heavenly Father.

Perhaps there are times when we find ourselves "in the wilderness" and I mean this in a figurative rather than a literal sense. Sometimes things happen in life which make us feel as though we are on the outside of the norm. Even in the midst of a busy world we can feel isolated, drained and uncertain. If faith plays a part in our life, then, like the Psalmist, we might wish to cry,

"O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." Psalm 63 v 1.

Sometimes, it's only when our lives feel barren and arid that we find ourselves in the right place to encounter God. When our options are limited perhaps it's then, just like the Israelites in Exodus, that we are ready to receive His spiritual sustenance and the divine guidance that will show us the way out of our interior desert.

Of course there are times when that wilderness experience is not something which is outside of our control but is something we choose of our own volition. Just like John the Baptist and Jesus himself, for whom the physical wilderness gave each of them the space to reflect on God's priorities, so we might also decide that we need to carve out some time away from our usual routines for the same reason. The joy of our interior wilderness is that it can be sited in any location of our choosing. The time we spend there can vary from a few minutes taken out of our day, right up to an extended period of retreat. It may be a place we visit regularly or it may be linked to the devotional practice of a particular season such as Lent.



Whatever it is that either pushes, or prompts, us to go into the wilderness, it will bring us to a place which is not entirely under our control and where we cannot always be sure of what we will find. But, if we are fortunate enough for it to lead to an encounter with the Divine, then we will find for ourselves that our souls, just like the desert of which Isaiah spoke *"shall rejoice and blossom as the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly...."*

Amen

Father Grant

Forest Church

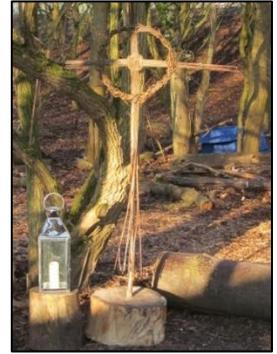
Crossroads are important.



There are those wonderful moments when you're out in the woods and the path you're on comes across another path. Most of the time you can't see those that have walked that path before you; only the footprints that they've left.

Occasionally, just occasionally, you bump into others who are going about things in a slightly different way. These meetings are fascinating, these people are loved by God.

Forest Church at All Saints seems to be sitting on such an intersection as 30 or so meet outside to bask or paddle in creation as the seasons pass.



In late summer we met the worms in the churchyard and joined the Inspire Festival with planting new things. In autumn we took time to say hello to the trees that sustain creation there.

The darkness of winter held time for those in Forest Church who don't have a bedtime to traipse along the tow path for compline in the dark of St Mary's churchyard away from the lights of the town. We walked and talked of faith things.



With shoots of spring not too far off, we returned to the Forest School at Pulfords to remember the Psalmist and watch the clouds that God places in the heavens and to feed the birds in God's name.

We have more evening complines, Sunday activity moments and perhaps maybe a sunrise morning prayer on our horizon. All are welcomed at our crossroad.



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