



***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](http://www.wheatleyurc.org.uk)*

# WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



**APRIL 2018**

## ***Covering Thoughts***

*An image I have been living with this past month was introduced to me by Robert Harding in our monthly prayer breakfast event. It is 'On the Threshold'. For me this is a very evocative image, especially as when I thought about it at first it was during a time of transition in my art work. I was threshing about with different ways of mark making and different mediums, getting very messy, working exceedingly slowly and wondering if it was going anywhere. The temptation was to abandon my efforts and go back to the style in which I was confident.*

*Threshing is often hard work. To get the grain from the wheat and to lose the chaff takes effort. I had not seen thresholds in that light. Thresholds for me had been places of standing and looking forward, of contemplation and reflection, and altogether gentler places of expectation and anticipation.*

*This year Easter has become for me a threshold place. Jesus in his young life was faced with antagonism, conflict, and ultimately with imprisonment and death. Yet his living on the threshold of life and death became the place of deepest vision, compassion and inspiration for his followers. It is on this threshold that we too will be most enriched. Experiencing a daily resurrection to a new way of being can transform the mundane into the miraculous, and open us to new insights in extraordinary places and with unexpected people.*

*It seems to me that this is as hard or as easy as we make it. Accepting the hidden life in the grain of wheat and planting it in a positive attitude is the golden beginning.*

***Christine***

## **WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**

A note of thanks and appreciation to all who helped make the WWDP such a meaningful service – the readers, the refreshment team, the musicians, the flower arrangers, the IT specialist, and last but not least, the 30 people who struggled through the snow to be there.

The service, planned by the women of Suriname this year, was so relevant to the situation we find ourselves in, how our waste, particularly plastic, impacts on the whole of creation. We look forward to next year's service.

**Ann Hardiman & Moira Watson**



## **DEAR SUPPORTERS /COLLECTORS**

We are starting to order resources, and make plans for this year's Christian Aid Week : May 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> . Christian Aid are encouraging us to "do things differently this year" and the Wheatley church organisers have explored suggestions for a change.

We are proposing that Christian Aid envelopes are delivered in streets as usual, but with an attached slip inviting people to return their donations to a secure central point in the village, or to one of the churches during the week. Our central collection event will be in the village on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May.

We are asking you to help us again this year to deliver envelopes in the village. With thanks and Best Wishes.

**Liz & Tony Barry  
Chris & Pauline Shelley  
Angela Morrison  
Mike & Sue McIlvenna**

more because the manna would rot if they tried to accumulate it. *The Lord's prayer with its core image of daily bread and that story of a crisis of bread recounted in the parable, definitely inform and relate to each other because both refer to the bare necessities of life made available to everybody according to their needs.* This is the holy vision of a just world in opposition to the misery, poverty and oppression so prevalent in first-century Palestine.

When Jesus tells the Parable of The Friend at Midnight, he is thus implying that what is at stake is not just some hungry visitors to be fed, but the faithfulness of the people to the Rule of God in order to build a kingdom of justice. And the famous sayings which follow the parable "Ask and it will be given to you, ..." are not simply descriptions of God's grace, but much more what happens in a community rooted in prayer and working for justice, because *while we seek to know God in prayer, that knowing is deepened through the doing of justice.* So, the point of prayer is not to change God's mind to convince him to give us what we want but to change us and the world.

## **'ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD'**

### **ST MARYS CHURCH – APRIL 2018**

Please come and support St Mary's latest fund-raising venture - a production of Tom Stoppard's dazzling comedy *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Peter Fanning will direct the play, which will feature many of the team that recently staged *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* and *Godspell*.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a play which, as it were, takes place in the wings of *Hamlet*, and finds both humour and poignancy in the situation of the ill-fated attendant lords. The National Theatre production in April 1967 made Tom Stoppard's reputation virtually overnight. Its wit, stagecraft and verbal verve remain as exhilarating as they were then and the play has become a contemporary classic.

#### Performances

7.30 pm, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2018: tickets, £8

7.30 pm, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2018: tickets, £10

7.30 pm, Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018: tickets, £10

Students and under 18s: £7.50 for all performances

Tickets available by email [smg.wheatley@gmail.com](mailto:smg.wheatley@gmail.com) or telephone 872262.

## **PASTORAL LETTER**

Dear Friends

I am writing this in Lent, as the Passion of Christ unfolds, and you are reading it in Easter, the season of Resurrection. But those of you who came to our Away Day towards the end of February will, I hope, like me, already have detected green shoots of fresh growth beginning to push up through the familiar old ways. We were fizzing with ideas and we don't want to lose the momentum. But you'll recall the parable of the sower. Not all the seeds he sowed – only a small proportion, in fact – flourished to yield a rich harvest. They were the ones that mattered, though. Over the next few months we shall no doubt discover that some of our ideas sprout and wither rather quickly. Others will grow more slowly than we might wish. Still others have not even begun to emerge above the ground yet.

It's easy to feel let down when nothing seems to happen in the immediate aftermath. Ours is a culture of impatience that likes quick results. But we need time now to listen, reflect and pray, to work out which ideas are worth serious consideration, so that we can come to a common mind about the way forward. Over the next year or two proposals, I am sure, will come to Church Meeting for consideration, as we build piece by piece on what we began that day. In fact, we have already started, by moving ahead with registering our building for the celebration of same-sex marriages. Not everyone is happy about that. It's a big change in a short space of time. But Church Meeting gave strong support to it, and I for one am grateful for the generous forbearance of those who have found it difficult.

All this began with a practical decision we had to make about our 1960s block. The easy solution would have been to make any necessary repairs and improvements and carry on as before. Instead, we took a leap of faith. We decided to pull it down, in the belief that a new building would serve our community better. At the same time, we were conscious that bricks and mortar alone do not bring new life to the church, and began to ask ourselves what vision we had for the future and how our new building might connect with our mission. People have responded magnificently to the appeal for funds from our own membership and we are now looking beyond ourselves for the rest of what we need to bring the project to a successful completion. But we also need to think hard about what it is we have to offer that may contribute to the wider community and what may help to draw people in to the life of our community of faith.

Our worship, for example, tends to the quiet and thoughtful. To people easily distracted it may seem slow and dull; on the other hand, to those who rush from one thing to the next, it may offer a welcome oasis. Can it be more

meaningful and helpful, and if so, how? One of the things many of us value is being part of a larger whole. There are a lot of lonely and isolated people around. Many of them are elderly, but not all. Modern life has become very fragmented and individualistic. Can our own experience of life in a Christian community help, and if so, how?

A church in the community and for the community. A place to refresh the tired spirit. A people on a journey, questioning, seeking, sometimes finding. An open door to all kinds of people. A campaigning church, committed to social and economic justice, to peace-making, to caring for the environment. Ideas like these run through my mind. You will have your own. Together, by God's grace, we may surprise even ourselves.

May the hope which Easter brings sustain you in the days ahead.

### Colin Thompson

**Please remember in your prayers** the members on Malcolm Benson's Pastoral Care List: Graham Dobson, Ann & Fred Hardiman, Doris & Dick Sinfield, Barbara & Albert Joiner, Sue & Charles Bennett.

**We also ask you to pray for the members of the Children & Young People Team:** Malcom Benson, Ann Hardiman and Mark Williams.

**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 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018** is the deadline for the May Newsletter. Please always send email copy to [newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk) and not to individuals. But paper copy may be handed to Barbara Joiner.

Please also inform [newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk) if the Church Calendar duty entries are changed.

### Sunday Tea on Easter Day

On the first Sunday of every month all are welcome to an afternoon tea party in the URC hall, from 2.30 to 4.30. It is a time for us to chat with our friends and meet new people.

We have lovely china, excellent tea and cakes, delicious brioche and little fruity skewers. Easter Day is no exception, so do come and bring your friends and visitors. Yum Yum.

grace: God's love, mercy, and healing are not conditional on our relentless efforts and our worth.

Then, if the parable is not about the virtue of persistent prayer, what alternative interpretation can we find? Let's call on the cultural context of the time to help us understand. When Jesus starts his story with the statement "Suppose one of you has a neighbour/friend who comes to ask for bread and he refuses" he is actually describing a totally unthinkable situation to which his audience would have reacted by saying: "Don't be ridiculous, of course not, he would not refuse!" And indeed culturally, under no circumstances would the man inside the house have failed to get up because refusing his neighbour's request would have brought *great shame* (yes, here we are again!) to himself and to his family. Indeed, in the interdependent life of an ancient village, it would have been an outrageous violation of the tradition of support, friendship and balanced reciprocity. Helping your neighbour was as taken for granted as was the caller's duty of hospitality for his late visitors, even at a late hour. I have seen this, many times with my African friends: you always open your door to a neighbour/member of your extended family, whatever the hour!

The traditional interpretation of persistence in prayer not only ignores this but in fact, according to modern commentators, is born out of two mistakes of translation: **First** the extremely rare Greek word, "anaideia" has been wrongly translated as "persistence" (in the sense of "shamelessness") when it actually means *avoidance of shame*. **Secondly**, because of some nuances of Greek grammar (that I will spare you!) the so-called persistence – or rather then, avoidance of shame - *has been wrongly applied to the man knocking at the door instead of the man in bed!* So instead of saying that the man got what he needed because he "persisted" and badgered his neighbour, Jesus is saying: "Truly I tell you, even if neighbourliness alone would not persuade the man to get up to give the caller what he wants, *yet because he needs to avoid shame, he will rise and give the petitioner whatever he needs.*" In other words, the man inside would incur terrible shame and *condemnation* because he refuses to give his neighbour the most basic thing of life, bread, and therefore would go against the essential values that Jesus consistently preached on: help, support and love for your neighbour.

More importantly however, that parable comes just after Jesus has told his disciples how to pray and taught them the Lord's Prayer which evokes the image of "our daily bread"! This is no coincidence and is a critical clue to understanding the parable. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus does not say, give **ME** my daily bread but give **US** our daily bread, the bread shared, for everybody to get what they need each day, no less, no more, like the manna given to the Israelites in the desert who were allowed to take as much as their needs dictated but no

## BI-BLOG BY LAURENCE DEVLIN

For the third and last of our mini-series on differences in cultural values and modes of social interaction between first-century Palestine and our modern world, and how they greatly influence the meaning of our Gospel texts, I will be looking at the absolute and non-negotiable obligation of hospitality, part of our old friend, the honour/shame code! At the risk of repeating myself, we need to keep this in mind, otherwise we might miss the meaning of what is usually called the **Parable of the “Friend at Midnight”** (Luke 11: 5-10).

Let’s first remind ourselves of the story: *“And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for some visitors have arrived, and I have nothing to give them.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. “So, I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened”.*

Traditionally, the “Friend at Midnight” has been interpreted as persistence in prayer: if you insist, God will grant you what you ask! Really??? Many modern commentators however - including Susan Durber, former Minister of St Columba’s that many of you know well- strongly disagree with this. According to her<sup>1</sup> - and as I said, many others - this is not only a wrong interpretation *but a scandalous one!* Scandalous because it would mean that God will give us what we want if we badger him with enough insistent prayer and that he can be swayed if we put enough pressure on him, if we nag enough, if we complain enough ... I don’t think so!!!

Furthermore, from this follows that, if, in spite of our persistent prayers, we do not get what we ask for - for example if a loved one is not cured of cancer and dies, if our child does not get the job he/she applied for or if the house we made an offer on goes to someone else, it is because we have not prayed hard enough or because God thinks we are not worthy of getting what we ask for. *This is a very dangerous theological terrain to tread* as it amounts to the negation of

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Durber, “*Surprised by Grace: Parables and Prayers*”, 2013, (Granary, URC)

## WALKING the WAY – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2 pm A Gentle Walk through Historic Thame

Ellen and Bob Webster will be leading an afternoon walk through the Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve and historic parts of Thame, lasting about one and a half to two hours, ending at a tea shop for refreshments. The starting and finishing points will be at bus stops for the Arriva 280.

Do make a note of the date if you wish to come along – more information will be available nearer the time. We will be looking at the conservation work being carried out at the Reserve and discovering some of the history of the familiar buildings in the town.



## CHURCH CALENDAR FOR APRIL 2018.

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

Date	1 <sup>st</sup> April	8 <sup>th</sup> April	15 <sup>th</sup> April	22 <sup>nd</sup> April	29 <sup>th</sup> April
<b>Service</b>	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service
<b>Time</b>	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
<b>Worship Leader</b>	Rev. Colin Thompson	Richard Bainbridge	Rev. Pauline Main	Richard Bittleston	Daphne Preece
<b>Vestry Elder</b>	<b>Ann Hardiman</b>	Charles Bennett	<b>Ann Hardiman</b>	Peter Devlin	Pauline Shelley
<b>Welcomer</b>	<b>Malcolm Benson</b>	Moira Watson	<b>Pauline Shelley</b>	Ellen Webster	Catherine Harding
<b>Steward</b>	Joan Kidd	Christine Bainbridge	Zena Knight	Ann Bettess	Bob Webster
<b>Reader</b>	Liz Barry	Malcolm Benson	Pauline Shelley	Phyllis Williams	Barbara Joiner
<b>Prayers</b>	Malcolm Benson	Bob Webster	Richard Wood	Ann Hardiman	Liz Barry
<b>Flowers</b>	Team	Phyllis Williams	Jean Boxall	Christine Bainbridge	TBA

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

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize at 3 Barns Close at 7.30 pm on Sundays 8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April

### COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS (leaders may use other readings.)

Date	1 <sup>st</sup> April	8 <sup>th</sup> April	15 <sup>th</sup> April	22 <sup>nd</sup> April	29 <sup>th</sup> April
<b>First Reading</b>	Acts 10: 34-43	Acts 4: 32-35	Acts 3: 12-19	Acts 4: 5-12	Acts 8: 26 - 40
<b>Psalm</b>	Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24	Psalm 133	Psalm 4	Psalm 23	Psalm 22: 25-31
<b>New Testament</b>	1 Corinthians 15: 1-11	1 John 1: 1 - 22	1 John 3: 1-7	1 John 3: 16-24	1 John 4: 7 - 21
<b>Gospel</b>	John 20: 1-18	John 20: 19-31	Luke 24: 36b-48	John 10: 11-18	John 15: 1-8

## OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN APRIL 2018

1 <sup>st</sup> April	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm	Foodbank Afternoon tea in the Hall
5 <sup>th</sup> April	Thursday	10.00 am to noon 7.15 pm	Coffee morning, Church open Elders Meeting
9 <sup>th</sup> April	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
10 <sup>th</sup> April	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
15 <sup>th</sup> April	Sunday	8.00 am	Morning Meditation & Breakfast
17 <sup>th</sup> April	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
21 <sup>st</sup> April	Saturday	2.00 pm	Walk around Thame
22 <sup>nd</sup> April	Sunday	7.00 to 9.00 pm	Pulse Group Games in Hall
23 <sup>rd</sup> April	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
24 <sup>th</sup> April	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild
29 <sup>th</sup> April	Sunday	7.00 to 9.00 pm	Pulse Group, Discussion, 7 Bell Lane

## WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Brownies &amp; Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 9.00 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>