



COWLEY ST JOHN
TWO CHURCHES
ONE COMMUNITY

COWLEY ST JOHN PARISH MAGAZINE

£1

July 2017



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Websites for Cowley St. John Parish:

- **Main website:** www.cowleystjohn.co.uk
- **Facebook Group:**
<https://www.facebook.com/cowleystjohn.parish/>
- **St. Mary & St. John Churchyard Project:**
www.ssmjchurchyard.org.uk
- **‘Home’, an experimental Christian Community in Oxford:**
www.home-online.org
- **Magazine issues:** <http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/parish-magazine>

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- **St Alban the Martyr**, Charles Street, Oxford, OX4 3AH
- **Bartlemas Chapel**, Cowley Road, Oxford, (turn down the lane next to the vicarage at 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ, and you will reach the chapel at the heart of Bartlemas Village).

Parish Postal Address (Vicarage): 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ

REGULAR SERVICES

Sunday:

- **8:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **9:15am** Sung Eucharist at St. Alban
- **10:45am** Sung Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **6:15pm** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Monday to Thursday:

- **8:00am** Morning Prayer at St. Mary & St. John
- **5:00pm** Evening Prayer at St. Mary & St. John

Wednesday:

- **12:00pm** Silence and stillness at Bartlemas Chapel (during colder months at Bethlehem Chapel, All Saints Convent*).

Thursday:

- **10:30am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Friday:

- **8:00am** Morning Prayer at St. Alban
- **9:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Alban

* All Saints 15A Magdalen Road Oxford OX4 4EN (<http://allsaintssistersofthepoor.co.uk/>)

If for any reason you are unable to get to church but would like a visit from one of our clergy, please contact us. We could bring Holy Communion or simply come and pray with you.

SOME REGULAR EVENTS IN RICHARD BENSON HALL (Next to St. Mary & St. John Church)

Alice's Mad Hatter Tea Parties:

Held on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, 3-4:30pm, a friendly place where people who have experienced mental health issues in their lives can relax and just enjoy a cuppa, cake and a chat.

A Place to Be:

Held on the 4th Tuesday of every month, 12-2pm, a friendly monthly lunch for people with dementia, their family, carers and friends.

Marhaba:

Held on the last Tuesday of the month, 7pm, a collaboration between various Oxford groups that sets up a platform for sharing music between communities.

To find out about other events, see the notices section in this magazine, visit the Parish website www.cowleystjohn.co.uk or visit the church.

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WRITING HOME: Sermon series on Paul's letters to the first Christian communities

By Fr. Phil Ritchie

"Definition of a classic: a book everyone is assumed to have read and often thinks they have."

Alan Bennett

Sometimes when we look at the New Testament we think, well, I vaguely know all that stuff and we struggle to engage with it again. Like, circumcision was such a big issue in the earliest Christian communities and it's difficult nowadays to energize oneself to have the same levels of enthusiasm!

However, as the Church in the West shrinks we increasingly find ourselves dealing with some of the things St Paul had to deal with. We see tension between different religions and different communities but also questions about religious identity and how to maintain it in a culturally diverse world. In cities like Corinth and Rome one also senses that the first Christian communities are living amongst some very sophisticated, deep thinking, relaxed and self-opinionated groups of people – I wonder what they made of Paul?

These thoughts, and more, are in our minds when we read the letters of the New Testament. Between 9th July and 3rd September (with a break for the Transfiguration and the Assumption) we will be looking at Paul's letters, starting with Romans and ending with Thessalonica. In a 10 minute sermon no one is going to end up a specialist!! Instead the aim is to look at one passage a week to get a flavour of each community.

Throughout the series I want us to hold in our heads three questions: 1. Why does the Church exist? 2. What are we to 'be' as Church? 3. What are we to 'do' as Church? It seems to me that Paul's answers to these questions are not born of deep academic theological investigation but rather from the debates and arguments he was having – via letter- with these very early Christian communities. Maybe these letters might have something to say to us on Charles Street and on the Cowley Road?

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THE SPIRITUAL CARE OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

By Margaret Coombs

On June 14th Bridget Newman and I attended a **Dementia Forum** organised by Oxford Diocese. The large room at the Wesley Memorial Chapel was packed with about eighty people. Because of the high demand for places, a second forum will be held in the near future.

The forum, led by Dr Joanna Collicutt, our Diocesan Advisor for the Spiritual Care of Older People, marked the launch of her new book, sensitively entitled, *Thinking of You; a resource for the spiritual care of people with dementia.* (BRF 2017). In offering further understanding of the nature and extent of dementia through the talks and mutual sharing of information, Jo Collicutt's presentation demonstrated that there is far more to the understanding of dementia than its medical aspects.

First she stated that dementia is not part of the normal ageing process or only affects older people. Nor is it acute confusion or depression, which are sometimes confused with the symptoms of dementia, but can be treated. Dementia causes a progressive decline in

memory and mental abilities which currently affects about 800,000 people in the UK. Of these about two-thirds have Alzheimer's Disease

Jo explained that dementia is a disease, requiring accurate diagnosis. Research into possible cures are ongoing. We could see it as a psychological disability, while learning how to manage and live well with it. Or we could also look at it as something that happens to social and family groups, as those affected by dementia include relatives, friends and carers. Or, to take another perspective, it might be viewed as something that society *does* to individuals who threaten values of rationality and control. Finally, in emphasising the importance of our spiritual life, Jo asked if we *need* to be able to think, remember and love to be fully human?

We can help someone recover their sense of identity by re-remembering them, recalling their past life, which often stays freshest in the mind, and by maintaining, loving relationships with those who may be losing their hold on reality. Jo also suggested we could help the person feel at peace by indicating that it is OK to be as they are, not forgetting that, in some instances, brain damage may alter personality in worrying or challenging ways. It is good to convey a feeling of solidarity with the person, going beyond the anxieties of the situation, and hanging on to hope by emphasising the positives. Of course, professional help and advice will also be required, from an early stage.

Jo reminded us that we are the Body of Christ and that we treat everyone as made in the Image of God. We can express this by being prepared to be alongside people in the land of forgetfulness and by developing dementia friendly churches, linked to local communities.

We moved on to discuss activities aimed at building dementia friendly congregations. Jo talked about real belonging; that is, you are missed if you are absent. She suggested we should look out for opportunities for forgetful people to make a continued contribution to

the life of the church community. This can, however, press on our reserves of patience, such as when someone needs to repeat questions very frequently. She also recommended exploring the continuing need for spiritual growth which might be expressed in older forms of worship, dating back to childhood.

Many participants also remarked on the importance of Church life to people with dementia. The importance of welcoming and ensuring physical and cognitive access to all parts of church buildings was emphasised, as well as access to meaningful worship. Sudden unexpected changes may throw people off their precarious balance.

One parish had designed a shorter communion service, set out in large print. To avoid stigmatisation it was suggested that it should be advertised as a service for older people. Visual and hearing impairment also need to be addressed to facilitate understanding and to promote full inclusion in church services.

Others emphasised the value for those with failing powers being enabled to participate in a range of social activities and functions. Bridget Newman described the very successful *Place to Be* monthly lunches for people with dementia, their carers and family members, in the Richard Benson Hall. Social life and enjoyable occasions, which might include singing and dancing, are also vitally important.

I should like to recommend *Thinking of You* to all those who would like to go into the important subject of dementia more deeply from the wider dimensions of the spiritual and social as well the medical perspectives. It costs £7 and can be obtained from the Bible Reading Fellowship or from Church House in Kidlington.

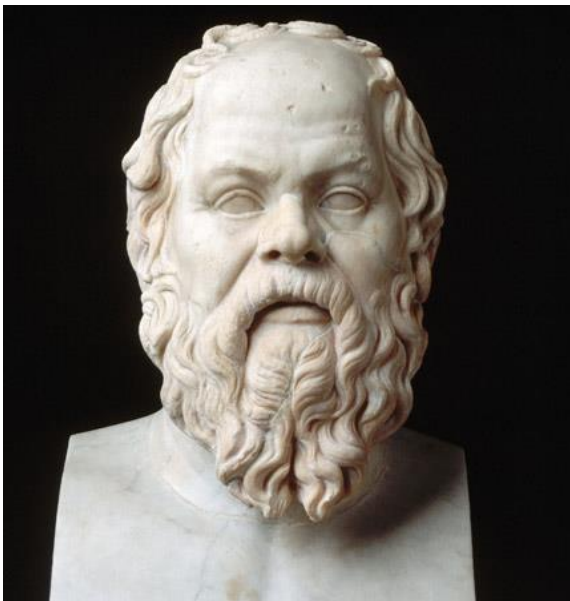
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SOCRATES: FORERUNNER OF JESUS AS PROTESTOR?

By Prof. Chris Emlyn-Jones

I'm not a regular attender at St. Mary and St. John church; I go to Greyfriars just down the road, but reckon I'm connected by virtue of being Danny's father (you probably recognise the surname!). Before I retired I was involved in teaching adult students in the Open University about Greek and Roman culture. My particular interest is Greek philosophy--hence what follows, which I hope you find interesting.

It's generally recognised that the personality and teaching of Jesus brought something vitally new into the world—but it wasn't entirely new. There have been other people who shake things up. More than four hundred years before Christ in the small city-state of Athens, an awkward character called Socrates was put on trial for corrupting the



youth with his teaching, which included not believing in the traditional gods. He was prosecuted on a charge of impiety and sentenced to death. By all accounts he was a fairly infuriating person who had a habit of challenging important people in argument and either reducing them to silence (he ran rings round his prosecutor) or persuading them they didn't actually know

what they claimed to know. As you can imagine this did not make him popular with the authorities any more than it would today (recognise the scenario?).

This was not all he did, however. He believed that his fellow citizens should not spend all their time pursuing power and influence but should cultivate their soul (*psyche*—we’ve taken the word over). What did he mean by this? For all but a fortunate few the soul was a kind of breath which escaped from the body at death and went down to a shadowy and fairly unpleasant existence in the Underworld (they called it Hades), leaving a lifeless corpse. Socrates, however, gave the soul a new emphasis: he believed that it contained the moral essence of the person, what they really should cultivate, rather than power and prestige, if they really wished to lead a good life.

A good life was all very well, but what might it lead to? In his prison cell on the day he was required to die by the traditional method of drinking hemlock, a mixture from a poisonous herb, a cheerful Socrates makes fun of his grieving followers. He has every expectation that he goes to a better world. But based on what? Didn’t the soul of the good man after all just suffer the traditional fate, or even worse: as one of his sceptical associates puts it, ‘emerge from the body like a puff of smoke, fly away and cease to exist anywhere at all?’ Socrates’ answer draws on traditional stories of some kind of better life for those initiated into exclusive religious cults (see the ‘fortunate few’ in my previous paragraph). But he gives this a new twist: where you landed up in the afterlife depended vitally on how you had lived your earthly life. After death, you were ferried across the river Styx by Charon the boatman, but then your soul had to face judgement by the gods of the Underworld. The bad got flung into Tartarus, but the souls which had lived a good earthly life (predictably Socrates includes philosophers in this category!) reached a kind of Elysium (we get this place-name from the Greeks).

If the broad outlines of this picture of the afterlife sound familiar, this is because the conception of a perfect ideal world was developed by Socrates' pupil and follower, the philosopher Plato, taken still further in Greece under the Roman Empire, and assimilated into Christianity in its expansion into the Gentile Greek world.

But for my money it's the forceful, ironic personality of Socrates and his moral conviction in the face of death, which sticks in the memory.

*

IT'S NOT MY JOB!

By Zoe Randall

There is something about this saying that really annoys me. It's such an easy saying to use and one of the most useful 'get out clauses' everyone has but what does it really mean? Over my career I have worked in several different industries and had a variety of colleagues, all shapes and sizes, but it wasn't until I started working in education that I started to hear this saying more often. Maybe prior to working in a school I just hadn't heard it being said or perhaps it's a new age thing and maybe people have a different approach to work nowadays.

However, I have always been in the belief that if you want a job done and done well then the best attitude to take is to work hard but as a team. Whilst studying for my NVQ in business and administration the word 'team' came up on more than one occasion so why do some of our colleagues use the saying 'It's not my job'?

I have a mixture of examples of when this saying has been used but this one seems to stick out more than the others: we have a delivery every Monday morning and the delivery consists of roughly the same items, it's not heavy work and doesn't take long but there is always little

help offered to get it from the delivery vehicle to the building and into its holding area. One person thinks it should be the job of another employee to unload it out of its boxes and they in turn believe 'it's not their job', and, incidentally, manage to disappear and then reappear at the exact point the delivery vehicle is pulling away! Well, I just want to get the job done and in the end, just get on with it. I'd rather get the items in the building so I can get on with my next job. Sometimes it's just not worth arguing the toss and wasted energy, we are a team!

In nearly every industry in the world there are several levels that are needed to produce that final service or product and I don't think there is one company who could honestly say that one person did it all on their own because their other staff members thought it wasn't their job to help out. I used to work for the local newspaper and when I think back it is quite an eye opener as to how many people actually used to work there. It has changed quite considerably now but in the late 1990's the building was buzzing from the hive of employees answering phones and tapping on their computers. The local paper could not have reached the readers without them all, including the paperboy throwing it through the letterbox.

So what would happen if we all took on this saying? What would happen if Fr Phil and the ministry team said 'It's not my job' when it was their turn to write the sermon? I know one positive; we would be enjoying our Sunday lunch half an hour earlier! But seriously, what would happen? Would we have a church service? Could we continue without a sermon? Or would someone eventually give in (with a huff!).

And where would we have been if the disciples had said to Jesus 'It's not my job' to continue your good word! Would we have a church at all? There would have been no bible to read and having nothing or no religion, we would be in that horrible void. That void that appears when you are stuck in a moment of time and lost for something to say or that second where you forget what just happened, or is that getting old!

Anyway, I think it's good to work as a team and share our responsibilities. It really saddens me when so many people argue over whether it's their job or not and then purposely disappear knowing that someone else will do it. I try my hardest to be a team player and very rarely will I turn people away who ask for help. I hope people see me as someone they can ask for help and not the office Rottweiler! We all should be team players and it also makes us appreciate what others do in their daily jobs, just to get things going. As a parish we are not only a Christian family but we are a team with our own individual special jobs that unite together and make our church whole. I especially felt this during our joint service for Christian Aid week. I walked home with my daughter full of a warm feeling that I had taken from our whole parish coming together as one big happy team.

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WE ARE SURVIVORS...

(This is for those born before 1940...)

Contributed by Martin Coombs

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, videos and the pill. We were before radar, credit cards, spilt atoms, laser beams and ball-point pens, before dishwashers, tumble driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes...and before man walked on the moon.

We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?). We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in Lent, a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat and 'crumpet' we had for tea. We existed before house-husbands, computer dating, and 'sheltered accommodation' was where you waited for a bus.

We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, artificial hearts, word processors or young men wearing earrings. For us ‘time sharing’ meant togetherness, a ‘chip’ was a piece of wood or fried potato, ‘hardware’ meant nuts and bolts, and ‘software’ wasn’t a word.

Before 1940 ‘made in Japan’ meant junk, the term ‘making out’ referred to how you did in your exams, ‘stud’ was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and ‘going all the way’ meant staying on a double-decker bus to the terminus. In our day, cigarette smoking was ‘fashionable’, ‘grass’ was mown, ‘coke’ was kept in the coalhouse, a ‘joint’ was a piece of meat you ate on Sundays and ‘pot’ was something you cooked in. ‘Rock Music’ was a fond mother’s lullaby, ‘Eldorado’ was an ice cream, a ‘gay person’ was the life and soul of the party, while ‘aids’ just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.

We who were born before 1940 must be a handy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder there is a generation gap today... But

By the grace of God... we have survived!

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GLEANINGS: A gathering of random thoughts from various sources

By John Purves

“Life is cumulative and washes up on the shore of now.”

Bob Geldof

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“The force of character is cumulative. All the foregone days of virtue work the health into it.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

*

“What will survive of us is love.”

Philip Larkin

*

“Sensual perception becomes keener with age and mysteriously increases while the body diminishes.”

Walter de la Mare

*

“Growing old is merely living more internally and doing less externally.”

Marie de Hennege

*

“Love is a fruit in season at all times and within the reach of every hand. Anyone may gather it and no limit is set.”

Mother Teresa

*

“Let there be less suffering – give us the sense to live on what we need. Bastions of wealth are no defense for the man who treads justice down and out of sight.”

Aeschylus. “The Oresteia”

“Foul a clean well and you will suffer thirst.”

Aeschylus

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“Grant, you Gods of wedlock, that gift, that prize, the lovely girl who finds a mate’s embrace in the deep joys of wedded life.”

Aeschylus. “The Eumenides” (The Kindly Ones)

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“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

1 Timothy 6:6

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“Forgiveness redeems the past and unlocks the future.”

Anon

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“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.”

Mahatma Ghandi

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“If you are powerless to change anything, all that’s left is how you look at it.”

Robert Southey

IN THE CHURCHYARD

From the churchyard team

The good news is that soon we will be able to install a secure shed for our working tools. The flower-bed by the south porch is now cleared (thanks to Bedford's technical intervention) and is now ready for composting and planting. Once the tools are moved to the shed the south porch can be re-opened.

The rest of the team have been busy keeping the vegetation in check, strimming to keep the views open, and maintaining brambly places of sanctuary for birds and other wildlife. The butterfly garden near the redwood tree behind the old vicarage is now looking rather 'mid-summer tired', but if you wander along the paths on a sunny day you will see a Speckled Wood or a Meadow Brown butterfly, and stripey bees homing in on the nectar. We're struggling to keep the pathways clear in the Garden of Remembrance and Thanksgiving, near the Leopold Street entrance. Children, with some grown-up help, are welcome to hop the stepping stones here, although we discourage off-path exploration elsewhere, as hidden tombstone curbs make so many hazards.

A reminder that there's an information board in the churchyard near the south porch, and there are leaflets available in the church, and information on the website, on local history and outlining walks around the churchyard for each season. We're looking forward to welcoming Carnival revellers to the churchyard on July 2nd, and we've tidied up paths and cleared litter to make it as safe as possible. Enjoy!

From one churchyard to another

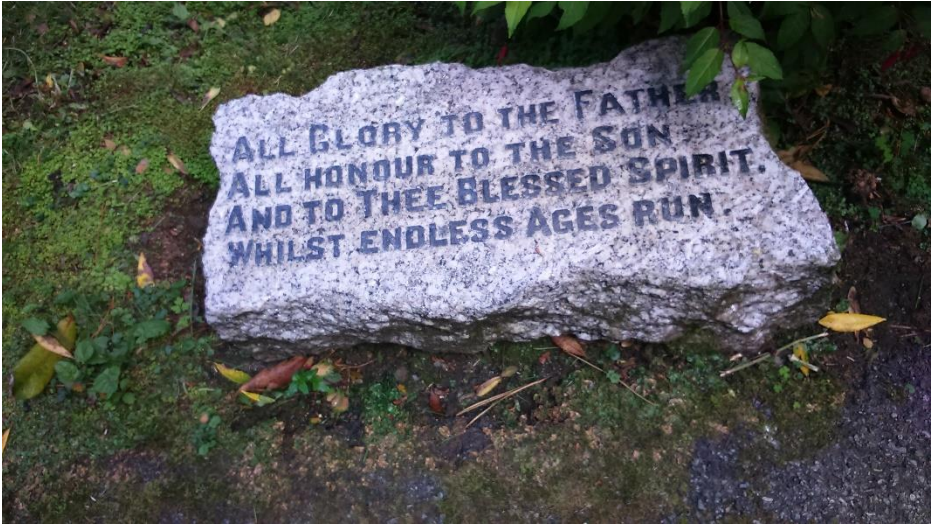
On holiday earlier this month I enjoyed a visit to a wonderful churchyard at St Just in Roseland, Cornwall. The church of St Just has been an inspiring place of pilgrimage for centuries. The steep hillside churchyard overlooks a peaceful backwater, seen in the photo behind the Celtic cross (see photograph on the front cover of the magazine), and features rare sub-tropical plants, a unique walkway through a series of granite blocks inscribed with biblical quotations, hundreds of ancient lichen-encrusted and moss-laden headstones, and a holy well.

The present church, with its embossed rafter ceiling, dates from the 13th century, but the original Celtic church on the site was built as long ago as 550 AD. In the church I noticed a prominent spot for children's creative involvement, a 'Dear God' gold-coloured box for prayers, and festoons of cut-out people messages indicating a flourishing church community. Here 'church' very evidently plays an active part in the local community just as we aspire to do in East Oxford.

Tucked away beside a tidal creek off the estuary of the river Fal, the St Just church is a welcoming haven for visitors. The South-west Coastal Path passes the churchyard, and nearby there's a spacious car park and a café offering cream teas.

And did those feet in ancient times ?

According to the legend, on which Blake drew for poetic inspiration, when Joseph of Arimathea brought the young Jesus to Britain they first landed in Cornwall, travelling up the Roseland peninsula on their way to Glastonbury. There, the story goes, Joseph left his staff planted in the ground, later to flourish as the 'holy thorn' of Glastonbury that traditionally flowers at Christmas time.



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NOTES FROM THE FRONT GARDEN OF ST. MARY & ST. JOHN CHURCH:

Reflections for Trinity Season

By Ruth Waddle

The Trinity Labyrinth has had its annual clean and now the poem can be more easily read. The designs on the tiles are clearer too and show the variety of interests of the community groups who created it.

The garden has clover with its three leaves symbolising the Holy Trinity – have you spotted them?

The roses are in full bloom and contributed to the celebration of St. Albanstide. The rose is not only one of the symbols representing the Virgin Mary. It also features in the commemoration of St. Dorothy (313

AD) who is the patron saint of gardeners and St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207 - 1231), the patron saint of nursing homes and bakers (all activities which are very visible and active in the parish now).

Enjoy summer in gardens, parks, green open spaces and give thanks to the Creator. Please pray the labyrinth and for the community groups symbolised there.

Photos, paintings, drawings of the individual tiles of the labyrinth are welcomed with the view to them being made into prayer cards. Will you do this? If interested, please let me know.

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A VIEW FROM CHURCH HOUSE, OR WHAT I DO MONDAY TO THURSDAY

By Petronella Spivey



I've been working for the Diocese for eighteen months now: just over a year at the new Church House to the north of Kidlington. Some of you have asked what I do. The answer is that I have two main responsibilities. One is to be the clerk to Bishop's Council. This

is effectively the Board of Directors for the Charitable company that runs the diocese. The Bishop's Council is made up of about forty people, alongside the four bishops and four archdeacons, lay and

clerical, elected by Diocesan Synod. They meet five times a year: sometimes checking that the diocese is meeting all its statutory responsibilities over things like safeguarding or charity reporting. More interestingly, I have listened to debates about how the diocese will respond to the General Synod debate about issues in human sexuality, or the response to the government consultation on the third runway at Heathrow (which touches the extreme south eastern end of the diocese). Since Bishop Steven arrived, the Council has begun discussing the new Diocesan strategy and it has been interesting hearing about Bishop Steven's reflections as he travels around the diocese, and watching his strategy evolve. Of course, I don't get to say anything, I just make sure everyone has all the papers they need to be informed, as well as buying the biscuits (Bishops are very partial to fig rolls, it turns out.)

The other part of my job is help with all the legal procedures needed when churches want to change their parish structure: perhaps joining with a neighbouring parish to work together, or altering their geographical boundaries to respond to new housing developments. I get to talk to a lot of people all over the diocese and try to help them serve their communities better: alas Church people don't always agree and I am sometimes caught up in the middle of that. As part of this, I am also secretary to the four committees (one for each of the four archdeaconries) that co-ordinate the responses of parishes and deaneries to wider changes in population, housing and finances. Did you know that Buckinghamshire is expecting as many as 100,000 new houses to be built in the next five years? And all this at a time when the number of clergy is falling dramatically as so many reach retirement age.

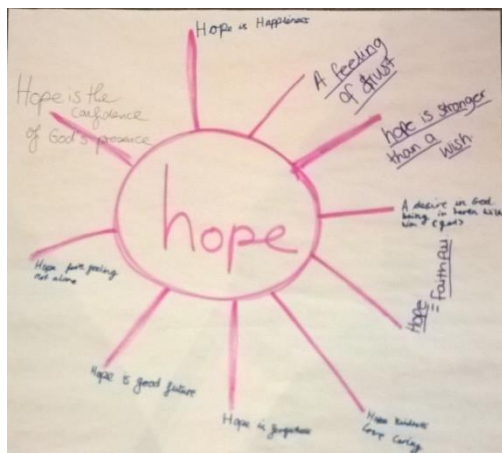
Meanwhile, my colleagues are also helping parishes in other ways: people in finance, HR and buildings departments are on hand to provide professional advice to parishes as well as doing all the necessary things to keep any large organisation going. There is a team of people to help with identifying new priests and training, and

specialists to help parishes work with the young and the old, or each other, or on social justice campaigns. (You can ask Janet Proudman about some of this as she sits on the Board of Mission). I also sit across the corridor from the Bishops and Archdeacons for Oxford and Dorchester, so what with that and all the training courses going on in the building, there is always a steady stream of visitors. I always enjoy waving to familiar faces from the parish and further afield.

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HOPE

One Sunday, the children discussed the meaning of hope. Here are their reflections:



Hope is:

Happiness

Confidence of God's presence

Feeling not alone

A good future

Forgiveness

Kindness, love, caring

Faithfulness

Stronger than a wish

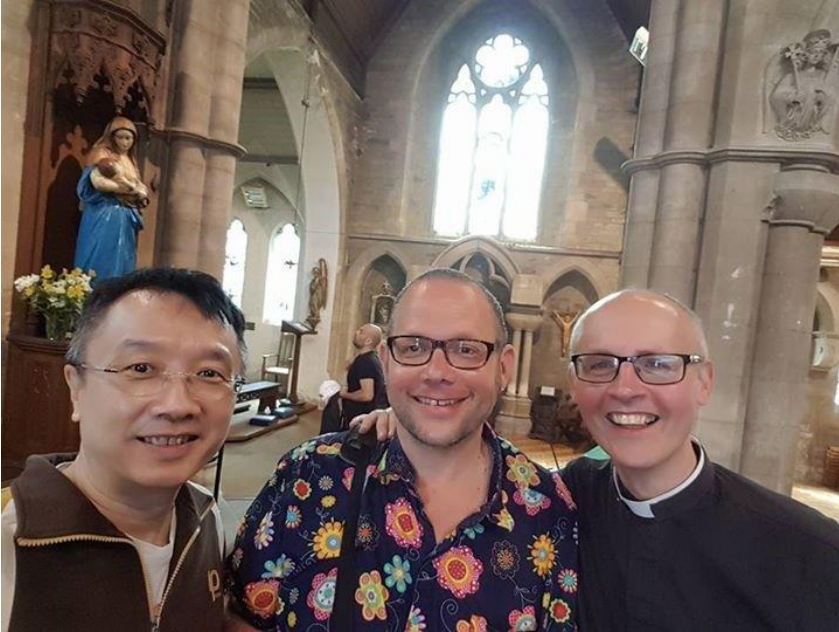
Being in Heaven with God

Stronger than a wish

A feeling of trust

A CONVERSATION WITH JOCK

By Daniel Emlyn-Jones



The interview I had planned for this month's edition fell through for logistical reasons. I was just about to despair, when I had a brainwave! My friend Jock is currently paying his annual visit to Oxford from Singapore, and he kindly agreed to share some of his thoughts. When Jock visits Oxford, he always attends St. Mary & St. John church, so he is in fact a congregation member! People often think that with a name like 'Jock', Jock is Scottish, but this isn't true. Coincidentally, 'Jock' is in this case an English representation of a Cantonese sound! Jock's full given name consists of two characters: 'Jock' (作) meaning 'compose', and 'Onn' (安) meaning 'serenity'. These are auspicious names (by the way, I adopted 'Tsokonn' as a middle name). 'Jock' is also the

generational given name of all of Jock's male paternal cousins of the same surname. Naming is not a straightforward matter in Chinese families. To Jock's nephews, 'Adam, Brian and Chester' (ABC), Jock is 'Daikaofu', which means 'big maternal uncle', since they are the children of Jock's younger sister Josephine.

For this conversation / interview, I asked Jock one simple question: "tell me about your faith". That was enough to get Jock talking, and here is what he said:

"I was brought up in Singapore as Taoist /Buddhist (in Singapore they are mixed). I have memories of myself as a child offering food, incense and burnt offerings with my family to ancestors and the gods. Even as a child, I never really believed in those gods and found the whole thing rather ridiculous. My mother, Wah Ying, wanted to send me to a missionary primary school, because she wanted me to learn English. My father, Cheong Chak, wanted me to go to a Chinese school where I'd have learnt little English. My mother won! The missionary school was by far the more prestigious option. Inevitably, at the missionary school I learnt about Christianity. We sang hymns and prayed in a 'chapel' session every week, where there were also talks and sermons. The principal or vice principal delivered prayers over a PA system into every classroom every day. With this daily rhythm of worship, I began to believe in a Protestant Christian God. After primary school, I went to a Christian secondary school, and all in all spent ten years in Christian schools. It was only when I reached sixteen that I went to a junior college which wasn't Christian. I didn't really go to church when I went to junior college. I still believed in God, but worship was somewhat on the back burner.

I went into the military for two years (compulsory for males in Singapore) and it was during this time that I attended the wake of my paternal grandfather. At this wake, a distant relative of the family suggested that I might like to attend her Wesleyan Methodist church. I became a regular worshipper there and got baptised. I became closely

involved in the life of the church, and attended bible study groups and weekly prayer meetings. I even became a Sunday School teacher for a period.

I also joined a cell group. These were church-based groups which met in church leaders' houses once a week and shared experiences with each other. The leader of my cell group, who I respected, one week invited someone to give a talk to the group. I thought she was a crackpot. She talked about the many visions she had, and said that someone she knew wanted to kill someone else. I questioned what she had said and was quite concerned. I shared my doubts with another cell group member, assuming I was doing it in confidence. The next day the leader phoned me up and said that the devil was speaking to me, using words like "I rebuke you, the devil is in you." I was quite upset by his action.

I liked and trusted a woman called Grace, who had a role as a social worker at the church. I told her about this incident, and she said she knew the woman and she had mental difficulties. I subsequently left the group.

I attended another cell group and the leader there said that we had to be vigilant all the time because the devil could take away our salvation. Just because you're safe now doesn't mean you'll be safe always. I thought "how can you be saved one day, and then not be saved the next?" It didn't make sense and I lost faith in that leader, and subsequently left the group.

I was also feeling more and more the fact that the church didn't accept gay people, and found this unacceptable. I initially turned a blind eye to the church's teaching on this, but steadily felt it more and more. Eventually, the question emerged and I asked Grace the social worker. She was very gay friendly and was not judgemental, but didn't give a definitive answer on what God thought.

I began to lose faith in Christianity and Christians in general but not in God. I studied at the National University of Singapore for one year, but failed Physics. These days with modular courses you can just redo a module if you fail, but back then in the 1980s you had to redo everything. I applied to study arts rather than sciences the following year but didn't get in. In the end, I left to study at the University of New England (UNE) in Armidale, Australia. I began to attend church there and hopefully 'find' God. However, they didn't have the seriousness and rigor that they had in Singapore. There were noisy children, and sometimes the pastor didn't preach but invited members of the congregation to preach. I just wanted someone in authority to preach. Partly as a result, I stopped attending church on a regular basis.

However, I learned something. At UNE, I made lots of lovely friends, and this taught me that there are lots of lovely and non-judgemental people who aren't Christian. After my first degree, I returned to Australia many years later to do a PhD supervised by a preeminent scholar called Anna Wierzbicka at the Australian National University (where I met Daniel). Anna is a professor of Linguistics and an expert on language and culture. She has written a book called "What did Jesus Mean: Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts." This book brings to bear our understanding of language and culture to dissect what Jesus actually MEANT when he spoke. This work taught me that the bible is very complicated, cannot be taken literally, and can only be truly understood by taking a scholarly approach to language and culture. Some people interpret the bible without much education and end up interpreting the bible literally, being judgemental and discriminating against people. They develop a very narrow view of God and put God in a bottle. They end up being small-minded, unfriendly and hostile, and doing the world a lot of damage.

My mother died of cancer some years ago. Before she died, a colleague urged me to convert her, believing that as a buddhist she would go to hell if she didn't embrace Christianity. However, without

me even mentioning it, my mother very clearly told me that she didn't want to be converted. I didn't really believe that she would go to hell, but I did entertain the thought. I talked to my friend and mentor Anna Wierzbicka, a Polish Catholic, and she told me that she didn't believe in hell. Daniel and his father Chris also reassured me. Subsequently, I no longer believe in hell as an eternal burning lake of sulphur. I now think that my mother lives among the stars.

It was also around this time that I started doing things that were considered pagan by Christianity – making offerings (e.g. incense) to the deceased and other supernatural beings, which is a taboo to Protestant Christianity (in Singapore at least). However, I saw Daniel making offerings to a Buddha (incense) and to my mother (pork bun). That broke the taboo for me. The act is not anti-Christian because it's done out of love and reverence.

I do now struggle with 'faith' somewhat. What's the point in praying, when you don't get what you ask for? I watched a documentary about an experiment that tested this. One group of hospital patients had people praying for them and another group didn't. There were no differences in outcomes. It seems to me that when Christians pray for something and they get it they say "Praise God!" When they don't get what they pray for they say "In His time". It seems to me people are making excuses for God, and, in the process, constructing one. I look at the terrible suffering in the world. I think I still believe in God, but think that whatever he is, he doesn't care about what's happening on earth so there's no point praying, unless it is seen as a way to connect with God. Often I think "I have friends like Daniel who help me more than God. Daniel has done more for me than God recognizably has."

I also stopped going to church in Singapore because as I learnt more and more, the pastors there seemed more and more simple-minded. They were saying unsophisticated and mundane things, catering for the masses. Why go to church to listen to something I could have thought of?

I gave up reading the bible. I think the bible is a metaphor for love. If we know how to love we don't need the bible; after all, there are only two rules, love God and our neighbours. The Bible doesn't tell us anything other religions don't tell you anyway. Whatever the bible tells us to do, we are supposed to do anyway, Christian or not. The bible thus doesn't tell us much. The bible says "search and you will find". Well, I haven't found much.

Also, I don't understand the idea of sending Jesus to die for our sins and 'cancel the debt'. If you really want to forgive someone you just forgive them. You don't need a debt to be paid. You just cancel it. Perhaps Jesus is a metaphor. Something for ordinary people to grasp onto. If God wants to forgive us for our sins, he can do so without the benefit of Jesus Christ.

Having said all this, I do believe in God, but I have found God more in the love and kindness of other people rather than in some remote deity. I still ask people to pray for me, when for example I'm going on a flight. Belief in a supreme supernatural being is something every culture has gone through. It's a cultural universal, so there must be something to it."

*

Thanks to Jock for sharing! And if you want to be interviewed, remember, don't be shy!

Jock is author of the book "The Culture of Singapore English" (2014), Cambridge University Press. It is designed for the layperson and hence is a very good way of learning about Singapore English.

PRAYER CALENDAR: July 2017

Daily Collect for use during July: *O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, grant that thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Amen* (Book of Common Prayer, Trinity IV)

Sat 1	Our churchyard and all who use it
Sun 2	Trinity III Visitation of B.V.M. to Elizabeth
Mon 3	For use of the Magnificat and for humility and obedience
Tue 4	Bishops and Archbishops
Wed 5	The use of Richard Benson Hall
Thur 6	Thomas More and John Fisher, Martyrs 1535
Fri 7	St. John's Home
Sat 8	Helen and Douglas House
Sun 9	Trinity IV
Mon 10	The bereaved and the work of "Cruse" bereavement care.
Tue 11	The homeless and the work of "The Porch, Steppin-Stones"
Wed 12	The unemployed
Thur 13	Oxford and Cambridge University Press
Fri 14	John Keeble, Priest, Tractarian, poet 1866
Sat 15	St. Swithun
Sun 16	Trinity V
Mon 17	The charity "Emmaus"

Tue 18	Our churchwardens
Wed 19	Our clergy
Thur 20	St. Margaret of Antioch
Fri 21	Our G.P.s and Health Centres
Sat 22	St. Mary Magdalene
Sun 23	Trinity VI
Mon 24	Our hospitals
Tue 25	St. James the Great, Apostle
Wed 26	St. Anne and Joachim, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Thur 27	Our libraries
Fri 28	William Wilberforce, anti-slavery social reformer 1833
Sat 29	Martha, Mary and Lazarus, companions to Our Lord
Sun 30	Trinity VII
Mon 31	Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuits 1556
Tue 1	Lammas Day
Wed 2	People living alone
Thur 3	Prisoners, Prison officers and prison chaplains
Fri 4	Church music, organist and choirs
Sat 5	Parents, grandparents and great-grandparents
Sun 6	Trinity VIII The Transfiguration



One Sunday, a pastor asked his congregation to consider giving a little extra in the offering plate. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to pick out three hymns.

After the offering plates were passed, the pastor noticed that someone had contributed a \$100 bill. Extremely grateful, he wanted to personally thank the generous person before the whole congregation.

A quiet, elderly widow shyly raised her hand. The pastor asked her to come to the front. Slowly she made her way to the pastor. He told her how wonderful it was that she gave so much and asked her to pick out three hymns.

Her eyes brightened as she pointed to the three handsomest men in the congregation:

"I'll take him and him and him."

THE FRONT COVER

The photograph on the front cover is by Janet McCrae and is of a celtic cross (see the article 'In the Churchyard' on page 19 for details).

NEXT ISSUE

Many thanks to all who contributed to, and all who read this issue. Thanks are also due to the work of the Parish Office. They are responsible for the effective printing and distribution of the magazine, and it is to them we owe thanks for the high quality booklet we see before us every first Sunday of the month!

The deadline for the next issue is ***Sunday 30th July, Midnight***. The deadline for submissions is always midnight on the last Sunday of the Month, and publication on the first Sunday of the month. The Magazine runs twelve months a year. Electronic submissions are to me, Daniel Emlyn-Jones, daniel_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk (underscore between 'daniel' and 'ejnew'). Handwritten submissions should be put in the parish magazine pigeon hole by the St. Mary & St. John Church back door. I will be in Singapore from 17th July to 30th August this summer, but will continue to edit remotely, and will be on the end of an email! For handwritten submissions during this time, they will have to be photographed with a mobile, and emailed to me. This is a simple process, and Soo Tian has kindly said he is happy to advise when he is about. Before travelling, I will do a last check of the pigeon hole on 16th July.

Soft copies of the Parish Magazine can be found at:

<http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/parish-magazine>

If you wish to subscribe to the magazine for a year (12 monthly editions), with the option of receiving it through the post, please fill in the form on the next page, cut it off with scissors and hand in.

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