

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



October 2017

Covering Thoughts

October sees us marking harvest and one world week, two events which when brought together cause both celebration and sorrow.

How can we be joyful in the good fruits of the earth, scientific advancement and economic progress when some places are devastated by flood, famine and war, causing mass migration and human suffering?

While much can be explained by human greed and hatred, most awesome of all is the destructive power of nature itself.

Nothing is simple, and if we depend too much on the media our view of the world becomes distorted by an emphasis on the negative. We cannot avoid being influenced by the numerous demands of the world, but it seems that most importantly we must try to act justly and compassionately where we are.

It has sometimes been hard for me to be glad about the wonderful things in my life when I am aware that others are less fortunate. 'Why do I deserve all this?' is a constant question. So I think that we need our harvest festival. It counteracts all the bad news and gives us permission to celebrate and be thankful. If we train ourselves to be thankful people perhaps we can take this thankfulness into the darker experiences of life and bring light to them.

While being mindful of recent hurricanes I still find the words of Vivian Greene in 2006 helpful:

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass....

It's about learning to dance in the rain.

Christine

Dear Friends,

Soon after you have a chance to read this, we will be holding a special church meeting to decide if we wish to proceed with some refurbishment plans for the two back rooms of our buildings. We will have to decide what to do next, which could of course be a decision to do nothing. I suppose we are making decisions about what to do next, all the time, probably without really giving them too much thought. Shall I empty the dishwasher or do a bit of gardening? Shall I check the emails or finish the book I'm reading? Shall I give the homeless person on the street some of the change in my pocket or just walk by? Perhaps I should even stop and talk to them? We might give that one a bit more thought. Should I accept a new challenge, perhaps something in church, that takes me out of my comfort zone or stay safe in what I know and feel sure about?

One of my favourite moments in the Bible is when the two travellers on the Emmaus Road invite Jesus in for supper, even though they must have been very tired and upset and this man is just another stranger on the road. They might very easily have wished him goodnight and a safe journey. What they decided to do next however had consequences they probably could never have imagined.

So please come to the special church meeting on October 2nd to help us decide together what to do next. Hopefully you will have had a chance to read the feasibility study, given it some thought and perhaps had a chance to discuss it with Mark or another member of the planning group. It is important that we not only maintain our buildings in good order, but develop them as best we can for the mission of the church and for future generations. See you on 2nd October .

Love and blessings Robert

Discussions after morning worship.

The "Adult Christian Education Ministry Team" would like to trial this idea during 2017. After morning worship on a number of Sundays you will be invited to join a discussion about the sermon that day. These will take place in the church between 11.30 am and 12.00 noon on **8th October**.

Biblog by Laurence Devlin

This month I'd like to start a mini-series on **the apostle Paul** who is second only to Jesus as the most important person in the origins of Christianity. Yet he is not universally well regarded, to say the least! Hailed as an extraordinarily important theologian, he is very often difficult to understand (do you understand all of Romans?!) and he is also considered by many as misogynistic, anti-Semitic and homophobic among other niceties such as self-righteous, stubborn, dogmatic etc... As we will see, many of these accusations are the result of misrepresentations or misunderstandings of what "The First Paul" (the title of a book by Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan¹) really said. But before unpacking those accusations, I'll start with some preliminary observations as they might reveal some surprises². Some of these observations might appear obvious but bear with me!

The letters of Paul were not written for us and we are in fact reading somebody else's mail! This clearly comes under the heading of the obvious but it implies that they were not written for people *like us*. Paul's letters were written not only in a foreign language very few of us understand but in a language which is not spoken any longer (New Testament Greek is as different from modern Greek as modern English is to Shakespeare English), so we must rely on translations and therefore, to a large extent, on interpretations. More importantly Paul lived in a pre-modern, agrarian, collective culture which was radically different from ours. But it is in the field of what I would call "making sense of the world" that the gap, the chasm even, is greater between then and now.

It was the leading German New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann who first pointed out the fact that all New Testament documents, *including Paul's letters*, presuppose, reflect and express what he called an ancient "mythological" worldview, therefore radically different from our modern "scientific" worldview. The main difference is that for us, every effect has a *natural* cause. Not so for the "mythological" worldview which is quite open to the possibility and even the probability of *super-natural* causes. That meant that angelic visitations, possession by demons, virgin births,

¹*The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary behind the Church's Conservative Idol*, (HarperCollins, 2009)

²*Some surprises from the apostle Paul* by William Walker Jr, (Polebridge Press, 2017)

miraculous healings, resuscitations from the dead and the like might have been unusual, wonderful and surprising but not at all impossible or contrary to the laws of nature. In other words, most modern people do not understand the workings of the universe in the same way as the ancient writers of the New Testament. Consequently, if we believe that Jesus' message is still relevant to us, we must "demythologize" the New Testament and get to the real heart of the Gospels. It does not mean *eliminating* the mythological features of the New Testament but *interpreting* them. It is with this present in mind that we should read Paul's letters.

Paul's letters are genuine letters. Again, that sounds obvious as they are not sermons or essays or philosophical treatises and they are *certainly not scripture*. They *became* scripture but Paul's letters are before anything else, genuine correspondence between him and first century Christ-believers, written to address specific questions, concerns, problems, opportunities that had arisen in these communities. They were "stop-gaps" composed to serve as a substitute for Paul's physical presence, pending his arrival at some point in the future. The **first** important corollary of this "obvious" observation is that we have only one side of the dialogue: Paul is responding to situations and circumstances about which we know very little as we simply do not know exactly what was going on in the churches to which Paul wrote his letters, even if we often attempt to guess, deduce or even imagine! The **second** corollary is that these letters do not provide us with what we might call Paul's "systematic theology" i.e. an overall view of Paul's total assumptions and beliefs, not like Calvin's *Institutes* or Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. And a **third** corollary is that, given that these letters were not written all at the same time but over probably a decade (from 40 to 50 A.D, therefore well before the first Gospel of Mark written around 70), it means that Paul's views changed and developed over the years. In fact, it seems that Paul's thought developed and was shaped in a large part precisely *as a response to the various circumstances, issues and problems that he and the churches faced*.

We do not have all the letters that Paul wrote. In 1 Cor. 5: 9 Paul says: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people." So, before what we have come to call "1 Corinthians", Paul had already written to the people of Corinth. This letter has not survived and it is reasonable to assume that he had written other letters, may be *many others* to other communities (in Athens for example as we know from Acts) which have not survived

either. We have therefore no way of knowing whether or to what extent these other letters might have changed our understanding of Paul's thought.

Some letters attributed to Paul are almost certainly not by him. There is now a massive consensus among scholars (90% vs 10%) agreeing on this observation: Seven letters are definitely "genuine", i.e. written by Paul himself: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians and Philemon. According to an almost equally strong consensus (80% vs 20%) 3 letters were not written by Paul himself: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, commonly known as the "Pastoral Letters," probably written around the year 100. Those are "non-Pauline" because of the difference in style, vocabulary and ideas. If you are thinking that writing in somebody else's name is dishonest and even fraudulent, it is worth remembering that it was a very common practice in the ancient world and a literary convention of the time, often to show how admired and respected the original author was. There is less consensus (60% vs 40%) on the authorship of the 3 remaining Letters i.e. Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians: they might be by Paul or they might not.

Finally, we do not have any "original" of Paul's letters. We only have copies which were transmitted and assembled into "collections" and edited by early Christians in the second century. What this means is first, that no two copies read exactly the same and secondly that it was *Christian communities* who decided what to include in these collections and who almost certainly did some editing of the letters they assembled, combining fragments, adding some sentences, deleting others, etc. Again, this was common practice in the Ancient world.

After these general observations, next month we will have a look at "Paul and women", a subject that has sparked many controversies and misrepresentations of Paul's thought.

Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride 2017

Tony Barry Wheatley URC OHCT Co-ordinator

Many thanks to the four stalwarts who kept our church open and welcomed visitors from the Oxford area for the eight hours between 10.00 am and 6.00 pm on Saturday 9th September. We received 9 visits during that time including a visit from the OHCT County Organiser, herself!

It was a busy Saturday for our church members and a number were also away, so there were no sponsored Riders or Striders from Wheatley URC on the day, this year.

However, on Sunday, after the morning service, six of us walked the hidden byways from Headington (Bury Knowle Park) to St Giles, via Mesopotamia (where we picnicked by The Cherwell) and University Parks (where we took tea in the Edwardian Cricket Pavillion), visiting and passing a number of churches and The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in Marston Road, en route.

The weather was kinder to us than last year and the forecasted rain did not arrive until we reached St Giles, where some of us sheltered by joining an interesting "Open Doors" guided tour of St Giles Church. This was a mainly self sponsored walk and raised £80 for OHCT funds of which Wheatley URC will receive half.

Dates for your Diary

SAT 30th SEPTEMBER 12-2 at URC
SOUP LUNCH for the Caribbean With Care for the World team

Creative Day - Saturday 25th November

Journey into Stillness through creative activities at the Wheatley United Reformed Church on Saturday 25th November 10am – 4pm. Using quality materials, all provided, come and paint, whittle, felt, write, draw, arrange flowers, weave, make graffiti and more. Explore the place of stillness within that we can experience as our hands are busy making and creating.

Sharing or watching, chatting, or in quiet, it's an opportunity to have fun together, be inspired and take time to reflect. No previous experience is needed and both men and women are very welcome.

Why not bring a friend or treat a friend to an early birthday or Christmas gift.

Cost for the day: £5 Final date for booking is 15th November

To book a place or find out more: contact

Christine on 01865 872865, email: the.bainbridges@btinternet.com

OR Pauline on 01865 873908; email: pauline.shelley@googlemail.com

Refreshments will be provided including delicious cake but do bring a packed lunch.

Church Calendar for October 2017.

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

Date	1st Oct.	8th Oct.	15th Oct.	22nd Oct.	29th Oct.
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service wi
Time	10 .00am	10.00 am	10 .00am	10.00am	10.00am
Worship Leader	Revd. Richard Bittleston	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson	Joan Van Emden	Revd Colin Thompson & Pauline Shelley
Vestry Elder	Ann Hardiman	Pauline Shelley	Laurence Devlin	Joan Kidd	Liz Barry
Welcomer	Joan Kidd	Ellen Webster	Ann Hardiman	Phyllis Williams	John Kidd
Steward	Bob Webster	Christine Bainbridge	Bobbie Stormont	Zena Knight	Sybil Beaton
Reader	Pauline Shelley	Phyllis Williams	Ann Bettess	Jean Boxall	Tom Goss
Prayers	Robert Harding	Bobbie Stormont	Ellen Webster	Ann Bettess	Malcolm Benson
Flowers	Wendy Benson	Liz Barry	TBA	Ellen Webster	Catherine Hughes

Simple Sunday evenings in the style of Taize will take place at 3 Barns Close Holton at 7.30 pm on Sunday 15th October.

***Deadline for the November newsletter is 6pm on Wednesday 18th October
Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk Paper copy may be handed to Barbara Joiner***

Common Lectionary Readings for October 2017

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings.

Date	1st Oct.	8th Oct.	15th Oct.	22nd Oct.	29th Oct.
Old Testament	Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32.	Isaiah 5: 1-7.	Isaiah 25: 1-9.	Isaiah 45: 1-7.	Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18.
Psalm	Psalm 25: 1-9.	Psalm 80: 7-15.	Psalm 4: 1-9.	Psalm 96: 1-10.	Psalm 1.
New Testament	Philippians 2: 1-13.	Philippians 3:4b-14.		1 Thess. 1: 1-10.	1 Thess. 2: 1-8.
Gospel	Matthew 21: 23-32..	Matthew 21: 33-46	Matthew 22:1-14.	Matthew 22: 15-22.	Matthew 22:34-46.

Please remember in your prayers the members of Ann Hardiman's Pastoral Care List: Ann & Roger Bettess, Annie Hughes & Elliot, Moira & Jim Watson, Allison & Colin Towner, Ellen & Bob Webster.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Maintenance Ministry Team:- Tony Barry, Malcolm Benson, Chris Shelley, and Bob Webster.

News of the Family

Congratulations are in order for Roger & Ann Bettess who celebrated their 10th Wedding Anniversary on 9th of September with a party in Little Milton.

A "Missing You" card was received from, Andrew & Elizabeth Walkey enjoying an Open Doors weekend in Leeds, during which they met Phil & Joan McShane.

Questions to Jesus

*Last month, in the light of Jesus' essential question to his disciples "Who do You say that I am" (**Matthew 16: 15**),*

Laurence asked us in her "Introduction to the Theme" to return the favour and ask questions Jesus.

Here are the questions we came up with: (Over the page)

- What did you think you were doing?
- Why choose 12 apostles?
- Where is heaven?
- Why do you allow so much suffering in your world?
- Do you still exist?
- When you read all the scholarly books written about you, which one has understood and explained you the best?
- Is God happy?
- Did you want to marry?
- Why did you have to die at such a young age?
- What is faith?
- Why do you let small children die in the extreme floods of which you have control?
- When will you return?
- How can one maintain courage in doing what is helpful even if it displeases some?
- How did you accept your time on the cross?
- Would you react in the same way to the leaders of the church today?
- How can I/we love more?
- Why do the poor always need to be with us when there is plenty in the world for all?
- Why do we still strive for peace?
- Why is there so much destruction in the world?
- Considering the many wars fought in your name, the killing of Christians by other Christians, do you agree that you could have been clearer about who you were?
- Why did you not write anything, unlike Mohammed?
- Why did you only have men as disciples?
- Is love stronger than all other powers, including faith?
- How can we encourage more people to realise they need to accept God into their lives?
- How can you allow all the bad things that are happening in the world today?
- Who am I and why am I me?

Faith in the City by Peter Devlin

In Slough, the town where I work as a Judge, there are 13 mosques, 4 Sikh temples, 5 Hindu temples and many Christian churches of different denominations. There are also CofE, Sikh and Muslim faith schools and an estimated 150 languages are spoken in the town.

Faith has a great impact on the daily lives of many Slough residents. For example, many Muslim children go to the mosque every day after school for two hours or more, to learn the Quran in Classical Arabic. Some litigants will tell me of their dream to visit Mecca or in the case of Sikhs, the Golden Temple in Amritsar and many save for this for many years. Money given as compensation for injured Muslim children may have to be put in Islamic compliant investments which do not permit interest to be earned. Orthodox Sikhs wear a ceremonial dagger and pose a challenge for our metal detectors but as our security staff have had diversity training, the Sikhs are allowed (with dagger!) into the building. We also often see Christian litigants, generally of African or Caribbean origin, coming to court with their pastor or minister as support.

Many Hindu and Sikh temples have restaurants attached to the main building and free food is provided *every day* to anybody who wants it: it is a familiar sight to see Irish building workers queuing among other people to get a free vegetarian meal! The temple is also a marriage bureau: parents can consult books where the name of girls and boys available for marriage are recorded and they can choose potential spouses for their children as the lists (now on line) tells the caste, the age, the level of education and the salary of each eligible suitor.

In court and before giving evidence, witnesses must take an oath to tell the truth either on a holy book or by making a non-religious declaration. We have all the Holy Books to cater for all faiths and none; They are all covered in protective covers ...except The Bible! The Sikh swear their oath on the 10th and final guru who is not a person but their holy book, the Guru Granth-Sahib which of course is kept under a protective cover! Pagans can swear an oath on anything they hold sacred and atheists can make an affirmation to tell the truth. Once I asked one witness whether he wished to take the non- religious option or to take a religious oath. He said he wanted a holy book so I asked which one he wanted and he replied: "which ones have you got? ...!!!" I told him it was better to affirm!

Many Muslims want to wash before taking the oath and in Slough they have to

go to the general toilet facilities for that but bigger courts provide separate washing facilities for those who require them, as it is the case in many airports or the BBC. Muslim women while menstruating or after childbirth are considered “unclean” and will not take a religious oath. It might seem strange to us but Christian women until recently were considered unclean in similar circumstances as are still nowadays, practicing Jewish women.

We cannot ask women in court to remove headscarves, veils or even burkas but we can advise that the quality of their evidence and credibility may be impaired if their face is not seen. During Ramadan, Muslim litigants as well as court staff are often tired and hungry because of day-time fasting. Many of them however have a phone-App which tells them the time of sunset (when they are allowed to break their fast), the direction of Mecca and the time of prayers.

Sometimes, litigants write to the court asking not to have a case listed in Ramadan. We cannot accommodate such a request although an exception is made for Eid (and also for some Jewish festivals). A few Muslim litigants have also requested to have a female judge but, as you can imagine, we have never indulged such a request! However, we can accommodate the request presented by some practicing Jewish barristers and litigants who ask not to have cases heard on a Friday afternoon in winter as they have to return home before sunset, the beginning of the Sabbath. For ultra-orthodox Jewish women, the religious divorce called a “get” is vital because without it, they cannot remarry religiously which is the only marriage they recognize. But given that it is only the man who can initiate the divorce and give the “get,” he may use that power as leverage to obtain a better financial deal in civil courts. But we have the power to stop the civil divorce proceedings until he gives the get.

Islam and Judaism operate their own traditional religious courts, the Sharia Councils and the Beth Din respectively. They have no *legal* power or authority in this country but many people turn to them to resolve disputes or to obtain a religious divorce. Many Muslims do not have a valid civil marriage as some mosques are not registered for civil weddings and as many do not realise this, problems arise when things go sour and divorce is sought as they are not married in the eyes of the law of the land. Many people feel great moral pressure to use the religious courts to achieve a community- based solution which will preserve the collective "honour" of the family. However, these "courts" are all run by men and may disadvantage women who, whether married or not, still have rights in the English courts.

The clash is between our principles of justice and the values of collective societies where extended families live together and are the most important social structure. For example, in traditional English families, loans between parents to children and their spouses are common and are usually documented in writing as they are intended to have legal effect whereas in, say, Asian families the passing of money between members of the extended family is done without any paper trail or any question asked about its purpose. It is a debt of honour *only* and is not intended to have legal effect. Again, you can imagine the problems which arise when divorce is sought in our courts.

Many cases I have dealt with involve important religious or cultural issues and here are some examples:

- A Christian mother opposed her son being circumcised but the Muslim father was adamant that it should happen. I forbade it.
- An Algerian couple both wanted circumcision for their son but the husband wanted it done in a hospital in England while the wife wanted a traditional ceremony at home in Algiers. England won out!
- A religious Sikh wanted a court order that his son's hair should not be cut as the non-practising Sikh mother had cut it. I decided that the hair should not be cut in future as the boy was being brought up as an observant Sikh.
- At the behest of a Muslim father, I made an order prohibiting his 15-year-old daughter from having a religious marriage at the mosque. It was not a valid marriage in English law and while the girl's mother wanted it, the father feared that if the marriage went ahead, she would be obliged to have sexual intercourse for which, he thought, she was not ready and it would have been a crime under English law.

Many Muslim women here, originally from Pakistan or India, have reproduced the savings clubs called "committees" which exist in their country of origin as in many other developing countries (they are called "Ekub" in Ethiopia, "Susus" in the Caribbean, "Seettuva" in Sri Lanka or "Tontines" in Mali and Ivory Coast). Each member pays in the same amount each month and one member in turn gets all the money paid in that month. The system operates on *trust* and *honour* and is not intended, as I decided in a recent case, to have legal consequences if someone doesn't pay. It is very rare for such cases to come to

court and in the recent case I decided upon, the person being sued for not paying her share, was a Muslim *convert*!

We have the power to make orders to stop girls being taken abroad if the reason is either for them to undergo Female Genital Mutilation in their country of origin (mainly Africa) or to be forced into marriage. It is of course very difficult to get evidence that the trip is done for those reasons.

In cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses who oppose blood transfusion, the courts will always give blood to an injured child against the parents' wishes.

In our courts, documents and written receipts are vital evidence but many Asians use the "hawala" system which is the transfer of money without moving it. For example, in a recent case, a woman bought a diamond necklace in Dubai. She paid nothing in Dubai but the seller instructed her to transfer money to a broker in England who was to pass it to a third party to whom the Dubai jeweller owed money and he, in turn, may have passed it to someone else. Again, the system is based on trust and leaves no paper trail!

From my experience of 11 years working in a court dealing with litigants from an extremely diverse ethnic mix, I honestly think that our legal system is flexible and adaptable to the needs of faith groups but does not allow anybody to dictate to us their own agenda.

For those interested in these issues, I can recommend the following websites:
southallblacksisters.org.uk (Helping victims of domestic violence)
www.dofeve.org. (Working to end FGM)
islamic-sharia.org. (The Sharia Council website)
theus.org.uk. (The London Beth Din website)
www.ukifc.com. (The Islamic Finance Council website)



Catherine Harding Is looking for some help serving and preparing Sunday morning coffee. It could be once a month or two months, if you are not sure what it involves please speak to me.

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN OCTOBER

1 st Oct.	Sunday	8.00am 2.30 – 4.30pm 7.00 – 9.00pm	Morning Meditation, Foodbank Afternoon Tea Pulse Group Discussion 17 Bell Lane
2 nd Oct.	Monday	2.00 – 4.00pm 7.30pm	Not So Young Club Special Church Meeting.
5 th Oct.	Thursday	10.00-12.00 7.15pm	Coffee in the hall church open Elders meet
8 th Oct.	Sunday	7.00-9.00	Pulse Group Games URC Hall
10 th Oct.	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club Two
15 th Oct.	Sunday	7.00 – 9.00pm	Pulse Group Discussion 17 Bell Lane.
16 th Oct.	Monday	2.00-4.00pm	Not So Young Club
17 th Oct.	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club
22 nd Oct.	Sunday	7.00-9.00pm	Pulse Group No Meeting
29 th	Sunday	2.00am	CLOCKS GO BACK

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

Toddlers Group	Monday 9.30 -11.30am
Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)	Monday 5.30pm to 7pm
Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)	Monday 7.30pm to 9 pm
Wheatley Singers (Term Time)	Tuesday 7.10pm to 9pm
Pre-School Music Group (Term time)	Wednesday 9.30am and 10.30
Guides (Term time)	Wednesday 7pm to 8.30pm
Prayers and Breakfast	Thursday 8.00am
Mindfulness Sitting Group	Thursday 9.00am to 10.00am
Brownies & Rainbows (Term Time)	Thursday 5pm to 6.30pm
Table Tennis	Friday 10.00 – 12.00.
Hymn Practice	Sunday 9.30-9.45am

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.



High Street, Wheatley, OX33 1UE

CHURCH CONTACTS

Minister: Revd. Pauline Main 01865 513581

Email: minister@wheatleyurc.org.uk

Associate Minister: Revd. Dr Colin Thompson

colin.thompson@stcatz.ox.ac.uk

Church Secretary: Robert Harding

email: secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk

Church website: www.wheatleyurc.org.uk