

Ploughshare June/July 1999 (scanned version from the original)

From the Rector Christopher Frith

There is still a smell of new carpet. The walls look beautifully clean and bright. The extensive platform looks dignified with its curved front. The comfortable, solid wooden chairs follow the curve nicely. The new St. Thomas' is pleasing.

Mind you, it would have been much better (in my opinion) if the Victorian Society had kept out of it and we had been able to create space in the chancel, with just one Holy Table to be a focus and not two. I mustn't complain, however. What we have is very fine.

It's certainly a privilege to preside at Holy Communion services at our new Table. It is large and solid and imposing, yet it has something of a carpenter's bench feel. Sadly we no longer have the text "We preach Christ crucified" to catch our eye, but instead the Table is a strong reminder that our Lord gave his life for us. This is where bread is broken and wine is poured out, and now everyone can see these powerful symbols. *"Thanks be to God, for his indescribable gift!"* (2 Cor9:15)

We still need a lot more chairs. Until we have them, the building will not be flexible as we intend it to be. We still need to look humbly to God constantly to renew us his people by His Holy Spirit. God has given us so much; he surely won't stop now!

Christopher Frith

The Time of Our Lives

On Friday 30 April 1999, 33 of us from the Diocese ventured down to London, to partake in the Archbishop of Canterbury's youth event, in preparation for the millennium.

After dropping our bags off at our designated modern, no draughts Church Hall, St John's Stratford, we headed off to our opening meeting at the Royal Albert Hall, presented by non other than ex-Blue Peter presenter, Diane-Louise Jordan! We worshipped with the aid of various groups including the incredibly soulful London Community Gospel Choir.

After a few hours sleep we headed off again to attend our morning sessions in Westminster. The topics varied from 'Reclaiming chastity in a sex-mad society' to 'Dance to the music'. After lunch there were more seminars as well as some free time to shop and to sightsee, of which we did both!! In the evening there was a range of activities laid on, including the Comedy Club, a concert by Courtney Pine and Compline, all at Lambeth Palace.

On Sunday morning we worshipped alongside the congregation of St John's Church, Stratford and we were made to feel extremely welcome. Following a picnic lunch, we trekked across London to a Garden Party at Lambeth Palace with the Archbishop of Canterbury. He provided great fun, food and fellowship!

At 5pm we set off on a March of Faith across London to our places of evening worship. 4000 youth practically sprinted across London in the most powerful portrayal of God's love we have ever seen. Most of our group went to St Paul's Cathedral to Soul Survivor, with worship led by Matt Redman (Petra and I even managed to get his autograph!!) Mike Pilavachi spoke on worship within our churches and of how it is not for ourselves, it is for the Glory of God and therefore is a form of sacrifice - powerful stuff!

On Monday morning we packed up and went to the final Eucharist at Lambeth Palace.

Highlights and things we learnt were:

1. We realised that the Bishops were normal people too!
2. That the Church of England is alive, and that we should not be ashamed to be part of it.
3. That youth is not only the Church of the future, but is very much the Church of now.

4. It was encouraging to see so many young people together in one place, not only excited about God, but standing up for what they believe in.

We truly had 'the time of our lives'

Sophie Jacques

Ordination at St Thomas'

Petra Owen will soon have been our Curate for a year.

On Saturday 3 July, she is to be ordained Priest by the new Bishop of Repton, the Rt. Revd. David Hawtin. The service will take place in St. Thomas' at 6pm, and one other person is to be ordained, the Revd. Lee Townend from Buxton. It should be a wonderful occasion, the first ordination ever to happen at St. Thomas' and an opportunity to surround Petra with our love prayers and support.

The Mystery of Communion

I must confess **that I had mixed feelings when I was asked** to become a distributor at communion services. This was not so much because I struggle with the dressing-up bit, nor even because of my perpetual difficulties getting anywhere early, but because I've always thought of receiving the bread and wine as a personal event, and pictured myself in that moment as kneeling at the foot of the cross; an intensely private moment of intimacy and forgiveness. I was hesitant that in distributing bread or wine I could be almost intruding on other people's personal encounters with God, (although I had never felt intruded upon by others distributing).

But in fact I have felt distributing to be an immense privilege, a very special honour, to serve in prayer for each person as they meet with God in the bread and the wine in their own personal way. It has led me to think a lot more about the *"communion of saints"*.

That phrase had stuck in me as old-fashioned and meaningless for literally decades. But the Last Supper was a shared meal; we encounter God personally and intimately, but also in the context of a shared experience. Passing the wine and bread round when we met at St John's in Lent emphasised this for me, as do the words of Jesus' prayer for all believers in John 17:22, *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be as one as we are one; I in them and You in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me, and have loved them even as you have loved me"*

With so many changes recently, and as we consider the wider context of what the church as community means in practice, we can remember that we each have the ministry of sharing our meeting with God together, so that others will see the paradox and mystery that communing personally with God uniquely brings. Communing and community-
"with unity" with others.

A Distributor

Treasures of Darkness

CPAS Ministry among Women day at St John's
A day led by Jane Grayshon

"I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places so that you may know that I am the Lord the God of Israel who summons you by name." Isaiah 45:3 (NIV)

The day started with registration, coffee and greetings in the church centre. Then we moved into the church.

Jane started by inviting us to think about our own pain, then to write of it briefly on a piece of paper and put this into a basket which she passed round. She then offered these to God.

She spoke briefly of her own prolonged bouts of life-threatening illness, and said she identified with Psalm 18:4-6, but found comfort in verse 19. Jane referred to the verse from Isaiah quoted above and made the point that although God has the desire to bless us, we can refuse to accept his blessings from wilfulness or woundedness.

She then gave us six "**treasures of darkness**", some of God's blessings which often only begin to have real meaning for us when we are in pain, when our suffering is great. We were reminded that God created the darkness as well as the light, and that we can see things in the night sky which are not visible to us in the day. This is true spiritually also.

Jane talked about prayer and shared the following, which had been given to her by a nun: *-Prayer is not an easy way of getting what we want but a difficult way of becoming who God wants us to be.*

Before lunch we went back into the centre and in small groups discussed the six "treasures".

In the afternoon Jane told us of the reaction of her husband, Matthew, to a sculpture in the Northern Tate Gallery of Jacob wrestling with the angel (*Genesis 32:22-32*), just after Matthew had been told that Jane needed another emergency operation which she might not survive. The sculpture showed that the angel was holding Jacob in a secure and protective embrace, whilst Jacob appeared to be tiring of the struggle.

Jane was very open and honest, and said that despite seeing all these blessings, she would not choose to have the body she has. She would prefer not to suffer. Jane showed that it is alright to express our deepest feelings to God when we are suffering, even if these feelings are anger towards God, even if we feel God has wounded us. God can transform the bad we bring to him.

Jane has written a book entitled "Treasures of Darkness" which I recommend. I **would also** encourage those who are able, to attend future CPAS events. This was the first I had been to, and the whole day was a blessing.

Pat Calow

From One Christian to Others

Encouragement in difficult times: God is always there if we seek Him.

I have been away from church for some little time now; I have also been somewhat down in my feelings. I have been unable to be close to God, to pray, to read the Bible or even to be with Christian friends. I have been in a minor depression, which has affected my relationship with others, and the way that I have been living for some months. I have been emphasising things like the house, getting my wife her car, booking holidays, wanting to get out and about to enjoy myself, but in doing so not really always getting much pleasure from any of this.

I have blamed many things for my feelings, including the fact that I am not now gainfully employed, that I was unable through health reasons to assist at a local Hospice, that the worship at our church was not to my liking, etc.

The simple truth is that I have been full of pride thinking I can get through my life on my own when the reality is that I can't and I am not meant to. I have not at any time lost my faith in God or that He sent His Son Jesus to set us free from our past but I have failed in my repentance of sin in so far as I have put myself before God. This is a sin and sin distances us from God and so the cycle described above goes on until we repent and live a righteous life. What is a righteous life?

Solomon writes in *Proverbs* (with the help of the Holy Spirit) that righteousness is;

Righteousness	10:7, 12:3, 28:12
Hating what is false	13:5
Committing all work to the Lord	16:3
Using words with restraint	17:27-28
Being even tempered	17:27
Loving wisdom and understanding	19:8
Humility and fear of the Lord	22: 4
Willingness to confess and renounce sin	28:13

I have had to accept, confess and renounce my sin of pride. Praise the Lord in doing so the distance between God and myself has shortened and I am beginning to feel a different person again, enjoying the pleasures of life, the sun, the wind, children running about, birds singing, none of which require the trappings of life with which we surround ourselves. God has been gracious and because of Jesus I can put these past months behind me. They are forgotten, my sin has been forgiven and God will draw me closer to Him again as I try with the help of the Holy Spirit to live my life according to the way of God.

I have been away from God and felt low because of it (perhaps not always realising it was because of being distanced from God). What if I had not realised it and not repented of my sin of pride? How would I have been judged? Would I have been distanced from God in heaven, not being able to enjoy all the fruits of heaven? Having confessed that Jesus is Lord and accepted Him as my Saviour I have assurance of my salvation. But even worse is the thought that many have not confessed that Jesus is their Saviour and will therefore spend not only this life but eternity distanced from God, out of the light. I know how I have felt these past months not being close to God, I would not want to spend another minute in that state, let alone face the prospect of eternity without God.

We should give thanks every day for God's grace and pray for those who do not yet know him.

Roger Freestone

Roger was on our staff as co-ordinator before he suffered a heart attack in 1995. He and Irene have now moved and have joined Chesterfield Baptist Church. We are grateful for all they have meant to us and we miss them.

Chosen Vessel

The Master was searching for a vessel to use.
Before Him were many; which one would He choose?
"Take me," cried the gold one, I'm shiny and bright,
I'm of great value and I do things just right.
My beauty and lustre will outshine the rest,
And for someone like you Master,
Gold would be best."

The Master passed on with no word at all
And looked at a silver urn narrow and tall.
"I'll serve you, dear Master, I'll pour out your wine,
I'll be on your table whenever you dine.
My lines are so graceful,
My carvings so true,
And silver will always complement you."

Unheeding the Master passed on to the brass,
Wide-mouthed and shallow and polished like glass.
"Here! Here!" cried the vessel, "I know I will do,
Place me on your table for all men to view."
"Look at me," called the goblet of crystal so clear,
"My transparency shows my contents so dear.
Though fragile am I, I will serve you with pride,
And I'm sure I'll be happy in your house to abide."
The Master came next to a vessel of wood.
Polished and carved it solidly stood.
"You may use me, dear Master,"
The wooden bowl said,
"But I'd rather you used me for fruit, not for bread."

Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay,
Empty and broken it helplessly lay.
No hope had the vessel that the Master might choose
To cleanse, and make whole, to fill and to use.
"Ah! This is the vessel I've been hoping to find.
I'll mend it and use it and make it all mine.

I need not the vessel with pride of itself,
Nor one that is narrow to sit on the shelf,
Nor one that is big-mouthed and shallow and loud,
Nor one that displays its contents so proud.
Nor the one that thinks he can do all things right,
But this plain, earthly vessel, filled with power and might.'

Then gently he lifted the vessel of clay,
Mended and cleansed it, and filled it that day;
"Spoke to it kindly "There's work you must do
Just pour out to others, as I pour into you."

B.V Cornwall

Ten Commandments for Parents

Your sons and daughters are not yours alone,
Bring them to know Me before they are grown.

Provide for their needs and know as you do,
That I will provide for each one of you.

Live by my Word, in love and in fear,
So you're living a message that children can hear.

I delighted in sharing creation with you,
Help your children appreciate loveliness, too.

And respect them, for each is unique by design,
Welcome their specialness, help them to shine.

Cultivate character, loyalty, truth
Lessons in living to carve in their youth.

Take time to listen, to laugh and to play;
When your children have grown, the memories will stay.

Teach them to talk to Me often in prayer;
I want them to trust that I'll always be there.

I am here for you too, remember to ask,
And I will equip you for this Holy task.

These are My loved ones, thus it shall be
As you do unto them so you do unto Me.

Pause for Thought

The other day I saw something that brought to my mind the words "seek my face" 2 *Chronicles* 7 v14. The picture I saw was a simple one, an ordinary everyday event in the lives of a woman and her dog. The dog had been trained to be her helper. Much like a guide dog for the blind only this lady was sighted but needed help in other ways.

For the most part the dog lay quietly by her side, but, when needed, sat up attentive, expectant, her eyes firmly fixed on her mistress's face. It was a big dog and spilled over into the aisle of the small church where quite a large number of women were gathered. Consequently people had to step over her tail to get by whilst chattering, rustling papers, flapping handbags not to mention the danger of a misplaced foot. But this dog never flinched. Through all the movement on her left, right and rear she was not distracted from her purpose. It is this that struck me most. Her

purpose was to serve her mistress by understanding what needed to be done, and this could only be achieved by seeking her mistress's face.

What a lesson that dog showed me. It has made me do a 'double take' on my walk with God. Am I going to be attentive, expectant, eagerly seeking His face, or let myself be distracted? ...Hmmm.

Well perhaps the woman and her dog were not as forceful as Balaam's donkey ... but then again I don't know!!

Enid Sheldon