

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2016

Covering Thoughts

In many ways January is a dreary time of the year. The quality of daylight is often poor, the days short and the colours tending to mud. The parties are over and we feel full of cold. Perhaps it is a time for new beginnings, but we do not feel much like them as energy is low and spring is nowhere in sight.

It was with feelings like these that I began to write these thoughts. No existing paintings seemed suitable so I went to the garden for inspiration. At the end of the path a red rose had been blooming faithfully all through the winter. There was one full blown bloom remaining and one more bud. It deserved some recognition so I cut the bloom and began to draw it.

It is only a rose you might say. No perfume to speak of and now it is indoors so it will soon drop. But for me it became a celebration of tenacity as it continued to bloom out of season against all the odds. This rose could stand for all those people who keep going in adversity, through floods and family crises, depression and illness, bereavement and more.

It also reminded me of all the members of our congregation who during our time of vacancy have kept up a continuity of attendance and support. We can celebrate continuing faithfulness and I can think of many moments when it has seemed that there has been a flowering of wonderful shared experiences and insights.

When the prophets wanted to raise the spirits of the dispirited they spoke of the desert bursting into flower. Perhaps when we see unseasonal plants flowering in our gardens this January we can reflect on this and try our best to be positive and cheerful.

Christine

Looking back; looking forward

Pope Francis, perhaps a little frustrated by conservative and judgemental elements in the church, challenges his fellow-members to see churches as 'field hospitals' – places to dispense mercy, not judgement.

What else are we, or might we be?

Here are some possibilities.

A silent vineyard
A wine-press for a harvest
A feast of hospitality
A blank canvas
A shadow land of doubt
A ship of fools
A school for wisdom
A vale of tears
A mountain of transfiguration
A field of compassion
A pilgrim's rest
A wind-torn desert
An oasis of flowing water
A chamber for debate
A table fellowship
A last refuge
A place to breathe
An empty tomb
A resurrection body
A pool of still water
A flock of lost sheep
A sheepfold we call home

Whatever it is that we are facing, may God bless us in the coming year, as it unfolds, night by night and morning by morning.

Mark Williams

Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

“Eat, drink and be merry!” Who has not embraced with maybe a little too much enthusiasm this command from Ecclesiastes 8:15 in the last few weeks? Guilty as charged! No more chocolate, no more festive meals please! Time for New Year resolutions and for a healthier and slimmer self... There is however nothing wrong per se with eating, drinking, entertaining and being merry. Quite the contrary in fact if we believe Luke, our Year C evangelist. Indeed as surprising as it may seem, Luke’s Gospel contains *a real theology of food, drink and hospitality* along with other more “expected” themes such as salvation: Luke is the only evangelist who speaks of Jesus as “Saviour” and the word “salvation” - which has come to be such an important concept in Christian theology - never appears in Matthew or in Mark and only once in John. In contrast both the title of “Saviour” and the word “salvation” appear repeatedly in Luke, showing that it is of great theological significance for him. And so is the theme of meals and hospitality: much more frequently than in any of the other 3 gospels, Luke shows Jesus eating, drinking (60 such references apparently!) and “reclining at table” (Roman style) and not “sitting at table” as it is often wrongly translated in modern bibles. Luke even reports in 7:34 that Jesus is accused of being “a glutton and a drunkard”!!! For sure, most of the meals and banquets that Jesus attends can also be found in Matthew and Mark but they don’t occupy the same central place; Luke was mainly addressing Gentiles who were steeped in Hellenistic values and for whom therefore *one of the most fundamental moral imperatives was the art of hospitality*. Whereas in our modern world we get hot under the collar about moral questions having to do with sexuality, the ancient moralists recognized hospitality as the basic ethical practice, central to all aspects of human activity from family and friends to strangers and enemies. Hospitality shared with friends and family seems natural enough but Luke shows us time and again Jesus eating and drinking *with strangers and enemies*. The picture that Luke is drawing for us however is NOT one of Jesus popping in any old house on his travels to have a quick bite to eat with whoever happens to be there, friend or foe. Rather *he is invited* to prolonged dinners during which the guests, reclining at the table, have the time and the inclination to discuss subjects at length. These dinners which were a feature of the Mediterranean world, were called in Greek “symposia” (from Syn= jointly and potizien=to drink) and were formal occasions during which certain customs and practices governed the behaviour of both host and guests.

The first of these great banquets or symposia appears in chapter 5 where Levi, a tax collector, invites Jesus and his disciples. Tax collectors were hated by the Jewish population as they collected taxes for the Roman occupier adding their own profit on top. Moreover, even if they were Jews themselves, tax collectors had to deal with Gentiles and had to handle things considered unclean and were therefore sinners. No Jew worth his salt could associate with them without becoming a sinner himself. But as Jesus says in 5:32 “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.” So Jesus’ willingness to recline at the table with Levi and his friends (other tax collectors no doubt) is part of what interpreters have called “the great reversal” another of Luke’s favourite themes i.e. “the first will be last and the last will be first” (13:30) when God will “bring down the powerful from their homes and lifts up the lonely” (1:52). In other words, eating and drinking with sinners is an integral and important part of Jesus’ ministry.

Luke shows many other examples where a meal provides an opportunity to announce the “great reversal” and one of these is the dinner at the home of Simon the Pharisee in 7: 36-50. The story is similar to some in the other Gospels (Matthew 26 and Mark 14) but in those the Pharisee becomes a leper and we are not told in those stories that the woman who anoints Jesus’ head with an expensive perfume is a sinner. So the fact that in Luke’s gospel, Jesus eats not only with Simon the Pharisee *but in his house* is vital to his theology: in the other gospels, Jesus *never* eats with Pharisees while in Luke he does so repeatedly. But what is interesting here is that despite Luke’s manifest interest for the poor in his entire Gospel, the story does not lead to any discussion on the price of the perfume which could have benefited the poor like in the other Gospels. Instead, Luke draws a contrast between the sinful woman’s profound humility and repentance and the Pharisee who fails dismally to honour his guest (v.44 to 46) - a major offence in that sort of collective society where honour and shame were core values - while still being convinced that he is superior to anybody else. We can therefore see that the meal gives Luke the opportunity to show another example of “the first will be last and the last will be first”, the great reversal that characterizes the Kingdom of God.

And then there is the famous dinner at the home of Zacchaeus (19:1-10) another “unclean” tax collector, where Jesus is not invited *but invites himself*. Coming after the parable of the Great Banquet in chapter 14 where the servant is ordered by the master to “compel people to come in” (14:23) we can see the parallel with the story of Zacchaeus when it is Jesus who

commands and decides. In total contrast to the other meals with Pharisees, where Jesus is invited to converse and discuss but where the Pharisees remain lords of their own households, Zaccheus undergoes a profound change because Jesus has burst into his life. As a result Zaccheus gives half his possessions to the poor and gets “salvation” in return (19:9) All those passages show the importance in Luke’s theology of a well-understood hospitality whose goal is to honour your guests and the manner in which meals are occasions to speak both of the great reversal and of the hope of salvation, two of Luke’s favourite theological themes.

Update On Our Vacancy

Revd Duncan Wilson attended our last Elders' Meeting to discuss the current situation. He outlined the process we need to go through to appoint an 'Interim Minister' and why that might be the best way forward at present. He has also met with Revd Pauline Main who currently has a joint 50% pastorate in Oxford, with a view to some of us meeting to discuss if we might have compatible interests which could lead to us taking this further with her.

Nothing can proceed without the agreement of the Church Meeting, so please attend if you can on Sunday 10th January, when we will explain some of this in more detail and have suggestions for the way forward.

Robert Harding & Malcolm Benson

WHEATLEY AREA CHURCHES

CHAIRMAN'S BLOG FOR JANUARY 2016

Happy New Year to members of all our churches and to all others who may read this magazine. May peace prevail in our country in 2016 and progress be made towards finding peaceful solutions to ending the continuing conflicts and outbreaks of violence around the World.

I trust that Christmas was a joyful time for you and your families and you are now ready to move into **Epiphany**, travelling with the Kings, as they follow the star to Bethlehem, from whence over two thousand years of our history has been shaped.

Next, our spiritual journeying will be taking us towards **Lent and Easter**. This year Lent will start on **Wednesday 10th February (Ash Wednesday)** and run through to **Sunday 20th March (Palm Sunday)** into **Holy Week** and the **Easter Weekend (25th to 28th March)**.

During the six Saturdays of Lent we intend to organise **simple Lenten soup lunches, again in the URC Hall**, with each church taking at least one turn at hosting the lunches. This year, proceeds will go to help Christian Aid, with their work around the World. It is also hoped to offer some form of weekly, Lenten meditation or study, either before the lunches or on a different day or evening during each week.

At the beginning of Lent we shall once again be showing our commitment towards creating a fairer world marketplace by participating in **Fair Trade Fortnight**. Watch out for church events in support of this between **29th Feb and 13th March**, which may include a Fair Trade Breakfast, this year.

There will also be the usual joint service on **4th March** for **The Women's World Day of Prayer**, this year, being prepared by the women of Cuba.

In the meantime, relax and enjoy the relatively gentle month of January and be charged up and ready to go forth with energy and enthusiasm into all that February and March will have to offer us. (I may even feel inspired to offer you a Sunday evening or three of contemporary liturgical music, so keep an eye your Sunday Links, for further information!).

Next WAC Committee Meeting: 7.30pm Wednesday 13th Jan at St. Mary's

Tony Barry.

Church Calendar January 2016

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

Date	3rd Jan	10th Jan	17th Jan	24th Jan	31st Jan
Service	Morning Service +HC	Morning Service	Morning Service +HC	Morning Service	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Colin Thompson	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson with Jane Benyon*	Revd. Richard Bittleston*	LEP at URC Revd. Colin Thompson with Father Dusham Cros
Vestry Elder	Ann Bettess	Joan Kidd	Richard Wood	Ellen Webster	Phyllis Williams
Welcomer	Ellen Webster	Ann Hardiman	John Kidd	Ann Bettess	Liz Barry
Steward	Charles Bennett	Liz Stuart	Bob Webster	Elizabeth Walkey	Tom Goss
Reader	Bob Webster	Sybil Beaton	Tom Goss	Chris Shelley	Ellen Webster
Prayers	Robert Harding	Liz Barry	Rebecca Bullard	Bob Webster	Richard Wood
Flowers	Catherine Harding	Allison Towner	Christine Bainbridge	Frances Simpson	Allison Towner

Traidcraft stall on occasional Sundays.

Elders on Communion Duty are shown in bold letters.

There is a crèche on the first four Sundays of the month.

Common Lectionary Readings January 2016

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings.

Date	3 rd Jan	10 th Jan	17 th Jan	24 th Jan	31 st Jan
Old Testament	Isaiah 60:1-6	Isaiah 43: 1-7	Isaiah 62: 1-5	Nehemiah 8: 1-3 & 8-10	Jeremiah 1: 4-10
New Testament	Ephesians 3: 1-12	Acts 8: 14-17	1 Corinthians 12: 1-11	1 Corinthians 12: 12- 31a	1 Corinthians 13: 1-13
Psalm	Psalm 72: 1-7 & 10-14	Psalm 29	Psalm 36: 5-10	Psalm 19	Psalm 71: 1-6
Gospel	Matthew 2: 1-12	Luke 3: 15-17 & 21-22	John 2 1-11	Luke 4 : 14-21	Luke 4: 21-30

Simple Sunday evening worship at 3 Barns Close will take place on January 17th and 24th.

Guest Worship Leaders:

Jane Benyon is the Director of the Oxford Community Emergency Food Bank
 Richard Bittleston is a retired U.R.C. minister, formerly at Abingdon U.R.C.
 Father Dushan Cros is a Jesuit from Campion Hall and one of the Chaplains in the University of Oxford.

New from the church family:

Hazel Hull

Before Christmas Wendy and I had the opportunity to visit York and spend some time with Hazel. She is living in a luxurious nursing home at Pocklington, which is about a mile from where her son lives outside York. The home was spacious, clean and had a good atmosphere. The staff were cheerful, caring and attentive.

Hazel is beginning to get her bearings. She was well dressed and her hair was very smart.

Although she spends much time in her room other residents visit her for a chat. She has a note pinned to her clothes to let folk know her name and that she is blind. She has regular physiotherapy and her mobility is gradually improving. She also has a weekly massage session. She attends a regular 'Knit and natter' group and is currently knitting a sleeping bag for a soft toy! She

has been lent some talking books from the RNIB but is yet to master the system to play them. The RNIB is also providing advice as to the best telephone which she hopes to have in place before Christmas.

Hazel had recently had a visit from Joan and Phil McShane and has been on a visit to Robin's home to spend time with her grandchildren although she did find it tiring. She is also planning to spend a short time with them on Christmas Day. Robin is going through her Christmas card list, which numbers 150 and hopes some of them will be delivered before Christmas.

In the meantime she sends her love and Christmas greetings to all her friends. If you are travelling north I am sure she would be delighted to have a visit from you.

Malcolm

Congratulations are due to Lynette Peterson on passing her recent exams.

Please remember in your prayers the members of Liz Barry's Pastoral Care

List: Christine & Richard Bainbridge, David & Gillian Herring, Pat Simpson, Annette & Marjorie Wright, Tom Goss & Bobbie Stormont.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Adult Christian Education

Ministry Team: Tom Goss, Peter Devlin, Sybil Beaton, Robert Harding & Bobbie Stormont.

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Charity Giving

The Finance Ministry Team met recently to discuss the charity donations to be made, to top up our charity giving for this year.

We have decided to support the following charities:-

Helen and Douglas House - £400

Macmillan Cancer Support - £400

Sightsavers - £400

Chris Shelley

And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

I shall not need to tell you who this 'she,' or who this 'him.' The day rises with it in its wings, wrote it with the first ray of the morning sun upon the posts of the world. The Virgin Mother, the Eternal Son. The most blessed among women, the fairest of the sons of men. The woman clothed with the sun: the sun compassed with a woman. She the gate of heaven: He the King of glory who came forth. She the mother of the everlasting God: He God without a mother; God blessed for evermore. Great persons as ever met upon a day. Yet as great as the persons, and as great as the day, the great lesson of them both is to be little, to think and make little of ourselves; seeing the infinite greatness in this day become so little, Eternity a Child, the rays of glory wrapt in rags, Heaven crowded into the corner of a stable, and He who is everywhere wants a room.

Well, but though He was content to be wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and those none of the handsomest neither, may we not look for a cradle at least to lay Him in? No matter what we may look for, we are like to find no better than a manger for that purpose, and a lock of hay for His bed, and for His pillow, and for His mantle too. A poor condition, and an humble one indeed, for Him whose chariot is the clouds, whose palace is in heaven, whose throne is with the Most High. What, not a room among men, not among the meanest, in some smoky cottage, or ragged cell; but among beasts? Go, man, and sit down now in the lowest room thou canst, thou canst not sit so low as lay thy Saviour. And, say I, let others seek Him in the courts of princes, in the head of an army, under a canopy of state, in a cradle of gold or ivory; I will seek Him to-day where He was laid, whither the angel sent the shepherds to find Him, in a manger, in a stable - in the humble and lowly heart.

But the manger is not the worst; the disrespect that forced Him thither, that is the hardest: 'that there was no room for them in the inn, no room for them' - mark that. It is not said there was no room, no room at all in the inn, but none for *them*; they were so poor, it seems, and their outward appearance so contemptible, that notwithstanding the condition of a woman great with child, and so near her time, they were put away without respect or regard. To have fallen by chance or some accident into so mean a place, or have been driven thither by sudden storms or tempest, had been no such wonder; but to be driven thither by the unkindness and inhumanity of one's

own countrymen is a trial of humility indeed; but to have contempt thrown upon His poverty, and neglect added to all inconveniences, is, sure, to teach us humility in the harshest usages we meet with. He that made all places, finds none Himself, and is content. He that hath many mansions for others in His Father's house, hath not the least lobby in an inn. He that would have given this churlish host an eternal house in heaven for asking for, cannot have a cabin for any hire, because His parents seem so poor.

How unlike us, I pray! For whom no downy pallets are soft enough, no room sufficiently spacious and majestic, no furniture enough costly, no attendance sufficient all respect too little. Do we ever call to mind this our Saviour's first entertainment in the world, or think we are no better than our Master? He could have come in state, in glory, in all magnificence and pomp, attended with all respect and honour; but would not for our sakes most, that we might see what He most delights in, and learn it as much by His example as His precept.

At such a time, in such a place, in such a case, so poor, so forlorn, so despicable, without respect, without conveniences, wast thou born O Lord; that we through thy want, might abound, through thy neglect, might be regarded, through thy want of room, room on earth, might find room in heaven! Oh happy rags, more precious than the purple of kings and emperors! O holy manger, more glorious than their golden thrones! The poverty of those rags are our riches, the baseness of the manger our glory; His wrapping and binding up, our loosing from death and hell; and His 'no room', our eternal mansions.

Mark Frank (1613-64), from *The Second Sermon for Christmas*

He was an Anglican priest and the Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

This was Colin's "Sermon" at our own carol service on Dec 13th. A number of people asked if it could be included here, so that they could hear it again. Ed

Care for the World Ministry Team

The next meeting will be on Thursday Jan 14th at 2.30pm, at Liz Barry's – 67, Old Road, Wheatley.

We look forward to welcoming Elizabeth Walkey to the team as we meet to plan for Fairtrade Fortnight.

A Bible Study Retreat in the Sierra Nevada, southern Spain

As some of you know, I have been leading retreats on a variety of topics at Los Olivos, a beautiful restored farm 1100 meters up in the Sierra Nevada National Park, south of Granada. I would love to take a group from Wheatley in 2017, probably for a week in June or September, to do some Bible study with a difference – looking at some of the most difficult and challenging stories and texts in both Testaments, especially those which never appear in the Lectionary. There'd be two 90-minute sessions per day, with plenty of free time in between. At this stage it would be good to know how much interest there might be in the idea. We'd need 10-12 people to make it viable.

The web-site will give you a good introduction to the place, which is set in acres of almond and olive groves and with excellent walks all around. I can highly recommend the home cooking, which is authentically Spanish. Check out www.haciendalosolivis.org and don't miss the tour from the air.

The cost of retreats at 2016 prices €425 (double occupancy) - €450 (single occupancy) per person full board for a course beginning on a Monday and finishing on a Friday; that's around £350, depending on the exchange rate. To that should be added the air fare and other transportation costs (and any additional nights).

Do let me know if you would be interested.

Colin

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 13th February
The Elders invite you to a party
in the church hall
fun, games and supper

Other Advance Dates

From Revd Dr. Carla A. Grosch-Miller, Minister St. Columba's U.R.C.
Oxford.

February 2016 is LGBT history month with the theme "Religion, Belief, Philosophy". The Faith in Action Group of churches in the Oxford city centre have organised a series of events to explore these issues.

Friday 5 February 7:30-9pm *A reading from the book of exile* An evening of poetry, theological reflection and storytelling with Pádraig Ó Tuama, leader of the Corrymeela Community, at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, on New Inn Hall Street, with refreshments.

Sunday 7 February 7:30-9:30pm *Christ's Table is Round* worship with *First Sunday*, A gathering of LGBTI Christians and Friends, at St Columba's URC on Alfred Street, with refreshments.

Thursday 25 February 7:30 for 8-9:30pm *LGBT and Christian Belief, Challenge and Opportunity*. A panel discussion with Revd Dr Susan Durber, Professor Paul Fiddes and Professor Adrian Moore, at New Road Baptist Church on Bonn Square, with refreshments.

The Faith in Action Group at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Road Baptist Church and St Michael at the North Gate. The events are open and of interest to all.

Carla

HAVE NEW CHESS SET - WILL TRAVEL!

FANCY A GAME?

Then, phone Tony Barry on 872293

OCCASIONAL EVENTS – JANUARY

3 rd Jan	Sunday	8.00am 2.00-4.00pm	Prayer Breakfast & Food Bank Sunday Tea, cake & a chat URC Hall
7 th Jan	Thursday	7.20pm	Elders Meeting
10 th Jan	Sunday	11.30am	Church Meeting
12 th Jan	Tuesday	1 00pm	Lunch Club Two
14 th Jan	Thursday	10.00am-12.00	Coffee and cake in the hall and church open
19 th Jan	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club 01844 215513

WEEKLY EVENTS

Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)	Monday 5.30 pm to 7 pm
Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)	Monday 10 am -1pm
Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)	Monday 7.30 pm to 9 pm
Carers and Toddlers (Term Time)	Monday 9.30 to 11.30 am
Pre-School Music Group (Term time)	Wednesday 9.30 and 10.30 am
Guides (Term time)	Wednesday 7 pm to 8.30 pm
Prayers and Breakfast	Thursday 7.30 am
Brownies & Rainbows (Term Time)	Thursday 5 pm to 6.30pm
Table Tennis	Friday 10.30am to 12.noon
Hymn Practice Pulse Youth Club	Sunday 9.30 -9.45am Sunday 7.00-900pm

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.*



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