

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2019

Covering Thoughts

When it comes to New Year's Eve there can be a tendency to look back. Some may have happy memories of celebrations and successes while others are simply grateful to have survived another year.

Our church theme for 2018 was that of journeys and it is a continuing challenge at this point to remember that Jesus said: No-one who sets his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.

We may be unable to prevent ourselves from returning to memories of the past. We may thrive on nostalgia or feel burdened by regrets or a sense of loss. A way forward for the New Year may be to renounce what draws us back to the past; to renounce all that prevents us from living in this present moment.

Nostalgia is a feeling of wanting to protect ourselves from change. We wish that the rosy memories of past experiences could continue into the present, but what they do is to prevent us from engaging totally in our new situation, appreciating it fully for what it is.

It is so easy to judge experiences as bad or good, but a bad moment is potentially as enriching for us as one we consider to be a good one. When each moment is accepted with gratitude and awareness it has the potential to be life enhancing.

Few of us are engaged in ploughing today yet we know instinctively what this familiar image means. In the gospel setting in Luke 9 v 57-62 family responsibilities were given as excuses for not taking up Jesus' challenge to journey with him, but what does this mean for us? Do we have the tenacity and love to continue what we have begun, and equally the wisdom to accept what we need to relinquish? It is something for each of us to consider as we step over the threshold of the New Year.

Christine

PASTORAL LETTER

In one of the Advent services at Marston, I spoke about Wheatley's preparations for the building works. It was to illustrate the effort we all put in to getting ready for important events, and how once the day comes, it will be too late to prepare! (cf Matthew 24:36). How thorough therefore were our Advent preparations?

It was a useful illustration, but it was also an opportunity to share with one of our "sister" churches something of Wheatley's plans. I'm not sure how much mileage there is in our Oxford churches "doing things together" – mission is local and we must work on our own patch with our friends from neighbouring churches – but we can keep our fellow URCs in touch and support each other as we can (not least by prayer).

By the same token, Summertown's works are now well advanced, and will soon, I hope, move from the messy, mud-heap stage towards a renovated and more attractive porch and improved facilities. Please keep Summertown in your prayers.

As we move into this New Year, our Cogwheel Project is very much at the forefront of our minds, and (as I write in mid-December!) I'm sure the preparations are well in hand. We owe a huge debt to Mark, Tony, Roger, Chris and all the Cogwheel team for how quickly things have moved forward, and to everyone for their hard work and generous donations towards the Project.

The next few months will be tricky, and I expect there will be some frustrations as we cope with the restrictions on the premises, but we can look forward in expectation to using the Mulberry Room and our refurbished large hall ourselves, and to sharing them with the community.

When we were approaching the new millennium – some years ago now! - a phrase which re-occurred in church circles was "a new start": Let there be ... a new start. Looking forward in hope towards a better future for the earth and its people. Our own hopes are more modest, but there's a sense in which every year is a new start, and it's perhaps a particularly appropriate phrase for us this year. So I went back to some of the "millennium" resources which I'd not looked at for some time. I found the following prayer, which, with a word or two changed, seemed a very appropriate prayer for us as we approach with anticipation this New Year, this "new start" in the life of our church.

A New Year is dawning –
not the end of our pilgrimage of faith,
but a milestone on our journey together.
May we pause for breath on the threshold
and listen to the fresh wind of your Spirit,
carrying away the dross of the past –
our failures, our deadness and pain.
Shoulder our burden, Lord,
forgive and forget.

Now remake us in your image,
breathe your new life into us.
Fill us with love, joy, peace and encouragement,
for you are our living Hope.

Take our hand, Lord,
stay beside us.
Shine your light
that we may follow your way
of loving service.
We ask it in the name of our living Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen

(from Let there be - Praying for the New Millennium)

With every blessing to you and yours.

Your Minister, Pauline



COGWHEEL PROJECT

Update January 2019

The project is proceeding really well. We have raised over £346,500, including a total of over £120,000 from church members and £98,000 from external Trusts and Charities, as well as around £10,000 from a number of important smaller donations from individuals and hall user-groups that are also really encouraging. The balance will be made up from the generous grant we received from the Wessex URC Trust. We are ready to proceed.

We have chosen Savvy as the preferred contractor and they hope to start work towards the end of February. They come highly recommended both by past clients (such as Jesus College in Oxford) and architects they have worked with.

The funds we have raised will enable us to build the new Mulberry Room and refurbish the hall, kitchen and back lobby area. [Work on the church itself will be left out of the project for now to be completed later, once we get feedback from the structural engineer about the church walls.]

What are we planning and what will we see when it's complete? We will have a new hall roof – insulated to modern standards; a blind on the south-facing window; new cupboards and a new loop system in the hall, and echo dampening on the ceiling. We will have a new kitchen, including two electric ovens to support the important work of the lunch club teams and others who need to use the ovens for events. We had hoped we might have a new floor in the hall, but close examination of the sub-structure suggests that it would be too expensive to excavate, so we will restore what we have.

We will, also, of course, have a lovely new meeting room - the *Mulberry Room* – with under-floor heating, built in storage, office and kitchenette facilities and up-to-date audio-visual equipment – and access to a refurbished disabled WC from the new glazed lobby area.

Savvy will start with the hall, kitchen, toilet and back lobby area, so these will need to be cleared in the weeks before the work starts. The refurbishment of the hall and kitchen will take about three months, so all being well, we will be able to move back into the hall and use the kitchen again by the end of May. Until then the church will become a *shared home* for all church and community activities, and the vestibule will become an area, not only for meeting and greeting, but also for making coffee and tea. To enable this to happen, the church pews and chairs and the communion table will be removed and stored securely by a Removal and

Storage firm. The hall chairs, tables (and other equipment needed by regular hall users such as the Table Tennis Club and the Not So Young Club), will then be moved into the church.

Once Savvy have begun the refurbishment work, they will proceed to demolish the back rooms and clear the site ready to rebuild. It is hoped that the entire project will take 6 months, so all being well, the new Mulberry Room will be ready for us by the end of September.

It will be very exciting to be able to provide these improved facilities for the community we serve. A warm thank you to all who have helped to bring us to this point.

The Cogwheel Project Team

NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK 2019

Tony Barry

I have been asked to arrange a shortish walk for church members, family and friends to continue our 2018 "Journeying" theme on into the New Year. You may recall that Charles led a similar walk from his farm to Rycote Chapel and back last New Year.

I am suggesting a sub 4 mile "circular" walk in the Stanton St John/Forest Hill area for this year. If we meet in the car park opposite the parish church in Stanton St John at 10.00 am we can then make a departure towards Stanton Great Wood shortly thereafter. There is a good square block walk of about two hours duration (including a half way break) around the wood and back through Forest Hill, mostly on field paths, with one short section of road. The route can be shortened to about one and a half hours, to miss out Forest Hill if the weather or walking conditions become too unpleasant.

There will be the customary list on the noticeboard for people to sign up for the walk and make car-sharing arrangements. As there is no availability of food and refreshments on the route, it would be advisable to take something with you for the mid point break. Waterproof and stout footwear is advised, as the open fields paths may well be wet and muddy in places.

On our return to Wheatley (by circa 12.30 pm), Laurence and Peter Devlin have generously offered their home from 12.30 pm onwards for a group foodshare lunch, with others who may not wish to walk. Please indicate on the list whether you will be bringing with you, a savoury main dish of food or a pudding, to share with others.

Any queries contact Tony on 872293

WHAT IS WHEATLEY DOING ABOUT REFUGEES?

Liz Barry (Convenor, Care for the World Team)

Many will re-call the original meeting a year ago at which Asylum Welcome and Sanctuary Hosting spoke so movingly of the plight of mainly Syrian refugees in and around Oxford.

A further meeting attended by interested parties enabled us to formulate lists of what we could offer to Asylum Welcome, and representatives have attended their Open House, and visited to discuss practicalities.

Following a CCOW conference in Oxford at which other support groups around Oxfordshire spoke of their work and experiences, it was agreed that a Wheatley group be established to take this forward.

Meanwhile, we have responded to the appeals of the Refugee Council Therapeutic Service and Asylum Welcome for financial help.

COME and HELP US FIND A WAY FORWARD from here: SAT FEB 16th 10 am MERRY BELLS.

Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members on Moira Watson's pastoral list: Jean Boxall, Pat Howard, Zena Knight, Frances Simpson, Liz & Tony Barry, Bev Paton and family.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Adult Christian Education Team: Tom Goss, Sybil Beaton, Pauline Main, Bobby Stormont and Mark Williams.

Disclaimer: The Editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.

Deadline: Wednesday 16th January is the deadline for the February Newsletter. Please always send copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals. But paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont.

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR JANUARY 2019

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services.

Date	6 th Jan	13 th Jan	20 th Jan	27 th Jan
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Rev. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Rev. Colin Thompson	Ray Stanyon
Vestry Elder	Charles Bennett	Tom Goss	Moira Watson	Peter Devlin
Welcomer	Robert Harding	Catherine Harding	Malcolm Benson	Moira Watson
Steward	Ellen Webster	Ann Gajda	Zena Knight	Ann Hardiman
Reader	Jean Boxall	Moira Watson	Sybil Beaton	Catherine Harding
Prayers	Liz Barry	Barbara Joiner	Joel Rasmussen	Christine Bainbridge
Flowers	Allison Towner	Wendy Benson	Frances Simpson	Christine Bainbridge

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize at 3 Barns Close at 7.30 pm on Sundays 13th and 27th January

COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS leaders may use other readings

Date	6 th Jan	13 th Jan	20 th Jan	27 th Jan
First Reading	Isaiah 60: 1-6	Isaiah 43: 1-7	Isaiah 62: 1-5	Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8 - 10
Psalm	Psalm 72: 1-7 and 10-14	Psalm 29	Psalm 36: 5-10	Psalm 19
New Testament	Ephesians 3: 1-12	Acts 8: 14-17	1 Corinthians 12: 1-11	1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a
Gospel	Matthew 2 : 1-12	Luke 3: 15-17 and 21-22	John 2: 1-11	Luke 4: 14-21

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN JANUARY 2019

3 rd Jan	Thursday	10 am to noon 7.20 pm	Coffee Morning, Church open Elders Meeting
6 th Jan	Sunday	11.30 am 2.30 to 4.30 pm	Foodbank Church Meeting Afternoon tea in the Hall
7 th Jan	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
8 th Jan	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
13 th Jan	Sunday	6.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group, Games in Hall Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
15 th Jan	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
20 th Jan	Sunday	8.00 am 6.30 pm	Morning Meditation & Breakfast Pulse Group, Discussion, 17 Bell Lane
21 st Jan	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
22 nd Jan	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild
27 th Jan	Sunday	7.00 to 9.00 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group, Games in Hall Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

We have seen last month how several courageous women, each of them risking their lives in various ways, saved the baby Moses. But as a young man, despite being a prince by virtue of being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses had to flee Egypt after killing a taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave. When we pick up the story, Moses is a much older man who has made his home in Midian, in the Arabian Peninsula, married a Midianite woman named **Zipporah**, and has been content to live there quietly for many years, far away from any Israelites and from any Egyptians. But God has big plans for Moses: he is called to return to Egypt to deliver the Hebrews from slavery. Understandably, Moses is far from enthusiastic about such a daunting task. With great reluctance, he finally agrees to go, knowing at least he has nothing to fear from his former enemies: *"Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return into Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead."* (Ex: 4:19). Moses sets out therefore with Zipporah and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer.

It is during the trip that a very strange incident happens, so strange in fact that according to Jonathan Kirsch¹, "for mystery, mayhem and sheer baffling weirdness, nothing else in the Bible quite compares with the story of Zipporah." That might be a slight exaggeration as there are plenty of weird stories in the Bible, but the story of Zipporah is certainly up there! This is how the text describes the "incident": *"On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So, He let him alone. At that time, she said blood-bridegroom in reference to circumcision."* (Ex. 4: 24-26)

The first obvious question which comes to mind is why would God want to kill Moses? Not simply to punish him but *to kill him*. Why is God so angry? Let's not forget that He has spent a lot of time patiently countering Moses's successive excuses which aimed to avoid having to go to Egypt: "What if they don't listen to me?", "I am not eloquent", "Please send someone else" etc... There is no doubt that God wanted Moses and no one else for that task, so why kill him now when he is on the way to fulfil his mission? We are not told whether God appeared in some physical form or as a voice but clearly Moses is paralysed with fear as he

¹ Jonathan Kirsch, *The Harlot by the Side of the Road*, (London, Rider, 1997)

does not act or say anything to defend himself or his family. *It is Zipporah's presence of mind that saves the day as she alone discerns what God wants and circumcises her son right away with a flint knife...*

This is indeed even stranger than God's anger. How come Zipporah knows what God wants more than Moses? Moreover, why is it that Moses did not have his sons circumcised in the first place, an essential sign of the covenant? Both Gershom and Eliezer should have been circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. Some commentators² explain that "oversight" by the fact that Moses having been raised as an Egyptian, did not identify with the Israelites' religious practices. Another explanation might be that Zipporah, not herself an Israelite, had refused to allow it.

But as extreme dangers demand extreme measures, the "gutsy Zipporah" as Lynn Japinga describes her, shows what she is made of and "with nerves of steel performs emergency surgery on her son without losing her lunch"³...!!! Nothing is said however of the reaction of the poor son (whose age we don't know) and please note, only one son, not the other.

The weirdness of the episode continues as Zipporah takes the foreskin and touched "his" feet. Whose feet? Moses's or her son's? The Hebrew is ambiguous and can designate either, but whoever it was, why does Zipporah do this? As the Hebrew word for feet is often in the bible a euphemism for genitals, most commentators have suggested that she touched Moses' genitals with the son's foreskin which would symbolically mean that Moses is being circumcised by her too. So here we have yet another woman saving the day for Moses: Zipporah having served as a mediator between Moses and God, God's mysterious anger abates.

The last strange element is what Zipporah says at the end: *"Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"* What does that mean? Several scholars have suggested that it might be the conclusion of a magic sacrificial rite that Zipporah performed as a high priestess of some ancient religion like her father Jethro, described as a "high priest". Trevor Dennis thinks that such a scenario is entirely plausible: "Despite its apparent spontaneity", he writes, "Zipporah's act is clearly of a ritual kind, in particular the fact that it seems to conform to established rules

² Lynn Japinga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament*, (WJK, Louisville, Kentucky, 2017)

³ Lynn Japinga. *Preaching ...*

such as using a flint knife with the emphasis on the shedding of blood which appears to have been understood as a type of sacrifice.⁴ “If this is the case”, writes Dora O’Donnell Steel, “this text is unique not only within a biblical framework but within the context of the ancient Near East as there is no other evidence that women performed acts of blood sacrifice⁵”

This enigmatic episode raises, as we have seen, a lot of unanswered questions but what is certain is that Zipporah averts a great danger: without her resourcefulness, her calm and of course her steady hand in performing a delicate operation on her son, Moses would have been killed. I will therefore let Trevor Dennis conclude this short study⁶: “Zipporah has emerged from this tiny, obscure passage as possibly one of the most significant women in the Bible and yet she is virtually forgotten and written out of the story of Moses when she makes her third and final appearance in the narrative in Exodus 18⁷”

We might deplore this, but we should not be surprised that in a book like the Bible, which was most probably entirely written by men living in a deeply patriarchal society, women who became heroines were never - or extremely rarely - recognised as such, *whatever they did*, contrary to their male counterparts. It is a modern *and very welcome* development that so many commentators have now endeavoured to reclaim the various roles and the great importance of women in the biblical text.

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good things therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again [Stephen Grellet]

Question You don’t seem bothered Answer Would it help? [from film *Bridge of Spies*]

⁴ Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women’s Voices in the Old Testament*, (SPCK, London, 1994)

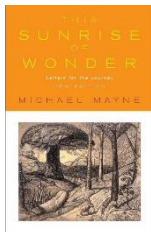
⁵ Dora O’Donnell Steel, *Exodus in The Women’s Bible Commentary*, (SPCK, London, 1992)

⁶ Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed ...*

⁷ Trevor Dennis, *Sarah laughed ...*

BOOK SHARE: 'THIS SUNRISE OF WONDER' BY MICHAEL MAYNE

Ann Hardiman



My book share choice is 'This Sunrise of Wonder' by Michael Mayne who was Dean of Westminster in the 1980s and 1990s. He has local connections in that he was trained at Cuddesdon Theological College. Robert Bailey gave me this book many years ago and I treasure it.

It is written as a series of letters to his grandchildren urging them not to miss the wonders of creation, of art, of literature, of music and he gives dozens of examples. He insists on the value of wonder and I return to this book again and again and it is truly life enhancing. It reminds me somewhat of the radio programme 'Something Understood' which is broadcast on Sundays at 6 am, which links the inner and outer worlds, the ordinariness, yet extraordinariness of this world.

The title was inspired by this GK Chesterton quote: 'At the back of our brains, so to speak, there is a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life is to dig for this sunrise of wonder'.

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE UPDATE

Robert Harding

In their most recent posting Commitment for Life included two stories to illustrate how the money and support that we give, through them to 'PARC', (The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee), benefits some of the farmers in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory. These stories are about two farmers in Gaza whose livelihoods were destroyed during the 2014 military offensive.

Said's family home and farm were badly damaged, and the intensity of the shelling forced them to flee, leaving their animals behind to die. PARC supported Said to rebuild his farm, fitting netting and a roof on his chick enclosure and installing a rainwater harvesting unit. In the summer this works like a cooling system for the enclosure and keeps the chicks healthier. In the winter, water is channelled into a useable system instead of disappearing after it falls across the farm. Said is now able to rear 50% more chicks, thus improving his family's income.

Elsewhere, Fadi also lives on a farm with his family and his brothers' families. During the 2014 military offensive, Fadi lost both his legs due to shelling. Some 80% of the farm was destroyed and much of the livestock died because the family had to flee. Fadi had bred sheep and goats before the conflict, but his injury took away his livelihood. Carrying water to his animals and getting around independently became impossible and he depended on his brothers for help. He almost lost his farm. Now with a rainwater harvesting unit installed with the support of PARC, Fadi simply flips a switch and his sheep get fresh water. He says: *'I benefitted a lot from the project. It gave me enthusiasm and encouraged me to raise my animals again. I have water all year. I feel comfortable, and I can do it alone in my wheelchair. This is the sort of difference we make as a 'Commitment for Life Church'.*



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