

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



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JULY / AUGUST 2016

Covering Thoughts

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a crowd all moving in one direction with a commitment to a goal and oblivious to all others? Richard and I experienced this in the forested hills of Alsace this summer. Walking along a very narrow path we were overtaken by about two thousand runners. There was no option but to climb repeatedly off the path out of their way. It soon became more than inconvenient as we had a long journey ahead of us and it was clear that although our route overlapped with theirs it was not heading in the same direction. Hundreds of feet had beaten a route on the storm washed path, and to discover where ours diverted became more than we could manage. We found a rock, stopped for lunch and tried to find out where to go. By the time we had been wished Bon Appetit by countless runners I was ready to throw my baguette at them.

This experience caused me to reflect on how easy it is to be drawn into someone else's agenda and that agenda can prevent you from keeping to your priorities and achieving your own goals. I remember when our children were small the pressure was put upon us to fill every moment of their spare time with worthwhile activities. It was hard to resist, but what fun we had just picnicking in the nearby field, or simply chilling out in the hammock at the bottom of the garden. It is no easier today to avoid competition and the pressure to be always doing something worthwhile. We need to resist the agendas of others, however noble they may be, and think carefully about our own priorities.

I was very amused to learn that the day of the runners was called Slow Down Alsace and that cyclists in their hundreds had also taken to the roads. All this frenzied activity did slow up the traffic and walkers like us, but for me the real go slow would have entailed a quiet sit beneath a tree in the shade and an awareness of the beauty of the countryside.

Christine

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN JULY/AUGUST

3 rd July	Sunday	8.00am 2.30-4.30pm	Morning Meditation, Foodbank Afternoon Tea in hall
7 th July	Thursday	10.00am-12.00 7.15pm	Coffee in the hall church open Elders meet
12 th July	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club Two
19 th July	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club 01844 215513
31 st July	Sunday	11.30am	Church Meeting
7 th August	Sunday	8.00am 2.30-4.30pm	Morning Meditation, Foodbank Afternoon Tea In the hall
9 th August	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club Two
16 th August	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club 01844 215513

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB Youth activities, Choir around the Piano and Wheatley Singers are term-time only)

Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)	Monday 5.30pm to 7pm
Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)	Monday 7.30pm to 9 pm
Carers and Toddlers (Term Time)	Monday 9.30am to 11.30am
Wheatley Singers (Term Time)	Tuesday 7.10pm to 9pm
Pre-School Music Group (Term time)	Wednesday 9.30am and 10.30 am
Guides (Term time)	Wednesday 7pm to 8.30pm
Prayers and Breakfast	Thursday 8.00am
Mindfulness Sitting Group	Thursday 9.00am to 9.40am
Brownies & Rainbows (Term Time)	Thursday 5pm to 6.30pm
Table Tennis	Friday 10.30am to 12noon
Hymn Practice	Sunday 9.30-9.45am
Pulse Youth Group	Sunday 7.30-9.00pm

***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.*

**The deadline for the September newsletter is 6pm on Sunday 21st August.
Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk or paper copy to Andrew Walkey 5, Littleworth Road, Wheatley OX33 1NW**

to do this and importantly, raises the troubling and recurring issue of what justice is: is God's justice the same as human justice? By whom and by what standards can God's justice be evaluated? Must whatever God commands be executed without question or challenged because whatever God does or allows, regardless of how unjust it may appear to us, is by definition just? The Sodom narrative is absolutely fascinating as it begins with a monologue in which Yahweh tells Abraham that his destiny is "to teach the world to *keep the ways of God* and to *do what is right and just*" (Gen.18:19). Abraham accepts this role but when God announces his plan, Abraham immediately sees a conflict: If he keeps "the ways of God" he cannot "do what is right and just" because what God is planning to do is actually something terribly unjust i.e. killing innocent people. So Abraham argues with God and says "you cannot do that" ... which is quite a daring thing to say to God!

But what is even more interesting is God's reaction who could easily have responded: "How dare you challenge me? You cannot understand my ways." After all, this is exactly the answer he gives to Job when Job refuses to accept the terrible fate that has been inflicted on him and his children. In the case of Abraham, there is no such rebuke from God and contrary to what amounts to Job's total and silent submission to an autocrat, Abraham and God *debate as equals*. The God who invites Abraham to argue with Him about justice is a God who encourages rational discourse and not fundamentalist submission... So the episode teaches us TWO important lessons: First, Abraham's courageous and most honourable defence of Sodom and Gomorrah, even if it is in vain in the end, shows us that standing *idle* when someone else's life is in danger or simply standing *silent* in the face of injustice - even what appears as God's injustice - is not acceptable. The second lesson is that the God we believe in, is a God with whom we can argue and remonstrate... Thanks be to God for that!

If we keep this remarkable episode in mind, it becomes even more difficult to understand what will follow: what the Jews call "the Akedah" or the Binding of Isaac, when Yahweh orders Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son and Abraham says ... nothing. How is it possible to reconcile the Abraham who fiercely argues on behalf of a lot of guilty people for the sake of some innocent ones and the Abraham who accepts without a word the ultimate injustice that God is ordering him to do, i.e. to sacrifice his innocent son? This will be the subject of September's bi-blog.

Interim Minister's letter

Greetings! I'm delighted to have been called as your interim minister, and looking forward to getting to know everyone better in the weeks to come. Thank you to everyone for your encouragement and support in the call process. The Induction Service (described elsewhere in these pages) was a real inspiration, though I'm always daunted by the promise we ministers make "to live a holy life"; I'm sure we all try, but how many of us totally succeed! Perhaps I can be reassured by the response we make: "Relying on the strength of Christ, I do" ... none of us, whether ministers or not, are asked to live our lives in our own strength alone, but invited to walk day by day with Christ, trusting that he understands us through and through. "You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways," as the psalmist says in Ps139, which was read in the service.

I then got off to a less-than-ideal start to ministry at Wheatley by taking a week's holiday! A friend and I had an enjoyable time in Devon, staying in Teignmouth. It was something of a nostalgia holiday, as the hotel specialised in catering for blind and partially-sighted guests; being surrounded by guide dogs brought back memories of my days working with blind colleagues at the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and I'm pleased to find that I can still read braille (by sight! I'll tell you all about it sometime). In the nearby village of Sheldon we came across what must have been the biggest street party outside of the Mall to celebrate the Queen's birthday – more than a thousand people were there, most of the population of the village. I hope the Wheatley celebrations were as joyful and rain-free.

We attended Sunday service at the local URC, a forbidding grey stone building on the outside, but with a warm welcome from folk inside, and an interior which had been renovated to make a light and airy space which is also used for concerts. The minister leading the service happened to be someone I used to work with during my time at Churches Together in England (more nostalgia), so it was good to catch up. The worship focussed on thanksgiving for the Queen's service to the nation, linking it to our own Christian duty. The minister imaginatively used a huge postage stamp to illustrate his sermon – stamps stick to the task, as the Queen has done (!); they carry their messages far and wide; the Queen's portrait is on the stamps, so they represent the nation, as we are called to represent Christ.

The minister mentioned the way things had changed vastly over the 60-odd years of the Queen's reign, touching on the changes in morality. He didn't pass comment on these, but it set me thinking. We can often see such changes in a negative light, but is that the whole picture? My friend and I had visited the Dartmoor Prison museum (busman's holiday, I hear you say), a reminder that in the 1950's, prisoners could still be given the "cat" or birch for misdemeanours, and that capital punishment was still practiced. And in wider society, homosexuality was illegal, unmarried mothers were disgraced and shunted off to "mother and baby homes" and then often pressured to give up their babies, childcare was much less available, so opportunities for mothers to have a career were much more limited: professional women – judges, doctors and so on – were much more unusual than today ... and so on. Perhaps not such a golden age after all. Times change, and our Christian responsibility, it seems to me, whilst giving thanks for those who have gone before us, is to see how we can live out our Christian witness in the world in which we find ourselves today.

Every blessing, Pauline

Welcome to Revd Pauline Main

On Thursday 26th May 2016 we welcomed Pauline to 'Interim Ministry' at Wheatley URC. The church was full for what was an inspiring induction service, led by our moderator Revd Clare Downing who was also the preacher. All aspects of the service, the singing, the prayers, the sermon and the welcome were inspirational, relevant, thoughtful and joyous. It was a wonderful start to Pauline's time with us, which will stretch to at least December 2017.

A very warm welcome from all of us Pauline, we are looking forward to our shared time and getting to know you better.



A BIG THANK YOU to all who gave time and talent during Christian

Aid week. The URC total was £ 1,000.24p. We must not forget all the street collectors, URC co-ordinator Chris Shelley, Care 4 World team on the wormery and table games at the fete, also Andrew Walkey for taking a Christian Aid assembly at the Primary School.

Thanks also to main Co-Ordinator Angela Morrison. Together with other churches we have sent a total of over £ 4,000.

Liz & Tony Barry.

divine promise of a mighty lineage which is more than can be said of Sarai who is still ignorant of her great destiny.

13 years go by and Yahweh appears to Abram to establish an "everlasting covenant": Abram is given a new name, Abraham and the promise of an "exceedingly fruitful" lineage is renewed (Gen.17: 6-7). Abraham listens in awe but when Yahweh says that Sarai, renamed Sarah, will be the ancestor of those multitude of nations by being the mother of a new son, Abraham laughs: What? Sarah? Yahweh cannot be serious! Sarah is much too old to conceive and in any case he has a son already, Ishmael, so it must be through him that God's promises will be fulfilled.

But God is insistent that it will be through Sarah's son that the covenant will be established and that Abraham's dynasty will start. Abraham falls silent, a silence that has often been interpreted as obedient acquiescence. However this is not necessarily the case as even after hearing directly from God about Sarah's importance in the fulfilment of the promise, he still says nothing to her of her role in God's plan. So it might be that in his heart he very much *doubts God's promise* and this is what is most interesting about the episode: the driving force is not Abraham's *faith*, which is frankly wavering but his fears, his doubts and his vulnerabilities but also the length God goes to in order to assure his chosen servant that he, God, is trustworthy and reliable. So when Sarah finally becomes aware of her destiny (through overhearing a conversation) she cannot believe it either and she *laughs*, a very mild act for which she is however rebuked by God whereas Abraham *who also laughed*, was not... From Sarah's point of view though, it is quite an understandable reaction as it is *the first time* she has ever heard of such an amazing possibility in her old age. Her reaction however cannot be more different from Abraham and shows a very feminine perspective: "After I am withered, shall I have pleasure with such an old husband" ... (Gen. 18:12) a very human remark accompanied however by the timid hope that "nothing is too wonderful for the Lord" (18: 14).

While Sarah is trying to come to terms with that apparently impossible proposition, Abraham turns his attention to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah that God has decided to destroy. The courage and assertiveness that Abraham displays in the episode is quite remarkable as he argues directly with God, no less, and tries to save the guilty for the sake of the righteous (Gen. 18: 17-33). It really takes a lot of "chutzpah" (guts) on Abraham's part

Common Lectionary Readings July/August 2016

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings.

Date	3 rd July	10 th July	17 th July	24 th July	31 st July
Old Testament	Isaiah 66: 10-14.	Deuteronomy 30:9-14.	Genesis 18: 1-10a.	Genesis 18: 20-32.	Ecclesiastes 1: 2, 12-14. 2: 18-23.
Psalm	66: 1-9.	25: 1-10.	15.	138.	49: 1-12.
New Testament	Galatians 6: 7-16.	Colossians 1: 1-4.	Colossians 1: 15-28.	Colossians 2: 6-15.	Colossians 3: 1-11.
Gospel	Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20.	Luke 10:25-37.	Luke 10: 38-42.	Luke 11: 1-13.	Luke 12: 13-21.

Date	7 th August	14 th August	21 st August	28 th August
Old Testament	Genesis 15: 1-6.	Jeremiah 23: 23-29.	Isaiah 58: 9b-14.	Proverbs 25: 6-7.
Psalm	33: 13-22.	82.	103:1-8.	112.
New Testament	Hebrews 11: 1-3; 8-16.	Hebrews 11: 29- 12:2.	Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16.	Colossians 2: 6-15.
Gospel	Luke 12: 32-40.	Luke 12: 49-56.	Luke 13: 10 -17.	Luke 14: 1, 7-14.

Biblog by Laurence Devlin

Last month, we started to have a detailed look at how Abraham is depicted in the Old Testament and how selfish and less than admirable that celebrated giant of faith and obedience can be. Let's pick up the story at chapter 16 of Genesis where Sarai takes centre stage.

Still not informed by her husband of God's promise and frustrated by her infertility, Sarai offers Abram her young Egyptian slave, Hagar, as a surrogate: "Perhaps I shall be built up through her" (Gen.16:2) she says. In true spirit of sacrifice (!) Abram accepts the proposition without the slightest hesitation and takes the young slave to his bed. Hagar becomes pregnant and starts having ideas above her station revelling in her newly elevated status. Sarai is furious and asks Abram to send her away. Far from refusing that spiteful proposition in order to protect the mother of his child – a child he has been so keen to have - Abram complies and sends Hagar into the desert. Hagar is saved in extremis from a sure death by an angel and returns to a hostile mistress and an indifferent master. At least she can find some solace in the



I am about to make up the list for flowers in the church, for the next year beginning in September. Several people have already requested a special date, and these have been noted. Please contact me if you would like to provide flowers in memory, or on a birthday – or just to provide flowers! Someone will always be available to help if required. Allison Towner

News of the Church Family Sheelagh Snell Most of you will know that Sheelagh died very recently. She and John worshipped at Wheatley URC from 1971 until leaving for Holmes Chapel in 2007. They were very faithful members of this church, and Sheelagh served as church secretary for a time, when Charles Brock was minister.

Altogether eighteen folk with Wheatley URC connections attended her memorial service on Friday 17th June. As Sheelagh had planned the service down to every last detail, it was (as you might imagine) a fitting and really appropriate farewell.

Our thoughts and prayers are with John, Justin, Penny and Dominic at this time of loss and adjustment.

Sheelagh and the URC Caravan Fellowship

Sheelagh, together with her husband John and like-minded caravanners from different parts of the country, founded the URC Caravan Fellowship in 1979. It still flourishes to this day with nearly fifty member families.

In 1979 couples had young families and enjoyed each other's company with the fun and fellowship of rallies throughout the season. There was also the chance to join congregations at the churches near to rally sites and experience their different forms of worship.

Over the years Sheelagh and John were so welcoming to all members and indeed I can say they were instrumental in persuading me to join the Fellowship in 1999, when they talked of their experiences of the URCCF to a Thursday morning meeting at Wheatley.

Joan and John Kidd remember many happy evenings on rallies, joining Sheelagh and John in their caravan, putting the world to rights and having the odd beverage.

In later years when they gave up caravanning, they would still join rallies for the day, attend our regular Christmas lunches and the AGM.

Happy memories

Zena

Church Calendar for July 2016

**Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10am Sunday services.
Traidcraft stall on occasional Sundays.**

Date	3 rd July	10 th July	17 th July	24 th July	31 st July
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Colin Thompson	Dr. Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Daphne Williams-Preece*	Revd. Colin Thompson	Revd. Colin Thompson with Revd. Dr. Dan Inman
Vestry Elder	Joan Kidd	Ellen Webster	John Kidd	Ann Bettess	Joan Kidd
Welcomer	Ann Bettesss	Liz Barry	Ellen Webster	Ann Hardiman	Liz Barry
Steward	Andy Walkey	Charles Bennett	Liz Stuart	Tom Goss	Bob Webster
Reader	Bob Webster	Richard Wood	Ellen Webster	Malcolm Benson	Robert Harding
Prayers	Bobbie Stormont	Robert Harding	Ann Hardiman	Liz Barry	Ellen Webster
Flowers	Ellen Webster	TBA	Pauline Shelley	Allison Towner	Zena Knight

*Rev Daphne Preece (nee Williams) was student assistant-minister in Wheatley-URC 30 years ago and has recently retired as hospital chaplain.

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize will take place at 7.30 pm at 3, Barns Close, Holton on July 17th and 24th.

Church Calendar August 2016

**Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10am Sunday services.
Traidcraft stall on occasional Sundays.**

Date	7 th August	14 th August	21 st August	28 th August
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	Revd. Colin Thompson	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Pauline Main	Revd. Donald Norwood
Vestry Elder	Phyllis Williams	Liz Barry	Ann Bettess	Joan Kidd
Welcomer	Ellen Webster	John Kidd	Ann Hardiman	Phyllis Williams
Steward	Elizabeth Walkey	Bobbie Stormont	Zena Knight	Barbara Joiner
Reader	Jean Boxall	Ann Hardiman	John Kidd	Elizabeth Walkey
Prayers	Ann Bettess	Richard Wood	Bob Webster	Christine Bainbridge
Flowers	Barbara Joiner	Phyllis Williams	Frances Simpson	Catherine Harding

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize will take place at Barns Close at 7.30 pm on August 21st and 28th.

Please remember in your prayers the members of Liz Barry's pastoral group: Christine & Richard Bainbridge, Gillian & David Herring, Pat Simpson, Annette Wright, Bobbie Stormont & Tom Goss.

We also ask you to pray for the Worship Ministry Team: Colin Thompson, Richard Bainbridge, Laurence & Peter Devlin, John Kidd, Pauline Shelley and Allison Towner.