

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



JUNE 2018

Covering Thoughts

As a child I had a giant box of Derwent coloured pencils. They were tiered and arranged in tonal sequences and I remember that it was important to replace them exactly. So it was with a feeling of nostalgia that we visited the pencil museum in Kendal last year. There was a similar box on display, but my attention was drawn to the fascinating story of the origins and development of the humble lead pencil. It is not the place to expand on this here but it may be something to research if you are interested. All I will say is that I discovered that the largest seam of graphite in the world was in the nearby village of Seathwaite. I no longer have that box of coloured pencils, indeed coloured pencils are my least favourite medium. However I do love strong colour and for the past few weeks have been using watercolour for the painting of slices of agate. Sliced, polished and often coloured, agate is very beautiful, with contour-like lines of different hues and tones and sometimes a crystalline centre. The abstract shapes and patterns are beautiful and it is easy to imagine miniature landscapes hidden within them.

While I was leafing through a book for images of agate I came across a photo of lead; not the graphite sort, but real lead (Pb). It was not exotic like agate but its appearance was breathtaking; dark indigo surfaces, reflections of blues, greys and violet. It was like a piece of mountain in miniature. It had none of the flashiness of the dyed agate, and the book described it as one of the poor metals, it being softer than many others. It is this image that is chosen for the front cover this month.

We may set our minds to study a particular subject, and this is rewarding in itself, but when a subject seems to choose us then it feels as if the spirit is at work.

With summer here and a little time to relax let us be open to the unexpected and give it our full attention with pencil or camera. Then sharing that image with someone else will both enrich them too, as well as fixing our experience more firmly in our memory.

Christine

Minister's letter

Early in May I attended a national Gathering of URC ministers, the first time such an event had been organised. Each Synod has its ministers' Spring School, but we don't usually have the opportunity to meet with colleagues from across the UK. It was good to meet and chat with old acquaintances and to meet new people, but in particular, being part of this large gathering was – as it was meant to be – inspirational. The URC is a small denomination and it is easy to feel that there are not many of us (especially with recent lack of ministers in our Oxford area!). So to be part of a gathering of 300 plus, all involved in the ministry of our Church, was a great experience.

Our emphasis was on Discipleship, the theme of *Walking in the Way*. One of the keynote speakers was Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, whose approach was to introduce us to three of his heroes of the faith (or am I allowed to say heroines?!), interestingly, three women from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions.

The first was Maria Skobtsova (“Mother Maria – the saint of the open door”), a politically radical Russian woman, who became drawn back to her Orthodox faith and eventually became a nun (though always a thorn in the side of the church authorities!). She lived in Paris, in a house which became an open door for refugees and anyone on the margins of society. During World War II she sheltered Jewish refugees and helped them escape the country. Eventually she was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück, where she was killed. She was certain that there was no other path to heaven than participating in God's mercy:

“The way to God lies through love of people. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked.”

Next was Dorothy Day, an American Roman Catholic and social activist who worked tirelessly for social justice, by setting up houses of hospitality, an initiative which grew into the Catholic Worker movement. Her door was also open day and night, no matter how disturbed the needy person. She and her colleagues were pacifists who were arrested numerous times down the years for civil disobedience. Her vision was of a Church true to the gospel message

– again she was an uncomfortable prophet, reminding the church to be what it said it was.

Rowan finally introduced us to Madeleine Delbrel, a French Roman Catholic. Her calling was again a hospitality ministry, supporting the poor with the goal of simply caring, consoling, aiding, and establishing good contact with people. Eventually she trained in social work and spent her life in charge of social care in a small town, dealing with (communist) politicians, and in writing. Her writing speaks of a practical holiness – sharing others’ burdens, connecting with people, being close to God.

Stories of people like these – uncompromising Christian people who devote their lives to the service of others – are inspirational. They can be an example to us in our discipleship, but also, I suspect, can be rather daunting, and it was not by accident that Rowan Williams started with the person most difficult to emulate and ended with someone closer to our own experience. Our first reaction may be “I could never be like that.”

Reflecting on this led me to think of the first disciples, the twelve. When we read of the early church, there are those at the forefront – Peter and John are mentioned in particular, preaching, healing, leading the church. Then new people begin also to take the lead – Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas We read of them being imprisoned, facing danger, even martyrdom.

But, we might ask, what happened to the others - Andrew, Matthew, Bartholomew, Thomas who was ready to follow Jesus to Jerusalem to die with him, and the rest of the twelve? There are traditions about some of them in the apocryphal writings, but they disappear from the biblical record. Did they stop being disciples, or was it that they stayed at home, quietly living out their discipleship, building up the fellowship in Jerusalem or Galilee – not as interesting to be written about as the travels of Paul or the experiences of Peter, but needed for all that.

Discipleship takes many forms: some feel the call to travel far from home; some endure great hardships; some spend themselves for the sake of others and of their faith; some work quietly in the background, unassuming but fulfilling the role they have been called to play. May God help us to fulfil our calling, whatever and wherever it may be.

Pauline Main



Cogwheel Rebuilding Project Pledges And Donations

Since the 'in-house' launch of our rebuilding project last October, the response in pledges and donations has been amazing.

Many pledges have already been converted to donations, but I have now been questioned on several occasions recently, as to when the Church requires the money. As we have now been granted planning permission, our architects can move towards going out to tender. Therefore if it fits in with your financial arrangements, I am happy to accept donations converted from your pledges at any time now, when convenient to you. You can let me have a cheque payable to Wheatley URC, or if you prefer you can make a transfer directly into our 'Rebuilding Project' bank account. Please ask me for the details.

If anyone who, for whatever reason, was previously unable to make a pledge and now feels that they would like to donate to the project, this is absolutely fine. Any donations can be made to me by cheque or bank transfer as mentioned above.

Please speak to me if you have any questions at all and please accept our grateful thanks for all your ongoing generosity.

Chris Shelley

Our NZ Unscheduled Adventure

I would like to thank all of our church members for such wonderful support when my unexpected adventure happened on our recent NZ holiday. You were all a great inspiration and comfort to both myself and Bobbie in our time of need. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to you for your contact, blessings, prayers, stories, humour and practical help. We both felt very much held by all of you in what was a very worrying time, when we were far from home and uncertain about the date of our return. I am pleased to say that I continue to recover slowly but surely and look forward to seeing all of you.

Tom Goss

Wheatley United Reformed Church **Discernment Process For Choosing Elders**

This has been revised since last month's newsletter.

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, 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 2018 is as follows:

MAY

- During the month of May, the congregation will be invited to consider prayerfully who they think God may be calling to the role of Elder for the next three years. Any who worship with us may be part of this process and along with church members may complete one of the slips to be found at the back of the church. This slip does not need the signature of the person being nominated, **but it does need their agreement, so please speak to them first and ask them to give at least a week before replying.** This is to allow for a reasonable period of reflection. The only criterion is that the person named must be a member of Wheatley URC.

JUNE

- The deadline for nominations will be Sunday 17th June 2018.

JULY

- At their July meeting, Elders will then prayerfully consider the names of all those whose names have come forward, and will, with God's help, discern those who they feel are being called at this time.
- The list of names of those discerned to have a call 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. Elders will then indicate who they believe are being called. In our experience, it will be clear at this time who these are. The Minister or Church Secretary will then speak to those (if any) 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 serving Elders due to complete their current terms in September 2018, are, Ellen Webster and Ann Hardiman. In addition we are still trying to find a new secretary to replace Robert. We are very grateful for all that they have contributed during their time as elders.

Sunday Dates for your Diary

10th June	11.30am Sermon Storming
24th June	Church Anniversary followed by shared lunch at the Benson's
5th August	Shared lunch after morning worship

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR JUNE 2018.

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

Date	3 rd June	10 th June	17 th June	24 th June	1 st July
Service	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Anniversary Service	Morning Service with H.C.
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson	Michael Hopkins	Revd. Pauline Main
Vestry Elder	Peter Devlin	Charles Bennett	Ann Hardiman	Tom Goss	Pauline Shelley
Welcomer	Moira Watson	Ellen Webster	Malcolm Benson	Catherine Harding	Peter Devlin
Steward	John Kidd	Barbara Joiner	Zena Knight	Angela Holdaway	Bob Webster
Reader	Moira Watson	Tom Goss	Ellen Webster	Wendy Benson	Richard Wodd
Prayers	Robert Harding	Christine Bainbridge	Ann Bettess	Malcolm Benson	Ann Hardiman
Flowers	Zena Knight	Catherine Hughes	TBA	Anniversary	Ellen Webster

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty. Simple evening worship in the style of **Taize** will take place at Barns Close at 7.30 pm on June 10th and 24th.

COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS

(leaders may use other readings.)

Date	3 rd June	10 th June	17 th June	24 th June	1 st July
Old Testament	1 Samuel 3: 1-10.	1 Samuel 8: 4-11.	1 Samuel 15: 34- 16: 13.	1 Samuel 17: 1a, 4-11, 19-23.	2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-27.
Psalm	Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18.	Psalm 138.	Psalm 20.	Psalm 9: 9-20.	Psalm 130
New Testament	2 Corinthians 4:5-12.	2 Corinthians 4: 13-5:1.	2 Corinthians 5:6-10.	2 Corinthians 6: 1-13.	2 Corinthians 8: 7-15.
Gospel	Mark 2: 23-3: 6.	Mark 3: 20-35.	Mark 4: 26-34.	Mark 4: 35-41	Mark 5: 21-43.

Deadline for the July/August newsletter is **6pm on Wednesday 20th June.** Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk Paper copy may be handed to Barbara Joiner or Bobbie Stormont

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN JUNE/1st Week JULY

3 rd June	Sunday	10.00am 2.30 -4.30pm 7.00-9.00pm	Foodbank Afternoon Tea in the hall Pulse Group Games in URC Hall
4 th June	Monday	2.00-4.00pm	Not So Young Club
7 th June	Thursday	10.00-12.00	Coffee in the hall church open
10 th June	Sunday	7.00 – 9.00pm	Pulse Group Discussion 17, Bell Lane,
12 th June	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club 2
14 th June	Thursday	7.15pm	Elders Meeting
17 th June	Sunday	8.00am 7.00-9.00pm	Meditation & Prayer Breakfast Pulse Group Games in URC Hall
18 th June	Monday	2.00-4.00pm	Not So young Club
19 th June	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club
24 th June	Sunday	7.00-9.00pm	Pulse Group Film Night at 17 Bell Lane.
26 th June	Tuesday	2.00-4.00pm	St. Mary's Guild in the URC hall.
1 st July	Sunday	10.00am 11.30am 2.30 -4.30pm 7.00-9.00pm	Foodbank Church Meeting Afternoon Tea in the hall Pulse Group Games in URC Hall
2 nd July	Monday	2.00-4.00pm	Not So young Club

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
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 8.50am to 9.40am
Table Tennis	Friday 10.00 – 12.00 Noon.
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 to edit, or not.

Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

When the sacrifice of a child in the Old Testament is mentioned, we think immediately of the Binding of Isaac, a terrible act that God stopped from happening. But there is another one: **Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11: 29-40** but in that case, sadly, God does not intervene.

Let's first then remind ourselves of the episode: *Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.*³⁰ *And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,*³¹ *whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*³² *Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands.*³³ *He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus, Israel subdued Ammon.*³⁴ *When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.*³⁵ *When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."*³⁶ *"My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites."*³⁷ *But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."*³⁸ *"You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry.*³⁹ *After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite tradition*⁴⁰ *that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.*

Well, I don't know about you but when I first read that passage, I thought "what a rash and stupid vow, this was!" And among the many questions which spring to mind, the most obvious is bound to be: "Why on earth did God not stop Jephthah the same way he stopped Abraham"? We will have a detailed look at this question (and others) but first let's talk about context. Where an episode is placed in the biblical text is always extremely important and this episode is no exception: It is found in the **Book of Judges**, one of the most disturbing and strangest books of the Bible that Jonathan Kirsch aptly described as "the oddest assortment of rogues, outlaws and lowlives,

seducers and harlots, assassins and mercenaries, rapists and torturers but also heroes and heroines, martyrs and saviours¹.” We must be aware therefore that when we are dealing with anything coming from the Book of Judges, we are entering a murky world and a murky time in the history of Israel when, as the text repeatedly points out, “*there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:1-18:30-19:1-21:25). Indeed, the Book of Judges takes place in the troubled era that followed the conquest of Canaan, a period of crisis, chaos and anarchy when nearly all the leaders (the so-called “Judges”) had lost their way and made destructive choices that do not correspond to God’s will and when their many moral compromises lead to increasingly dire consequences for the whole nation. Just have a look at the book introduction and then at its conclusion and its message will appear crystal clear.

It is in this context that we meet Jephthah, a “mighty soldier” but basically a mercenary with little honour: his mother was a “prostitute” and his father, a wealthy man had not it seemed bothered very much with either the boy or the mother. He is therefore despised by his half-brothers (the other sons of the wealthy man) who unjustly dispossessed him of his part of his inheritance, an injustice ratified though by the Elders of Gilead. Not a great start in life! So, shamed and rejected, Jephthah reinvents himself as a kind of “biblical-times gun-for-hire” as Jonathan Kirsch described him, operating from a nowhere-town on the border between Israel and Ammon. However, in this portrait of a fiercely ambitious and violent leader, comes a ray of light: his young daughter, his only child. No mother is ever mentioned but the text suggests that the two of them live together in a tender bond. Like many adults who grow up in broken homes, Jephthah would have cherished his own child above all else. But strangely, the girl is not named, something which should alert us that something is afoot as naming in the Bible is always of great significance and confers identity and honour.

And so, we come to Jephthah’s *rash* vow... but is it really that rash? Quite a few commentators are convinced that Jephthah knows perfectly what he is doing and is prepared to sacrifice his most precious possession, his daughter, to induce God to grant him victory, increase his tarnished honour and satisfy his ambition. They point out that Jephthah could not have

¹ Jonathan Kirsch, *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*, (Rider, London, 1997) p. 202

overlooked the possibility that his daughter would be the first (and only) one to greet him on his return from battle as the women of Israel traditionally celebrated the victory of their men on the battlefield with music and dance. And this is precisely what the daughter does, “*dancing to the sound of timbrels*”. This interpretation might appear highly disturbing and controversial especially that Jephthah, along with other Sunday-school favourites like Samson, Gideon or Ehud (all in the Book of Judges) have been traditionally celebrated as role models. But as I said earlier, the context of these episodes, when “*the sons of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord*” (Judg. 3:7) should set the alarm bells ringing as these so-called “heroes” commit many acts of immorality and even barbarity and flout the will of God.

However, there might be two other possibilities to explain Jephthah’s behaviour: **First**, according to Jonathan Kirsch, we should try to understand Jephthah’s state of mind at the eve of the coming battle against the Ammonites: “Possessed by the spirit of God, distracted by the prospect of that crucial battle, charged up with adrenaline and perhaps a certain blood lust, Jephthah does not pause to reason out the ways in which his vow might go wrong.” Fair enough, isn’t? Let’s not forget that in biblical times a rural house was built around a closed courtyard where people and livestock mingled freely, as it is still the case in many areas of the developing world. It is also important to remember that the text can be read either as “I will sacrifice *whoever* comes out of the door of my house” or “*whatever* comes out of the door of my house” as the Hebrew word can mean either. So is it possible that Jephthah was simply anticipating a chicken or a goat to be the first ones wandering out when, victorious, he enters his compound. Really? Vowing to sacrifice a chicken or even a goat does not seem very serious when Jephthah wants a victory over the mighty Ammonites! Besides, if Jephthah had in mind to offer an animal, it surely would have been acceptable to God if he revoked his vow when it is a human being (and his own daughter at that!) coming to the door of his house. Indeed even if admittedly, vows were a very serious business (see Numbers 30:2), the God of Israel strictly forbade child sacrifice (see Leviticus 20: 2-3). So even if a vow is sacred, it could be annulled if it violated some other commandments. A **second** explanation offered by many commentators is that Jephthah did not actually “kill” his daughter but gave her away to be a lifelong virgin who would serve in the sanctuary, “sacrificing” her to the service of God in the

sanctuary. Admittedly, the text does stress twice that she remained a virgin and “did not marry”, but it *only* mentions a “burnt offering” which it seems to me, means what it says, killing and burning! The way Jephthah fulfils his vow remains nevertheless unclear as it depends on what you think **“and he did to her as he had vowed”** really means.

What is however **very clear** and does not allow for any ambiguity, is God’s inexplicable willingness to let the child die... We will examine this question, along with others (looking in particular at the girl’s behaviour and apparent docility) next month.

Wheatley Area Churches AGM Report 2017/18

About twenty people from the various churches gathered in the sun in the Benson’s garden at 82 High Street at a bit before 2.00 pm on Sunday 13th May to hear the chair’s report for the last twelve months of joint events in the village and news from the churches. Three out of the five churches are embarking on major works this year to make their buildings more suitable for greater community activity in the twenty first century. The Community Church, which does not have a building of its’ own, at present is pleased to announce the news that they are appointing their first pastor and we look forward to meeting and welcoming Justin and Ash, very soon.

Edna Ackroyd (St Bartholomew’s, Holton) completed her two years as Chair and handed over the office for the next two years to John Guy (Our Lady of Lourdes) and Gordon Ewbank (Community Church) was elected Vice Chair, pending taking over the role of Chair in two years time. Edna was thanked for her work during her period in office. Val Farmer (St Mary’s) was re-elected as Secretary and Margaret Wilson (also St Mary’s) as Treasurer.

We looked back over many successful events during the year, Working with Fusion at the Summer Children’s Club Week, Singing Christmas Carols at Asda, Village Christmas Carol Service and Lessons at St Mary’s, Lent Groups, Processing together to respective churches on Palm Sunday, Procession of the Cross on Good Friday, Sharing (a bit damply this year) with Village Families and Fusion at The St George’s Fun Day and Festival and of course the Distribution of Christmas and Easter Cards around the village. We look

forward to the same round of events again in the next twelve months.

Christian Aid Week is current again (last year we raised about £3,300 from street collections, door-to-door). This year we are asking people to bring their donation envelopes to a tea party at The Merry Bells, instead. Also, by the time this goes to press we will have had a welcome BBQ for the newest members of our community from Phase 1 of the new Mill Green housing development.

Pauline Main, Tony Barry and A.N Other (?) look forward to continuing to represent your interests on the Wheatley Area Churches Committee in the year to come.



Thank you to all who came to the Afternoon Tea for Christian Aid in Worminghall , you will be pleased to know we raised **£163**.

Care for the World Ministry team report :

Following our two meetings about refugees, the Care for the World team at URC undertook to draw up a list of priorities, from the offers of help given and to keep the interested parties notified of the next step.

In the meantime a conference has been held in Oxford looking at many of the issues and questions raised in Wheatley.

Four people from Wheatley URC attended and were amazed by the enormity and complexity of the situation. This day did however provide information and links to other groups in the area, and suggestions for establishing support groups, some with community sponsorship schemes.

This would seem to be a good time to re-assess our present situation here in Wheatley and we will be sending out a proposed date for a meeting within the next two weeks.

Liz Barry (convenor Care for the World team).

Wheatley URC

www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

Walking
the Way

Traditional Bank Holiday Fete

Come & meet friends at

Dr Flury's Garden
116 Church Road Wheatley
2pm Monday 28 May



Cream Teas

Aunt Sally

Plants

Books

Cakes

Tombola

Children's Games



with Live Music:

Barbershop Quartet

& Jazz

Launch of the
Cogwheel Project
for the new
Mulberry Room



The
Mulberry
Room

OXFORDSHIRE ARTWEEKS IN HOLTON Continues Until

Bank Holiday Monday May 28th inclusive.

Open 11am – 6pm daily.

For more information visit www.artweeks.org venues 361 and 362 and pick up a free booklet to discover other studios to visit during May.

“The things that come to those that wait may be the things left by those who got there first.”



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