

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



FEBRUARY 2019

Covering Thoughts

Misia Sert 1872-1950

May I introduce you to Misia Sert a gifted pianist taught by Gabriel Faure. You may be forgiven if you have never heard of her, but if I list some of her close associates: Renoir, Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec, Sati, Debussy, Ravel, Diaghilev and Chanel, you will see that she was at the heart of the arts world in Paris. She was also one of the most painted women in the first half of the twentieth century, and a friend, patron and muse.

A close friend of Diaghilev's it was she, unbeknown to the waiting audience, who saved the opening night of Petrushka at the Ballets Russes by paying the costumier his 4000 francs. The costumes were released and at last the show commenced.

So why have I chosen to do her portrait for the cover of the newsletter?

In the month when we celebrate Valentine's Day it is good to reflect on someone who was an inspiration and beloved by many, who had a gift for bringing others together, yet who has today been forgotten. She did not paint herself yet she enabled others to excel in their art. We are fortunate that so many portraits of Misia have survived, but today they are valued for the artist who painted them rather than for Misia herself.

In her autobiography she wrote: I always believed that artists were more in need of love than respect. I loved them, their pleasures, their work, their troubles and their joy in life which I shared with them.

Christine

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

I imagine very many of us come into the sanctuary of Wheatley URC with a sense of relief, a sense of peace and a sense of being where we belong. Our church has, in the minds of many, a beautiful and holy simplicity to it. We know where things are, where they belong, where to find them and generally what to expect. If like me, this is all part of the attraction of being part of the family that is Wheatley United Reformed Church, *then be prepared for an almighty shock!*

By the end of February all the pews and chairs will have disappeared, replaced by the hall chairs, the table tennis table will be in one corner, somewhere else there will be the Guides bits and pieces, the small folding tables from the hall cupboard will be tucked in there somewhere, the porch will look very different and we will probably be facing a different way during worship. Nothing much will look the same or seem familiar. The upheaval will last several months. So here's a question! Is this something to be borne, to grin and bear as best we can, or is it an opportunity?

Perhaps it will be an opportunity to worship the God who doesn't worry about the clutter and the mess. After all, life is not generally carefully ordered, free of complications and things getting in the way. So perhaps that shouldn't bother us too much during the next few months.

Perhaps it will be an opportunity to worship the God who enjoys the unexpected. Who knows quite what it will feel like to worship in our 'altered worship space'? So maybe we should be on the lookout for some unexpected feelings and emotions during our worship and see what they might tell us.

Perhaps it will be an opportunity to worship the God who wants to present us with new and different ideas. Maybe there will be experiences and new ways of doing things that we might consider taking forward with us once all the clutter and unfamiliarity has been cleared away and we are back in

the sanctuary we are used to? So perhaps we should be looking out for these?

And a final thought. Perhaps this is an opportunity to take a break from some of the things we do week by week or month by month. A chance to take a rest, a chance to step back and review what maybe we do as a matter of routine. To evaluate whatever it is we are doing, before picking up the reins once again refreshed, renewed and maybe with some new ideas. So here's **looking forward with hope** to some challenging months ahead.

Love and blessing to all Robert Harding

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Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Malcolm Benson's pastoral group; Graham Dobson, Ann & Fred Hardiman, Ann Gajda, Barbara & Albert Joiner, Sue & Charles Bennet

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Care for the World Team: Liz Barry, Sybil Beaton, Ann Bettess, Angela Holdaway, Rob Holdaway, Pauline Main, Elaine Matejtschuk, Mike Matejtschuk, Ellen Webster, Annette Wright

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Adult Christian Education Team Update

The ACE team met recently and after a full and lively discussion, have agreed an overarching framework for all the talks, discussions and presentations we have planned to support our Church life. This framework has now been discussed and agreed by the Elders.

However, because of space needed, the reality of when these 'events' might happen are uncertain while the building operations proceed.

Aims and Framework

The Adult Christian Education team aims to promote open dialogue through lectures, discussions, and house groups. There are four streams

that we hope will engage both regular church attenders, but also friends and neighbours in the wider community.

1. The Borderlands of Faith - occasional public lectures and/or panel discussions by outside speakers on challenging topics
2. Exploring the bible and religious stories - seeing the unexpected in both ancient texts and literature through the ages
3. Living the questions - DVDs plus discussion to explore faith in the modern world
4. Prayer, meditation and the spiritual journey: a programme of house groups, courses and retreats."

We hope that this update has been helpful. Next meeting, 30th Jan 2019.

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## **Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

**Merry Bells - Saturday February 16<sup>th</sup> at 10am**

### **How can we as a village support Asylum Seekers and Refugees?**

Over a year ago there was a meeting at the URC at which Asylum Welcome and Sanctuary Hosting told us about their work with Asylum Seekers and Refugees in and around Oxford.

Since then we have met to discuss ways in which we can support this vulnerable group of people. Ideas have ranged from financial support through to helping with language and giving advice.

Please come to the meeting to discuss ways in which we can help as a village. There will be workshops, a speaker and refreshments.

**Liz Barry and Viv Vernede**

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CHURCH CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 2019

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

Date	3 rd February	10 th February	17 th February	24 th February
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	Laurence Devlin
Vestry Elder	Phyllis Williams	Laurence Devlin	Catherine Harding	Charles Bennett
Welcomer	Pauline Shelley	Robert Harding	Tom Goss	Peter Devlin
Steward	Joel Rasmussen	John Kidd	Barbara Joiner	Joan Kidd
Reader	Ann Hardiman	Richard Wood	Malcolm Benson	Christine Bainbridge
Prayers	Ellen Webster	Malcolm Benson	Tom Goss	Robert Harding
Flowers	Moira Watson	Zena Knight	Joan Kidd	Pauline Shelley

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

Simple evening worship in the style of Taizé at 3 Barns Close at 7.30 pm on
Sundays 10th and 24th February



COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS leaders may use other readings

Date	3 rd February	10 th February	17 th February	24 th February
First Reading	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)	Jeremiah 17:5-10	Genesis 45:3-11, 15
Psalms	Psalms 71:1-6	Psalms 138	Psalms 1	Psalms 37:1-11, 39-40
New Testament	1 Corinthians 13:1-13	1 Corinthians 15:1-11	1 Corinthians 15:12-20	1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50
Gospel	Luke 4:21-30	Luke 5:1-11	Luke 6:17-26	Luke 6:27-38

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN FEBRUARY 2019

3 rd Feb	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm 6.30pm	Foodbank Afternoon tea in the Hall Pulse Group, Discussion, 17 Bell Lane
4 th Feb	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
7 th Feb	Thursday	10am to noon 7.20 pm	Coffee Morning, church open Elders Meeting
10 th Feb	Sunday	6.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group – trip out, meet at URC Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
12 th Feb	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
17 th Feb	Sunday	8.00 am	Morning Meditation & Breakfast Pulse – no meeting (break)
18 th Feb	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
19 th Feb	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
24 th Feb	Sunday	6.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group – games in hall Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
26 th Feb	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild

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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>

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 13th February is the deadline for the March Newsletter. Please always send copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals. But paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont.

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Women's world Day of Prayer – Friday 1st March

A woman led, global, ecumenical movement

This years' service has been prepared by the women of Slovenia. It will be held at 2pm in Wheatley URC and 7.30pm in St Mary's on Friday 1st March.

World Day of Prayer is;

- the largest ecumenical movement in the world and the only one supported by Catholic and Protestant, Orthodox and Evangelical Churches
- global – alive and well in more than 120 countries
- women-led but open to all
- above all, a prayer movement

Ann Hardiman

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Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

For the 5th instalment of our series on women in the Bible, we turn our attention to **widows** and more particularly to the one who appears in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, the widow who gave two copper “lepton” (the smallest coins in existence in the Roman Empire) to the Temple treasury, while being observed by Jesus and his disciples. This is the episode known as the **widow’s mite**.

Whether in the Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts or Paul’s letters, the obligation to care for widows comes up very often: There are no less than 80 direct references to widows in the Scriptures! Why so many? In the ancient world, widows were generally poor and vulnerable as they had no security, no claim on their dead husband’s property, no male protection and very few independent resources. And as we know, the God who appears in the Scriptures is the kind of God who keeps a careful eye on the vulnerable, a kind of God who is “*a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows*” as Psalm 68 says.

In line with this, God commands the nation of Israel to care for widows and not take advantage of their vulnerability: “*You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;*” (Exodus 20:22). The strong obligations of children and grandchildren towards their parents (this is what the commandment “honour your parents” means) included caring for them and their welfare, especially if their mothers or grandmothers were rendered totally vulnerable by widowhood. The book of Lamentations captures this sense of vulnerability by using the word “widow” to describe Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar razed the city.

Caring for vulnerable widows was therefore an absolute requirement of righteousness for Jews but when the nation of Israel turned away from serving God, they also turned away from his commandments and widows were among the first casualties. All the Old Testament prophets reproached those who wronged widows and called the

nation back to its God-given responsibilities, for example in Isaiah 10:1-3, Jeremiah 22:1-5, Ezekiel 22:6-7. In the New Testament, apart from Jesus himself, Paul in his first Letter to Timothy treats extensively the issue of community support for widows. At the same time, widows are encouraged to make positive contributions to the church's ministry. And James in the first chapter of his Letter writes: "Let's be clear about the nature of real religion. It must be visible and practical. It visits widows and orphans in their trouble as well as maintaining moral purity in an evil world."

Let's now turn to the specific episode of **the widow's mite** recounted both in Mark and Luke. This is the Markan version:

⁴¹He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12: 41-44)

The traditional interpretation of this episode makes a heroine of the widow, someone whose generosity is worth emulating, a selfless giver who gives until it hurts. However, I would venture to say that if we think that little vignette is about encouraging generous giving, we are totally missing the point, and this for two reasons: *First*, Jesus does NOT commend the widow for what she did, does NOT say "go and do likewise" and does NOT pronounce any words of praise. He just observes what she has done and points it out to the disciples' attention.

Secondly, we should always remember that the Gospels are not a collection of independently assembled inspirational stories but *whole narratives* where what comes before and after, often gives the meaning to the passage itself. Consequently, it is important to notice that the widow's mite

episode comes right after Jesus' condemnation of the Scribes who were the ones administering the Jerusalem Temple and who were part of the great Sanhedrin, the chief Jewish legislative and judicial body: *"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts but **who devour widows' houses** and for a pretence, make long prayers"* (Mark 12: 38-40). Prior to witnessing the widow's offering, Jesus had therefore been teaching his disciples about systems of social inequity, of imbalance in the religious, political, and social structures of his day. By rebuking the teachers of the law specifically *for devouring widows' houses*, he condemns the premeditated, predatory greed that targets a vulnerable group.

The point of that story is not therefore that the widow has so generously given her only two remaining coins but that *she had been "devoured" to the point of having only two tiny copper coins left to live on!*

This is the last teaching of Jesus' public ministry: four days later he will be killed. So maybe we can draw a parallel between the widow giving her last penny to a corrupt institution and Jesus giving his life to a corrupt world. For us in any case the lesson is two-fold: First, can we identify and do something about the structures that allow injustices and poverty to continue to this day and secondly the immediate needs of human beings should always take precedence over the established rules and customs dictated by an institution.

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Tree Competition



Can anybody identify this drought tolerant tree which thrives on an island near the Gulf of Aden?

Answers, please, to Jim Watson on 873689

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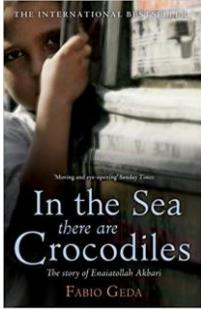
Science Corner – A Good Friend

If you mix water, some sugar, a few trace elements and yeast, then let it ferment and smell the result, you might think it smells like wine. Many people think that the smell of wine comes from the grapes which were used or that the smell and flavour of beer comes from hops and barley. But it now seems that the taste and smell of these beverages actually comes from a tiny organism which is not visible to the naked eye – yeast. Yeast has been used for millennia to make wine, beer, cheese, bread and some other food products but most of the time we did not know that yeast was responsible for the fermentation – it was like magic!

Yeast has been modified over the centuries, unwittingly at first, to develop specific strains for many foodstuffs – not just wine and beer! Whilst brewer's yeast and baker's yeast are well known for their use in fermentation, it is only recently that it has been realised that the yeast contributes a lot to the flavour of the end products. It is now possible to deliberately modify strains of yeast to target the flavour of the end product and it is likely that completely new uses for yeast will be found in the future – maybe banana flavoured beer or chocolate flavoured bread. Yeast has been, and still is, a good friend!

Jim Watson

Book Share: “In the Sea There Are Crocodiles” by Fabio Geda



I recently found this second hand book in a box in Church so I imagine at least one other person in our church family must have read it too. It is one of the most compelling books that I have read, in a while. Whilst it is written as a novel, it is based closely on a true story about the horrendous five year journey of Enaiatollah Akbari, a ten year old Afghan boy refugee, abandoned in desperation, by his own mother

They live alone in a single rented room in a village near Kabul where he, as a child, is relatively oblivious of the harassment that his mother is enduring. She puts him to bed one night and asks him to make three promises to her, that whatever happens to him, he must never use drugs, use weapons or cheat or steal. She also extols him to go through life with a wish ahead of him and by her gentle tones, soothes him to sleep. He wakes in the morning to find she is gone and he is all alone. Their landlord confirms that she will not be coming back, but offers him some menial work to enable him to remain at the house. Thus begins his life alone, moving from job to job in his native village and later in Kandahar, to keep his head above water. He meets and befriends other street “orphans” with whom he opts to “hang out” to save money rather than pay rent from his meagre earnings.

The boys come to realise that there are better opportunities and a life to be had beyond the uncertainty and repressive violence of Afghanistan of living under Taliban domination. So they agree to travel by night, ill equipped, with a “trafficker” across the mountainous border and into another uncertain future in Pakistan, where they are constantly at risk of being arrested and returned across the border. The trip has cost them all their savings and they must find illegal work where they can in factories and try to save again for the next leg of their journey. They are forced to carry out heavy manual work for exceedingly long hours with little pay, sleeping rough in or around the factory.

Eventually, they cross other borders and travel across Iran and Turkey to Istanbul, but have to suffer terrible hardship travelling for hours in cramped

overcrowded conditions in foul compartments beneath lorries with only a bottle of water and a sandwich for the journey. As part payment they have to agree to work off the traffickers' "fees" by working and living on arranged building sites, on arrival.

From Turkey they struggle to cross the Aegean Sea to Athens and then on to Corinth before another long sea journey up to Venice. This is how the book's title arises as most have never seen, let alone attempt to cross a sea before and one boy has been told that the sea is full of dangerous crocodiles and is in fear for his life, despite his friends' assurances. Once in Italy, it's Venice to Rome to Turin where Enaiatollah is befriended and becomes part of an Italian family, who encourage him to apply, successfully, for asylum. Thus after five years of extreme hardship and courage, he has at last found a safe environment in which to live for the first time in his fifteen year life. It is after this that he meets the writer Fabio Geda, who helps him to tell his incredible story.

As we struggle to find our direction in supporting and helping asylum seekers and refugees who for their part struggle to gain acceptance in and around Oxford, I would recommend this book as a really worthwhile read. It may just assist us in understanding how our fellow human beings, travelling in good faith to escape violence, oppression and poverty, wish to become an active part in the God given better life that we are privileged to share and enjoy. Like the Italian family, perhaps our compassion and humble acceptance of their situations may become the next stage of our own faith journeys?

Liz is currently reading the book, we will return it to the book box in the gallery which is brought out at the monthly coffee mornings.

Tony Barry

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Book Share Invitation

We would like to invite you to share a book you have read that has helped you on your faith journey, shaped your faith in some way or given you much to ponder about your faith. Your small book share in the newsletter might just help someone else or interest them in reading it for themselves. Please contact Bobbie Stormont if you are interested. (ACE Team)



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