

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



JUNE 2017

COVERING THOUGHTS

As I sat at the computer wondering what I could write this month my attention was suddenly drawn to the bright colours of a rainbow end in the trees across the field. As I opened the window to see better, it began to grow until it arched across the sky disappearing overhead. How long would it remain I wondered? Had I time to leave the window and go outside to see the whole?

There was time, indeed many minutes, as the sky darkened and even the Canada geese were silently watching. In my whole life I have never seen such a rainbow. As I walked along the field edge it encircled an old willow one moment and seemed to plunge into the pond the next. I was fascinated by its stillness and its changing relationship to the land as I moved my position. I had the power to create one composition after another with my camera until the rain came and it disappeared.

Many years ago Wendy Benson had the inspiration to get a group of us together to work on a silk painting for the church. She wanted it in four sections with an empty cross in the centre. This was the first of several designs and I remember it featured a sky with clouds and a rainbow. The rainbow was just about impossible to paint, but we did our best.

It has, since the writing of Genesis, been seen as a symbol of hope after a time of destruction. But you might say: there have been successive disasters, droughts, famines, wars and disease throughout the history of humankind; our lives are cross shaped; to be human is to suffer. Yes, but life is also full of wonder, human kindness, love and forgiveness, and inexplicable beauty, like the rainbow.

I do not have the skill of Turner to paint my rainbow but this is what I saw from my window.

Christine

PASTORAL LETTER: Further Quotations

Quotations collected in the late 1990s until 2013.

Wisdom is knowing who you really are. [Brahma Kumaris]

Theology is poetry plus not science minus. [Swedish proverb]

In Religious Education we aim to give children the paintbox and not the painting. [Derek Bastide]

Any path is only a path. They all lead nowhere. The question is 'Does this path have a heart?' [The Hindu Asylum of Sarabhanga]

Too much theology makes your grasp on non-reality go funny. Not enough does the same. [Source forgotten]

Talent hits a target no one else can hit. Genius hits a target no one else can see. [Arthur Schopenhauer]

All you have to do is to write one true sentence. [Ernest Hemingway]

I am a pilgrim of the future, on my way back from a journey made entirely in the past. [Teilhard de Chardin]

Looking at each other's gardens makes us better gardeners of our own. [Source unknown]

I should like my epitaph to say 'He helped people see God in the ordinary things of life, and he made children laugh'. [Revd. W. Awdry]

Men [sic] are not disturbed by things but the view they take of things. [Epictetus]

God is not the name of the most real thing, but of what is most real in things. [Source unknown].

The greatest thing about your last journey is that you don't have to pack. [Tony Benn's grandparents]

If at first you don't succeed, remove all the evidence that you ever tried. [Ricky Gervais]

For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes! [Dag Hammarskjold]

There is no more perfect a heart than a broken one.....so why should not my doubts be a highest form of belief. [Kotzker Rebbe]

It is in the apparently small and seemingly trivial acts that others most accurately see your true character. [Plutarch]

Hope is like a road in the country; there never was a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence. [Lin Yutang]

Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle. [Philo of Alexandria]

Why don't Buddhists vacuum in corners? It is because they have no attachments. [Zen and the Art of Housework]

Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. [Albert Schweitzer]

RICHARD BAINBRIDGE

Carolyn Dexter Brock

Carolyn Brock died peacefully at home on Sunday May 7th after a long illness borne with great dignity and good humour. Her cat Louisa was lying on her bed and Charles was at her bedside. They were listening to Faure's "Cantique de Jean Racine" a work which Carolyn had conducted on a number of occasions.

We will include a fuller tribute to her in the July newsletter. In the meantime our thoughts and prayers are with Charles who is hoping to visit us in early June and is likely to worship with us on June 11th. We look forward to seeing him then.

Malcolm Benson

DISCERNMENT PROCESS FOR CHOOSING ELDERS

Introduction

The fundamental body by which we in the URC govern ourselves is the Church Meeting. All members of the church are entitled to attend and vote at Church Meeting.

As was the case in the earliest days of the church, we choose some of our number to work on our behalf, ensuring worship is held regularly and properly, providing pastoral care to members of the church meeting and friends of the church, and taking care of the resources of the church (money, building and so on).

These people we call Elders and we believe their role is sufficiently important in the life of the church, to hold them in that esteem which we recognise by using a process of 'ordination'.

How we choose our Elders is important.

The process, which is designed to encourage all of us to take part, will be the same as last year and focuses on discernment and a sense of call.

The whole Church community has been challenged to consider whether they have the gifts, talents and skills to enable them to fulfil the role of Elder and all are encouraged and given time to take part in the discernment process.

The process for 2017 is as follows:

JUNE

- The deadline for nominations will be the beginning of June. At the June Elders' Meeting, the names will be shared and time will be spent reflecting on individual gifts and talents and where these might fit with the needs and mission of the Eldership. For the time being, the names will not be publicised. Elders will hold these names in prayer during this month whilst all church members and friends will be asked to pray for the process of discernment.
- The Church Secretary or their elder will contact all those nominated early in the month and ask them to prayerfully consider their call. When approached, they will be told of their discerned gifts, talents and experiences. It is recognised that many of us share our gifts and talents in a number of ways through our home and work life, and through voluntary work outside the church. Some may feel they cannot take on the role of Elder at this time. However, it is important that anyone who

has been identified by this discernment process has time to reflect on whether they are indeed being called to the role of Elder. In time for the July Elders Meeting, they will be asked whether they are willing for their names to go forward.

JULY

- At their July meeting, Elders will then prayerfully consider the names brought forward, and will, with God's help, discern a number of people who they feel are being called at this time.
- The list of names of those discerned to have a call, and who are willing to stand, will be brought to the July Church Meeting. During the months of July and August, each Elder will contact those in their pastoral group to ask them for any thoughts they may have. In this way the whole church will share in the prayerful discernment of our Elders over the summer.

SEPTEMBER

- At their September meeting, Elders will once again prayerfully reflect on the list of names. Using a simple ranking system, if appropriate, Elders will then indicate who they believe are being called. In our experience, it will be clear at this time that a number of names will rise to the top of the list. The Minister or Church Secretary will then speak to those who are discerned not to be called at this time.
- At the Annual Church Meeting in September members will be invited to consider the names of those whose call to Eldership has been discerned, and, after an opportunity for prayerful reflection, to approve them.

The **five** serving Elders due to complete their current terms in September 2017, are Liz Barry, Joan Kidd, John Kidd, Laurence Devlin and Phyllis Williams, and in addition Robert's term as secretary is also due to end. We are very grateful for all that they have contributed during their time as elders.

SCIENCE CORNER Jim Watson

Particles of plastic from shopping bags and containers have become so widespread that all the oceans throughout the world now contain vast quantities of tiny fragments of plastics, which are toxic to ocean wild life and are causing very serious concern. By chance, a recent discovery in Spain found a caterpillar in a beehive which seemed to thrive on eating plastic – a very unusual event. It has been shown that the caterpillars can digest plastic and probably involves a single enzyme which could, in the future, be produced industrially on a large scale to reduce the environmental degradation caused by plastics. Hopefully!

WHEATLEY AREA CHURCHES NEWS

The date for the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** has not yet been agreed but the meeting will probably be held in the URC Church Hall in early July. Once a date has been fixed, details will be published in the forthcoming Sunday Links. Please attend the AGM to support your committee members (Pauline Main, Malcolm Benson and Tony Barry) who have some input into planning joint church events for 2017/18. The committee members are there to represent your church's ecumenical views and needs for our joint worship, fellowship and Christian outreach in the village. Hot and cold beverages will be provided, but please bring a picnic lunch to eat before or after the meeting.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK took place between the 14th and 20th May and although most of the money collected will have been counted by now, results will not be available until the next newsletter. This year we suffered a higher than usual loss of collectors, mostly due to infirmity and ageing and we thank them for their many years of stalwart service. As we were unable to find enough new collectors, this has resulted in a loss of potential income for **Christian Aid** this year of about £1,200. We apologise to residents in roads that were not covered and hope that new collectors will come forward in time for next year's collection. A list of roads and areas not covered will appear in next month's issue. Thank you to everyone who has helped and generously donated this year.

PENTECOST: I understand that a rather special joint service may be in the planning stages, but again we need to watch the Sunday Link for more details.

Tony Barry

MORNING COFFEE ON THURSDAY 18th MAY 2017 WORMINGHALL VILLAGE HALL FOR **CHRISTIAN AID**

Thank you everybody who visited Worminghall where £246.60 was raised for Christian Aid Week! This was a big increase on last year's event when £191.00 was raised. So very well done all the organisers, helpers and those who attended.

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR JUNE 2017.

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

Date	4th June	11th June	18th June	25th June
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service Church Anniversary
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Colin Thompson	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Pauline Main	Revd Dr. Romilly Micklem
Vestry Elder	Ellen Webster	John Kidd	Phyllis Williams	Pauline Shelley
Welcomer	Laurence Devlin	Joan Kidd	Charles Bennett	Phyllis Williams
Steward	Malcolm Benson	Moira Watson	Barbara Joiner	Angela Holdaway
Reader	Malcolm Benson	Laurence Devlin	Robert Harding	Barbara Joiner
Prayers	Joel Rasmussen	Tom Goss	Bobbie Stormont	Liz Barry
Flowers	Moira Watson	Catherine Hughes	Pauline Shelley	Team for Anniversary

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

There will be no simple worship in the style of Taize at Barns Close in June. It will re-commence in July.

Please remember in your prayers the members on John Kidd's Pastoral Care List: Graham Dobson, Ann and Fred Hardiman, Richard and Doris Sinfield, Barbara and Albert Joiner, Sue and Charles Bennett.

COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS FOR JUNE 2017

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings.

Date	4th June	11th June	18th June	25th June
First Reading	Acts 2: 1-21	Genesis 1: 1-2, 4a	Exodus 19: 2-8a	Jeremiah 20: 7-13
Psalm	Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b	Psalm 8	Psalm 100	Psalm 69: 7-10 & 16-18
New Testament	1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13	2 Corinthians 13: 11-13	Romans 5: 1-8	Romans 6: 1b-11
Gospel	John 7: 37-39	Matthew 28: 16-20	Matthew 9: 35 - 10.8	Matthew 10: 24-39

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN JUNE 2017

<i>1st June</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>10.00 am to noon</i>	<i>Coffee in the Hall, Church open</i>
<i>4th June</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>8.00 am 2.30 to 4.30 pm 7.00 to 9.00 pm</i>	<i>Morning Meditation, Foodbank Afternoon Tea in the Hall Pulse Group, 17 Bell Lane</i>
<i>5th June</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>2.00 to 4.00 pm</i>	<i>Not So Young Club</i>
<i>8th June</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>7.15 pm</i>	<i>Elders meeting</i>
<i>11th June</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>7.00 pm</i>	<i>Pulse Group Games in Hall</i>
<i>13th June</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>1.00 pm</i>	<i>Lunch Club Two</i>
<i>18th June</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>7.00 to 9.00 pm</i>	<i>Pulse Group, 17 Bell Lane</i>
<i>19th June</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>2.00 to 4.00 pm</i>	<i>Not So Young Club</i>
<i>20th June</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>1.00 pm</i>	<i>Lunch Club</i>
<i>25th June</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>7.00 to 9.00 pm</i>	<i>Pulse Group Games in Hall</i>
<i>27th June</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>2.15 pm</i>	<i>St Mary's Guild</i>

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>Carers and Toddlers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 9.30 to 11.30 am</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 9.00 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term Time)</i>	<i>Thursday 5.00 to 6.30 pm</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 21st June 2017** is the deadline for the July-August Newsletter. Note it will be a combined edition for 2 months. Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk or paper copy may be handed to Jim or Moira Watson.

The Newsletter is printed on A5 paper – therefore your contributions should preferably also be sent as A5, to make editing simpler!

CHURCH OUTING



to

**Evenley Wood Gardens
with tea in Brackley**

SATURDAY 10th JUNE

Starting at 1.30 pm

beautiful, peaceful

woodland gardens

with walk options

10 miles north of Bicester

£5 entry; travel by car

see <http://www.evenleywoodgarden.co.uk>

sign-up list on church hall noticeboard

BI BLOG BY LAURENCE DEVLIN

When you ask children which stories from the Old Testament they really like, a lot of them put **Jonah and the whale** first, only rivalled perhaps by Noah and his ark, Moses parting the Red Sea and maybe Daniel in the lion's den, all fantastic and wondrous stories which appeal to the imagination. In the case of Jonah, what everybody remembers of course is that he is swallowed up by a big fish (even if a whale is a mammal and not a fish!), stays in the beast's dark stomach for 3 days and is then spewed up on dry land after appealing to Yahweh. But if we are honest, most of us have not got much further than this as it is precisely this childhood familiarity and the predominance given to the whale that might keep us from looking for a more profound meaning for that little book (only 47 verses).

Finding it, is a difficult task though as it is a very strange story with not only a bit of an unresolved ending but a plot which is full of excesses and incongruous elements: A prophet who refuses to do what prophets do, the fact of course that he is eaten alive by a huge fish AND survived, the enormous size of Nineveh (it takes 3 full days walk to go from one end to the other: no city in the Ancient World was that big!) the immediate repentance of the Assyrians including their cattle (!), Jonah's excessive mood swings (from total depression to extreme anger) etc. But logically, as the book is included in the Hebrew canon as one of the 12 minor prophets, it must be more than just ... a whale of a story! So, what is the Book of Jonah really about?

Well, the whale might not be the most important element even if some interpreters go down the allegorical route and claim that Jonah staying for three days in the dark belly of the beast symbolises a crisis of faith when the soul is in darkness and that it is only in that state of darkness that Jonah is able to reflect and to confront his fears and his mistakes. In other words, it is only after confronting the darkness *in himself* that he is able to repent and to accept the mission that God has given him ... Such allegorical interpretations have been favoured in past centuries by many commentators who have also equated Jonah's boat trip with human life when everything may seem fine and dandy for a while, even if we flee from God's presence, until a terrible storm happens, the storm representing tumultuous circumstances in life which threaten the very survival of our "ship" i.e. our existence so we have no other option but turn back to God. Not always the case as we perfectly know, often the reverse actually!

Even if those interpretations have some value, they are extraneous to the plot and therefore go against the internal integrity of the story which is always a weakness. However, as Jonah's boat adventure, including the storm and the big fish is surely there for a reason (there is nothing gratuitous in the Bible), one question springs to mind: why does Jonah attempt to escape God *by boarding a boat*? Israel was not a sea-fearing nation, contrary to the Phoenicians, and always turned towards the land in its history. The sea does not figure very much in the Bible at all except to symbolise primitive chaos. So why would a *prophet* trust his fate to chaos to escape the God who exerts ultimate power over chaos, as we see in the first chapter of Genesis? Is it precisely to show that it is a futile endeavour bound to failure and that it will take a trip to Sheol - symbolised by the dark belly of a big fish (a sea-faring monster?) - to make him see light? Maybe! It might also be the reason why the story of Jonah is read in its entirety in synagogues on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, the Day of the Atonement, which of course has to do with repentance and forgiveness, including the human tendency to turn away from God.

In any case, when Jonah repents from his own transgression and is delivered from Sheol and from chaos, he finally goes to Nineveh (which is the modern Mosul of recent sad fame by the way) to warn them of its impending destruction. But lo and behold, the entire Assyrian population, including the king and his nobles and all "animal, herd and flock," repent *immediately!* Instead of being overwhelmed with joy however, Jonah is greatly displeased and becomes angry: "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I know that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. *Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.*" (4:1-3). What a strange reaction! Why on earth is Jonah so angry? This has exercised commentators for centuries but here are the two most common reasons they have come up with.

First, it might be that Jonah feels he has been made to look a fool: He had told the Assyrians that in forty days their city would be destroyed but it was not. So, Jonah might be feeling that God's mercy makes him appear as a *false prophet* because according to Moses "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken" (Deut. 18:22). But a prophet is not an oracle and a prophecy is not a prediction. *A prophet does not foretell, he warns.* So if his warning has made people change their wicked ways, then the prophet has succeeded. So the reason for Jonah's anger must be elsewhere as he should logically be proud of his efficiency as a prophet!

The second possible explanation (which seems to me more plausible) is that he is distressed that God had forgiven the heathen of Nineveh. According to him, the Assyrians deserved to be punished for their wickedness. Why then would a mere change of heart, rather quick and spectacular at that, release them from the punishment that was their due? *For Jonah, this is unjust.* This is particularly so in the case of the Assyrians who would be the cause of so much suffering for Israel (as the Book of Jonah was almost certainly written after the exile). *God's forgiveness and merciful character conflicts with Jonah's sense of retributive justice.*

In view of this, Yahweh decides to teach the sulking Jonah a lesson: He sends a bush to give him shade from the burning sun but the next day a worm makes the bush wither and die. The sun beats down on Jonah who feels faint and he is *again* very angry to have lost the bush, using the same sentence as he used to express anger at God's decision to save Nineveh from destruction: "it is better for me to die than to live". Interesting remark if we keep in mind that Jonah was almost dead in the belly of the whale except for God mercy towards him.

There is certainly an ironic dimension in this latest development as there is in the whole book: who would be angry enough to want to die for a plant but not be concerned enough for the life of a whole city? Is Yahweh teaching Jonah a lesson by giving and taking away? Maybe as he significantly says to Jonah: "you are angry about losing a mere bush *for which you did not labour and did not grow*". What God might be saying here is that Jonah is angry because he now realises that he has lost something precious even if he originally took it for granted. He now realises its value but *it is too late*. So, adds Yahweh, "Imagine how much more tragic if the great city of Nineveh and the thousands of people in it, were lost. *Should I not remember their value and forgive their wickedness*". Here Yahweh might be making a point about the necessity to value things/people and not taking them for granted but it seems a very indirect and complicated way of teaching such a lesson. Rather, the whole book seems to have more to do with God's forgiveness and mercy for all nations *and not only for Israel* and this, even if from a human point of view, it appears unjust not to punish the wicked. God's justice is different from human justice as the Old Testament makes abundantly clear in many stories.



APRONS: WHAT CARE4THEWORLD ARE UP TO

The sharp eyed among us may have noticed 4 smart black aprons hanging in the corridor near the kitchen. Closer inspection will reveal that they have the fair trade logo and a jolly tagline, “Bake my Day: Choose Fairtrade”. There is a story behind these.

At the time of the pancake breakfast in February, the Care for the World ministry team appealed to the Co-op for funds to help our fair trade campaign. They very kindly gave us £200 to promote fair trade in the community. Think – “How generous!” and “Amazing what you can get just by asking!”

Taking the parable of the talents to heart we have been thinking of productive ways to use the money. We used some to buy ingredients for the pancakes. We plan to provide free samples of fairly traded goodies at the Fete, and we ordered these aprons from the Fairtrade Foundation. They are available for anyone working with food, in church and at public events. So anyone, please use them and enjoy them, to help get the fair trade message out.

Ann Bettess on behalf of the Care for the World Ministry Team



High Street, Wheatley, OX33 1UE

CHURCH CONTACTS

*Minister: Revd. Pauline Main 01865 513581
email: minister@wheatleyurc.org.uk*

*Associate Minister: Revd. Dr Colin Thompson
email: colin.thompson@stcatz.ox.ac.uk*

*Church Secretary: Robert Harding
email: secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk*

Church website: www.wheatleyurc.org.uk