

Ploughshare April/May 2004
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From the Rector

The last couple of months of my life have, to put it mildly, been 'interesting'! As most of you are aware, a few weeks ago, I was projected, totally unexpectedly, from a doctor's surgery to a bed in the Royal hospital. The right side of my body was not functioning as it should. I am happy to report that things are getting back to normal, although I remain a mystery so far to the medical experts.

Numerous people have asked me to reproduce in print the sermon I gave on my return. Space doesn't allow me to do so fully, but below is the 'edited highlights'.

Lying on a bed in Manvers ward those spiritual questions of "what", "why" and "if" preoccupied my dialogue with God. To these questions God led me to the book of the prophet Habakkuk and chapter three.

Verse 17 - tearful tribulation

In one verse all those things which give us assurance and hope are stripped away. This verse describes a complete and absolute disaster. Habakkuk talks of a time where there appears no hope - no future to look forward to. A time where it appears you have been abandoned to pain, darkness, hopelessness and despair. If thrown into this place of darkness what would your response be? Let's be honest, which one of us could not say they would be tempted to turn from God.

Verse 18 - trusting relationship

Notice what Habakkuk says, in spite of all the tragedy of life, "I will rejoice ...", "I will be joyful ..." In spite of the end of hope, he wishes to rejoice. He wants to offer exuberant praise to God. Is he mad! His world has fallen apart, yet he wants to praise God, what for?

Well, he explains why in the two titles he gives to God. Firstly, he calls him the LORD. The title 'Lord' refers to the fact that God is God. His ways are beyond us, as Isaiah 40 states: "...his understanding no one can fathom"

God is still on the throne, he has a purpose in all things, he is still in control. In this we can rejoice. Lying in a hospital bed, God didn't answer my question "why", but he did assure me that he was the LORD, the Sovereign Lord.

The second title that is given to God is 'Saviour'. Whatever happens in my life, I have to keep coming back to that bottom line. God is my Saviour. He has delivered me from the powers of darkness. He has freed me to live with him for all eternity. Even lying on my hospital bed, with thoughts of a terrible future running through my mind, I still knew that God loved me with an everlasting love.

Verse 19 - transforming grace

Do you notice that in this verse Habakkuk doesn't say that the suffering is removed? But in the midst of it, he knows the strength of the Lord. Through that supplied strength, he is enabled to rise above and triumph over all that threatens and oppress him.

Please don't interpret my next statement as being arrogant! I firmly believe that I am now entering the most powerful phase of my ministry. I say this not because I myself, my abilities or my strength. I say this because I have never felt so weak in my life. But like the Apostle Paul, I can say "For when I am weak, then I am strong." because of the transforming grace of God. In some respects, my ministry has been driven by the motor that is me. I have relied on my own strength. The problem has been is that this has crowded out the strength of God. One of the results of my illness has been to humble this Rector.

'Now in my weakness I call upon the Sovereign Lord to be my strength.'

David Mouncer

Why Pray?

To ask the question 'why pray' is a bit like asking the question 'why breathe?' One is essential to physical life, the other essential to spiritual life. We pray to stay alive as Christians. We breathe the oxygen of God's presence and love. To be more specific:

We pray in order to get to know God.

I love going to Iceland, all those volcanoes and glaciers. But if I really wanted to get to know the country I would have to go and live there. Prayer is living with God in a new country with new priorities. We pray to become acclimatized to the new culture of the kingdom of God. P.M. Bounds once wrote, "Prayer is the contact of a living soul with God. In prayer, God stoops to kiss man and to bless man". Prayer bathes the soul in an atmosphere of the divine presence.

We pray in order to share our lives with God.

If we are trying to put him at the centre of our lives we have to keep the doors open to his constant arrival.

We pray in order to express our love and thanks to God.

Prayer can easily been seen in terms of duty. A relationship with God ought to have fewer of the characteristics of duty and more of the characteristics of a love affair. Prayer is also man's ultimate indication of trust in his heavenly Father. By talking to God we affirm our basic decision to depend on Him.

We pray as a way of loving people.

Because we love them we pray for them. The most important thing we can do for those we care for is to hold them in the loving presence of God.

We pray to bring our own needs to God.

God has said that he responds to our prayers. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Prayer is the slender nerve that moveth the muscles of omnipotence." Nothing is too small for his concern.

David Mouncer

"THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING"

I am writing this article just two hours after receiving feedback from the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) on the revised 'parish centre' building plans we submitted for its formal consideration this week. I am rather excited about their response. A point I shall return to.

One of the defining principles of our project has been to reach out to our parish community - hence 'parish centre' - to share our love of Jesus. Quite simply we aim to help implement our vision statement within our parish. One way in which we can do this is to 'connect' with our parishioners by responding to their needs. Our Community Survey of last year has helped highlight what these are and has confirmed a real demand for our proposed new centre. Once this is built we will have the opportunity to welcome and communicate with many new users of our centre, a majority of whom will not be regular church goers. This is not to suggest there are no other ways for us to 'reach out', but the thought of our church becoming the centre of the parish community, rather than being an irrelevance for many within it, has long inspired me to progress our project.

The DAC's feedback is the most positive we have received to date. The Committee now accepts and supports the principle of an extended building solution, as justified by our detailed 'Statement of Need'. It further accepts the repositioning of our main entrance and foyer from the west to south, which will enable us to present a welcoming face to Chatsworth Road. The DAC is less 'comfortable' with the current detailing of the link between the new building and church as "The extension should appear subservient to the existing church and the architectural form of the existing building should still be able to be read." A different 'connection' point we shall now address.

In the meanwhile we have been encouraged to approach the Local Authority, Georgian Group and English Heritage for their views. This is as much as we could have asked (and I for one prayed) for.

Since the turn of the year I have been conscious of our development project gathering momentum. This had largely dissipated during the interregnum following the DAC's decision in July 2003 that it would rather we await the arrival of a new rector before progressing our plans, and its further decision in November 2003 that now he had arrived it was not supportive! This year has been very different. So many things have been 'falling into place'. There has been the re-doubled commitment of our architect, the timely, generous and wise contributions of many people (thanks to them all), and the committed prayer support offered by the church family. One thought recurred to me during our times of prayer for the 8 March DAC meeting, namely that whatever we ask in God's name he will provide. I believe our Lord has provided. And it's been a privilege to have 'connected' with His will.

Thank you all for your continued prayers and support for our development project. There's still a long way to go before we can welcome the first users of our parish centre, but we have taken an important step forward, and what's more, God willing, we will complete our journey!

Graham Brown

People and Jesus

Julie Barton, Head Teacher

For the last four years I have been privileged to be the head teacher at Matlock Bath Holy Trinity Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School. It is a small school with sixty pupils, ranging in age from five to eleven years and is located behind Holy Trinity Church, visible from the main A6 road through Matlock Bath.

The church is similar in style to St. Thomas' and I felt a wonderful sense of "being at home" from the very first service I attended. The fellowship and care I have received from members of that church family has enabled me to remain strong and focused in the most difficult of times. Each Tuesday morning the Holy Trinity prayer group meets at church at 7 a.m. to pray for the school. There are two members of the church family on the Governing Body (in accordance with the constitution) and they are a great support. Each week the vicar or Youth Worker takes an assembly in school. There are so many ways in which I am supported as a head teacher.

The school community is made up of mainly atheist families who perceive the school as a community school, which happens to have an association with the church. I was initially amazed by the distrust and antipathy to Christianity. For example, one of my first changes as a rather innocent and exuberant head teacher of a church school was to create, in response to an OFSTED criticism, a new mission statement that opened with the quotation from Galatians chapter 5 (the fruits of the spirit). The outcry from Governors and parents totally shocked me.

Thank goodness for John Currin, the vicar, who helped me to negotiate a path through the controversy. We now have the quotation without "self control" as this was deemed to be against freedom of expression.

Over the years I have tried to act in a Christian way to the children, their families, the staff and the governors, usually without overtly referring to Jesus but by praying for wisdom and the ability to always see how others may feel. Mine has not been an office based headship: I have taught the children for most of the week and I have sought to involve myself in church, community and family events. In return I have received the trust and care of a non Christian community. Many of the children, families, staff and governors have, over time, implicitly subscribed to the Christian ethos, which has been a joy to me.

I absolutely know that God was looking after me when He gave me this school to nurture; He has supported me and enabled me to succeed in an environment where I have been cared for and I have been able to care for and help others: children, staff, governors and families "in Jesus name." I feel most humbled by that knowledge.

When we are working through changes in our lives, especially when change is imposed, it isn't always clear where our Father God is in that process. It is often only with hindsight that we know that Jesus walks with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

My current prayer is that Holy Trinity School will continue to grow in God's love and care as I leave and that I will be able to share **The Love of God** in my new post, in a different community at John Hadfield House, where I take up a post as a Literacy Consultant after Easter.

Julie Barton

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 9TH-15TH MAY 2004

I've just been looking through the Christian Aid annual report for last year. Did you know that last year's Christian Aid week was a record breaker, raising £13.5 million, nearly a quarter of the organisations annual income in just 7 days?

A lot of us are vaguely aware of the week: the little red envelopes; press and TV adverts. But sometimes it's good to ask ourselves "What is it about? What's it for?"

Christian Aid has a slogan: "we believe in life before death". The organisation represents Christians and churches from the UK and Ireland, helping to put faith into action. It works through 561 partner organisations in 55 countries and sets out to:

1. relieve poverty and give humanitarian aid, including in war-torn areas and in emergencies.
2. work to eradicate poverty and suffering in partnership with the poor and marginalised they even have a goat-loan scheme called Go For It!
3. influence change through education, advocacy and campaigning, such as the Dying To Learn programme among HIV /AIDS families and orphans in southern Africa.
4. work at lasting economic and political solutions to reduce injustice and bridge divided communities.
5. promote trade justice, especially working through the Trade Justice Movement, a coalition which grew from the Jubilee 2000 campaign. This links with the Fairtrade system and label, which has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary in Fair Trade week.

There is lots of information on the Christian Aid web-site, including "Global Gang" youth and educational resources: www.christianaid.org.uk

So there's a lot going on and good reason to consider getting involved or being a collector.

"But what does it involve?" I hear you ask.

Basically, it involves being over 18 and able to spare about two and a half hours.

The churches locally divide up the collecting into manageable rounds. You have an identity badge, envelopes, leaflets and a collecting carrier bag. You ideally deliver your envelopes in the first weekend, and return to collect the sealed envelopes in the week whenever you can, but afternoon or early evening are ideal. You note house numbers with no reply and either re-visit if you are able, or slip a note through the letter box with details for bringing their envelope to church/church office if they wish. You return your carrier bag to church at the end of the week for centralised counting. Easy! You could even do a round with a friend. There is an added advantage that you sometimes get to chat with people, maybe explain where you are from or why you're doing it, and raise awareness that there are Christians in the community. You may even meet your neighbours!

Should we ask non-Christians to give? I guess that is debatable, but people often simply decline. You are only inviting them to give, enabling them to support those in need in this way if they want to.

"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6 v.8)

Rosie Welch

Alison Hawksley is finally returning home

Alison Hawksley is enjoying the fresh, damp atmosphere, now that the sun is no longer shining in Peru. Her commitments at the school are now over and she is working on the English course in her flat.

She considers that her work in Peru is drawing to a close and cannot see herself doing another year. She is feeling tired of teaching and rather than exploring other possibilities just yet, she is hoping to return to England, to recoup energies and spend time with her family, especially her grandmother and her new baby nephew. She has also discovered recently that her dental health problems, which she had thought were under control, have resurfaced.

It is for these reasons that, after much thought and prayer, she has decided not to renew her contract with SAMS. Alison thanks all of you who have supported her throughout her time in Peru, and for those who have supported her in prayer throughout this decision time. She feels that although this has been a big decision, it is the right decision for her at the moment. She is at peace about it and is excited about her last few months in Peru and about returning to England. Alison hopes to be able to stop in Arequipa until the end of June so that she can take her time to say her goodbyes after four years in Peru.

Alison is looking forward to visit us on her return, to thank you for your incredible support. She cannot find the words to say how much your care and prayer have meant to her. Your support has been invaluable, and she loves you all very much. Alison states that the best thing about coming home will be that she is able to visit us more often than just once every two years.

She does not want to close the door on mission work in the future. Work with the poor, and in particular, children is still very much on her heart, but she feels that she needs to take some time out to regroup. She has thought about undertaking further study again and she knows God will faithfully guide her and open doors if this is a right step.

She ends by repeating her thanks for your faithful support over the last four years. It has been a privilege for her, and she sends you all her love.

Yvetta Jacques

Mission and Ministry Leadership Team

The team of Rev David Mouncer, Karen Riley, Karen Herrick, Graham Brown, David Sanderson and David Holden continues to meet approximately 10 times per year. The prime objective is to ensure that St Thomas' continues to operate within the Core Values of the church. Significant emphasis is placed upon prayer, scripture and seeking God's guidance on all decisions to be made. Each member reports back each meeting concerning what has happened within their team. Discussion takes place on any items which may be contentious or require a policy decision. This ensures that day to day running is kept as smooth as possible. Major items of policy are passed to the PCC with recommendations from the leadership team.

During the time of the vacancy the church wardens, Pam Brimelow and Mark Hoare, were invited to join these meetings which has proved beneficial to both Wardens and Leaders. This has continued since David's arrival, and it is hoped will stay as a permanent association. It is now part of the leadership team's duties to set the budget for each area of the church and to approve its total budget. Significant time has been expended on the Building project, Safe from Harm policy, attendance analysis, mission giving, external notice boards and new projects.

The needs of St Thomas' members are of prime importance to us all and significant time is taken up discussing the needs of various groups, especially children and the elderly. This generally gives rise to the recurring discussion point of the shortage of helpers. Most of the work needing to be done does not require any special talents other than to be available, so if you can help then please tell us...

Recently we have had to consider Neil Roper leaving us to go to another post. These discussions revealed to us the complexity of the task of children and youth work, leading to the fact that we really needed to split the job. This was to more effectively cover two smaller age range groups, with the subsequent appointment of Karen Herrick as the Children's worker. We continue with the recruitment of a Young People's worker. Karen will continue in the leadership team until September. Meanwhile, Pam will be standing down at the APCM after a long and significant period as Church Warden, volunteers are being recruited for this and deputy warden positions. Even these choices are getting more complex as the Safe from Harm policy requirements now mean the nominations for these positions have to have satisfied the necessary police checks.

We continue to praise God that His work continues to grow. We have seen the Men's Breakfast group restart, that a new Mum's and Babies group are meeting regularly in the rectory, the new "Gateway" open house group is very successful and significant work is being put into a new "Start" course, which will replace Alpha.

Please continue to pray for the necessary permissions to come through for our building project. We, as a Church, need it as well as the parish requiring the resources which we could offer. Please pray for your leadership team members, that we might continue in an effective and God inspired way to lead St Thomas' forward.

David Holden

Touchstone 2004

Having just completed our tenth anniversary year, we can look back with a sense of achievement on our mission to "help the unemployed and other disadvantaged people return to work, gain recognised skills and play a full part in society; while at the same time improving the environment, economic and social fabric of society".

In our early years the trustees underwent a training course on "Coping with Change", boy was this necessary! Ever since, this has been our major function. Last year we moved from our rented premises on Hipper Street to the Miner's Rescue Station on Infirmary Road, which we now own. The building still contains many historic reminders of the past, the canary cage on the roof, blackened cellars where they practised with breathing apparatus and a circular shaft that contained the greasy pole for the rescue team to slide down. The garage space has been converted into a conference room.

Now that the financial climate has changed, all our projects, which provide the major 'back to work' skills, must be self-financing or have a high proportion of revenue income. Social Enterprise is our new focus, hence our latest project to open a new, much needed fifty place Childcare Centre in the middle of Staveley, due for completion in the autumn.

Have you visited Ringwood Hall to see the restoration work on the organic Victorian Gardens by our "Touchwood" team, or the environmental improvements at Linacre by our "Touchground" team? Remember there is always a home for unwanted furniture, just phone 554932.

From April, the New Deal back-to-work scheme for 18-24 year olds will be reduced from 26 to 13 weeks. This is a big blow to voluntary organisations like Touchstone, who need a minimum of six months to provide the NVQ training and rehabilitation needed by employers.

Despite 'rosy' national employment figures I cannot envisage a time when the comprehensive support we offer will not be needed. We regularly support and employ over thirty trainees and are working closely with Chesterfield College on providing training in such areas as childcare and building skills.

Please continue to pray for those in need in our community and the dedicated staff at Touchstone.

Adrian Marsden-Jones

Midweek Parish Communion at St. Peter's

St. Peter's holds a service of Holy Communion on Tuesdays at 9.30 am, lasting about 40 minutes. We would wish this to be regarded as a parish event, when all would be assured of a warm welcome. It may prove convenient for mums and dads who have deposited their children safely at school.

Please remember that there is no service on the first Tuesday of every month, when we hold an Ecumenical Communion and Coffee service in the URC room on Wednesday, for those who are unable to make it up the hill!

Adrian Marsden-Jones

From the Parish Registers

WE WELCOME INTO THE CHURCH IN BAPTISM

St Thomas'

15 February

Caitlin Kelly

22 February

Matilda Robinson

WE EXTEND SYMPATHY TO THE RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF THOSE WHOSE FUNERALS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN RECENT MONTHS

12 January

Deborah Featherstone (39)

16 January

Arthur Kean

30 January

Kenneth Shooter (75)

11 February

Mary Drury (80)

12 February

Robert Davenport (78)

25 February

Jacqueline Batteson (80)