



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 23rd May 2021

NEWS UPDATE



Cessation of Church Newsletters – end of June

As we are steadily moving out of lockdown restrictions, I have been reflecting on what kind of routines are suitable and sustainable as we get back to some kind of 'normal.' These weekly newsletters have been a blessing on many levels, but I feel they should come to an end at the end of June when, all being well, restrictions are fully lifted. Sunday 27th June will therefore be our last newsletter.

We began these newsletters on Sunday 19th March 2020, and since then we have only skipped one week in December out of a total of sixty-three weeks. That is not bad going! I expect the reinstatement of the church magazine to replace the weekly newsletter, with an electronic version being sent out as well as paper copies. We can also distribute the magazine using the same delivery groups and email lists as we have used with this weekly newsletter.

I want to thank everyone who has helped contribute to these newsletters. I know that they have meant a lot to people, especially during times of lockdown.

thanks!

Sermon Series Starting Sunday 6th June – 'Sharing our faith'



Over five weeks starting on Sunday 6th June we are going to follow a sermon series on sharing our faith. We are not traditionally an evangelical church, and I know this is a bit of a taboo subject for some. The purpose of this series is to reflect on why sharing our faith matters, and how we can approach it in a way that is natural and appropriate. By approaching this subject positively, we can all be encouraged and inspired to play our part, without being anything other than ourselves. 😊

No Tuesday Zoom on 1st June

The Tuesday evening Zoom prayer group will take a week off on Tuesday 1st June, which is the school half term week.

BIBLE READING – Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will

lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.”

THIS WEEK’S MESSAGE – Graham’s Story

This week I asked my friend Graham Hickey from Christ Church, Fulwood, to come and speak to us about his faith journey. Graham is one of the people I got to know well during my time as curate at Christ Church. He is a fellow musician, and for a few years we played in a little swing band together. He has conducted the Preston Concert band for many years, and he is now a music teacher at Ashton High school.

Every Christian has their own faith journey, and each of us has a story to tell. Sometimes there are moments along our journey that are significant; spiritual experiences perhaps, or times when our faith has been deepened. At these times God may touch us in such a way that others notice the difference. During my time in Fulwood Graham was such a person in whom I saw the Spirit of God at work, and I wasn’t the only one to recognise it.



This is Pentecost Sunday when we remember the giving of the Holy Spirit to Jesus’ followers. We are not just remembering a bit of history; we are celebrating that the Holy Spirit has been filling Jesus’ followers with life and power ever since. We could read and learn about the work of the Holy Spirit, which is a good thing to do, but it is often personal stories that really bring home the reality. For this reason I asked Graham to come and share his story with us on Pentecost Sunday. I don’t know what he is going to say! As someone who has walked alongside him, here are a few things I have witnessed.



Graham has a passion for caving, and over the years has embarked on many underground adventures. On more than a few occasions he has dived with death, having found himself in some dangerous situations. Graham first recalls re-connecting with his childhood faith when facing the fear of death in a cave, which understandably led him to pray. Psalm 94:17-18 have become special verses that he relates to:

“Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, “my foot is slipping,” your love, O Lord, supported me.”

Graham has quite literally experienced his foot slipping, and nearly fallen to his death. He would say that at moments like these he has really sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit with him.

At the time when I was a curate, Graham was picking up bits of work as a supply teacher. The hours were irregular, along with the income, and due to needing something more regular he took up a job at a school in Carlisle. The distance he had to travel from Preston was far from ideal, and for a number of weeks he stayed overnight in a hotel during the week. It was not the happiest arrangement, leaving his wife and children behind each week. Graham filled his evenings by playing his trumpet in some of the local bands, or by going for a drink in one of the local bars. He described to me how, one evening, he felt the emptiness of the life he was living in Carlisle, and how he ended up on his knees in his hotel room calling out to God. At that moment he became overwhelmed with a sense of God’s loving presence, and he describes being filled with the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way.



After this experience, people at church began to notice that there was something different about Graham. He seemed to shine with a joy and a warmth that wasn’t there before. My observation was that it was like he didn’t have anything to prove any more, as if he was somehow now at peace with himself and others.

Graham began to find that he was praying a great deal more, and reading the bible regularly. Not long after this he began to wonder if God was calling him to get ordained, which he explored with the diocese.

Ordination didn’t turn out to be right for him, but he went on to become churchwarden at Christ Church, led the Pathfinder group for young people, and has made various other contributions to the life of the church.

Graham is just an ordinary guy who has a deep love for God, and who wants to share this with others. What I find most refreshing about Graham is that there is no religiosity about him, he never comes across as pious or super-spiritual. He has certainly experienced the Holy Spirit in his life, though not every moment is an ecstatic encounter with the divine, Graham still identifies with the struggle of living by faith. Real life is lived in the valleys, not on the mountaintops.



The wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that God takes our personalities, our character, and our giftings, and causes these things to shine for him. In Graham's case he is a creative person, and most astonishing of all is his 'hobbit prayer house' that he's made in his back



garden out of natural materials. You would never imagine that such a thing existed in someone's ordinary back garden in Preston. We must hold our next parish prayer meeting there!



Prayers

We pray for God to fill us with his Spirit.

Generous God, we thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit.

We ask that we may be strengthened to serve you better.

Lord, come to bless us;

and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the wisdom of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to make us wise to understand your will.

Lord, come to bless us;

and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the fruit of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to reveal in our lives the love of Jesus.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the gifts of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to equip us for the work which you have given us.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

May the Spirit, who hovered over the waters when the world was created, breathe into us the life He gives, that we may be confident of God's love wherever He calls us. **Amen.**