



**ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH.
WALTON-ON-THAMES**

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2021

Volume 78 No 8



*But ask the animals and they will teach you; the birds of the air and they
will tell you; ask the plants of the earth and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.*

Job 12 vv 7,8



From The Manse

October 2021

Dear friends

I've recently been reading a slightly weird book but it's one I've enjoyed very much and which set me thinking quite a bit. Life is full of choices and the choices we make then shape our lives. In this book, the main character, who is deeply unhappy, is given the chance to try out a number of the lives she might have lived, had she made other choices at critical points. (I did say it was a bit weird.) One of the first things she discovers is that certain assumptions she's made when making decisions were wrong, meaning that certain regrets she has are actually based on mis-information and are without any foundation.

One of her regrets is that she found herself unable to commit to her boyfriend and that consequently they split up. In this "chance to try out what would have happened" she soon finds out that her boyfriend may have realised his dream of becoming a country pub landlord but that he also becomes an alcoholic and that the idyll of running a country pub collapses around them. Is it that her hesitations about making commitment to him were actually an instinct that this wasn't going to work? In this "chance to see what might have been" she quickly appreciates that it was not the dream life she wanted and that refusing to commit to him was not a mistake at all.

During the book she tries out many different versions of how her life could have been and discovers that many decisions she regrets not taking would actually have turned out rather badly. And she also discovers at least one in which she was happy - if only she had mentally been in a better place when that opportunity came her way.

Having tried many different versions of her life, the main character comes to realise a number of key things. Firstly, in the past she's tried to live her life to serve the dreams of others - the perfect daughter or sister or partner or employee etc. The thing she's never allowed herself to be (or been allowed by others to be) is herself, a fallible human being who has a life of her own rather, not just the life that other people would wish to lead through her. Accepting this she is able to embrace life again because that is now her choice.

Through the different lives she tried, the main character has also been able to see the possibility of what she could do and feel for herself. She emerges from the experience having finally rid herself of the regrets she had about her life and about the choices she made. When she manages to get in contact with her brother, from whom she thought she was estranged because of something she had done to him, she soon learns that the rift was nothing to do with that whatsoever. In fact, her brother was in such a bad place mentally he didn't want her to see him like it.

The book has no direct religious content but it made me think again that God made each one of us in his own image. We need to be the person and to lead the life for which God created us. Realising that we are fallible is part of that and although there could well be many different versions of what our lives could have been like, the real joy is to be found in the life that we are living - and in the fact that we don't know how it ends.

A thought-provoking read indeed. (The Midnight Library - Matt Haig)

With all good wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Laing", followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

ELDERS' OPENING DEVOTIONS - SEPTEMBER 2021

In September, Paul Walsh shared a daily reading from Christian Aid by Revd Jarel Robinson-Brown, a Methodist minister serving in the London District, Lesnes Abbey Circuit.

Where will your faith lead you?

"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish"
Matthew 15: 28, from full reading Matthew 15:21-31

The power of faith can be hugely underestimated. Many studies have shown that those with faith or those who have spiritual practices such as meditation in their lives receive physical and mental benefit from it. In the encounter between the Canaanite woman and Jesus, there is distress, anxiety and judgement. Even the disciples want the woman to leave Jesus alone, and they ask Jesus to send her away because of her shouting at them. But Jesus knows he was sent for such a situation as this, and he has time and healing not just for her daughter, but for her. Her faith led her to Jesus, her faith kept her chasing after him, and her faith in his ability to do something about her situation led to a solution. Jesus praises her for her faith and grants her wish that her daughter might be set free from her burden.

Faith has a place in our lives and in our world, because faith, hope and love are powerful and change things. The Canaanite woman found this to be true, but that was because she had faith in the right thing – faith in Jesus and in his power.

God of grace and love, you sent your only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world that we might have perfect freedom. Give me the faith I need today, to follow you and do your will. Amen.

What are the first words that come to mind when you think of kindness?

"In this world you have to be a bit too kind in order to be kind enough."
Pierre de Marivaux

University of Sussex academics are partnering with BBC Radio 4 on The Kindness Test, a huge public science project aimed at increasing our understanding of the role that kindness plays in our lives.

To find out more, The Kindness Test launched on BBC Radio 4 on Tuesday 31 August. Devised by a network of researchers based at the University of Sussex, the in-depth online questionnaire will explore how people view the place of kindness in their lives. The pandemic has brought the topic of kindness to the fore, highlighting inspiring examples of true kindness in action and with thousands joining community WhatsApp groups. The latest research is demonstrating that kindness can be central to success at work, in politics and in relationships. The study aims to tell us more about how kindness is viewed within society at large and some issues being explored include: what are the most common kind acts people carry out?; where do people most often experience kindness?; is kindness viewed as a weakness?; how is kindness connected with compassion and empathy?

Here are some words that people connect with kindness, that have featured in the answers to the questionnaire with the aim of finding out people's attitudes towards it:

empathy thoughtful care compassion generous love
give warmth helpful selfless gentle helping

The questionnaire takes about 30 minutes to complete. Anonymity is protected. I gave it a go and it really made me think, in a good and constructive way. The results will be analysed and announced on BBC Radio 4 in February 2022. *Ed*

COVID PROTECTIONS IN CHURCH

Both set of Elders have recently reviewed our risk assessments and the measures we're taking to try to create a Covid-safe environment. A few adjustments have been made in the light of experience.

After-church coffee is restarting and in both churches the halls are being used for this so that there is plenty of space and ventilation. Obviously we have to take our masks off to drink a cup of coffee so we're trying to mitigate against that and keep people safe.

Some hymnbooks and Bibles are being returned to pews and pew cushions have also been put back as well. Higher cleaning levels remain and so we hope that we are striking an appropriate balance.

We no longer have to apply the two metre rule but we are encouraging people to spread out in church and to use the space we have to our advantage.

Probably the most controversial thing at the moment is that in line with URC guidance (and the practice of many other churches) we are asking people still to wear masks in church principally because we are singing hymns in worship. I know that some of you **are** coming because we are asking this and that you wouldn't if we didn't. And I also know that some of you are **not** coming because we are asking this and would if we didn't - so we really are between a rock and a hard place on this. As someone who wears both glasses and hearing aids I know what a pain masks are (and I've lost an ear ring!). I just beg you all to bear with this as we move into autumn with Covid case figures rising and likely to continue so to do. Let's do all we can to keep each other safe, even if we do hate wearing a mask. By doing so we're not protecting ourselves - we're protecting others.

Finally, if you do go down with Covid and have been in church recently, do please let us know (or ask your family to) so that we can quickly take the action we are obliged to take. That would be really helpful.

Michael Hodgson



It isn't too early to start thinking about shoe boxes. National Collection Week is 15-22 November.

Last year, due to the difficulties of preparing the shoeboxes in the Covid situation, the Elders agreed that a donation should be given to Samaritan's Purse. Watch this space for more details of how you can help this year!

DOING THE ROUNDS IN HARARE (a play on corruption)

(sent by one of the artists. It is good to see Zimbabweans have not lost their sense of humour! JS)

Yesterday I had only \$20 in my pocket. I went to Holiday Inn's restaurant and made an order of the most expensive meal they had available with the most expensive wine included. After the meal, drinks and champagne, my bill was \$450 and I told the waiter I had no money. The hotel manager was called and he called and handed me to the police. On my way to the station I handed \$10 to the officer and I was set free. This is what I call "Financial management". Learn from me.

SERVICES AND OTHER KEY DATES OCTOBER 2021



All our services are also accessible on Zoom



Sunday 3 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship with Holy Communion taken by the Minister.
Tuesday 5 October	7.30 pm	St Andrew's Elders' Meeting - Hersham Room
 Friday 8 October	12.30 - 1.30 pm	People Who Lunch - Weybridge URC
Sunday 10 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship taken by the Revd David Netherwood
Sunday 17 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship taken by Mr Graham Pearcey

COPY DATE FOR NOVEMBER ISSUE: WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER

All items to the Editor, Norma Reid, 3 Gwalior Road, London SW15 1NP
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Sunday 24 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship taken by Mr Sydney Shore
Sunday 31 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship taken by the Minister



HARVEST COLLECTION FOR ARTPEACE (ZIMBABWE)



A collection was made at our Harvest service on Sunday 19 September. However, a few cheques have arrived since then bringing the total to £330. Should anyone wish to donate to this worthy cause please send cheques, whatever, to Johnston Simpson. Every donation will be gratefully received.

The latest 'ArtPeace and Friends' article in this month's Newsletter will explain how we intend to use our donations. Our friends' Harvest is their main source of food for their extended families and some impoverished neighbours, lasting much of the year.
 There is no wastage — even dried old maize cobs are used as fuel.

Thank you!

HARVEST AT ST ANDREW'S

After last year's "lockdown harvest" it was nice to be back in church to celebrate Harvest Festival again which focussed very much on God's blessing. We were joined by friends from ArtPeace, to whom our financial gifts are being sent this year. It was nice to be able to speak directly to those who will be receiving that money and to wish them well- and it was good to be able to thank them for the greetings and encouragement they give us through the messages they send.



We also had a surprise visitor as Norma's friend, Beverley, was in the country from Norway and able to join us in person for the first time. Beverley started joining us during lockdown in the Zoom Service and so it was super to be able to welcome her in reality and to have her join us.



L-R Beverley with the minister and Norma outside church

With coffee after the service, all hymns being accompanied by the organ, and with the joy of seeing Jake (pictured below) come up to help look at the harvest produce in church, it felt as if a little normality was returning. Jake, by the way, was fascinated to see feet playing the organ pedalboard as well as hands playing the keyboard



An apple a day...



Malted Wheaties - one for the shopping list!

And just to support a well-known harvest hymn, the weather ensured that it was fine when we came to church, that there was the odd spot of rain by the end of the service and that by the end of coffee the "winter storms" had well and truly begun with the rain coming down in stair-roads.

A good Harvest Festival.

Michael Hodgson

OUTREACH UPDATE

One of the most surprising things for me about the lockdown was the amount of outreach we were able to do despite the closure of our Church buildings. Thanks to the Zoom technology we were able to keep in touch with each other, former church members and friends based all over the world. At one point we were covering all four points of the compass with people zooming in from Australia, Zimbabwe, Norway and the USA!

Our challenge now is to keep our momentum going and consider how we want to serve God and our communities going forward. To help us understand the local community, we are using the information from the census and other sources to understand the makeup of Walton. This community audit will give us data on age groupings, ethnicity, religions etc and we are aiming to have this done by the end of September.

Once we have that data, we can think about which segment of the community we want to work with. There are a number of factors to take into account when doing this: the make up of the Walton community, outreach work carried out by other churches and how we ourselves would welcome newcomers. For example, whilst it would be lovely to try and have young families join us it might be difficult to make a young family feel comfortable coming to St Andrew's if theirs were the only children in our Sunday service.

You can help by thinking about the questions in this article and discussing them with the Minister or Elders. We would like to hear your views on the following questions:

What does “outreach” mean to you? Is it about growing :

- The number of people in our Sunday morning service?
- the frequency of messy church meetings and / or the numbers attending that service?

Is it about having a range of different types of services?

Is outreach about being a force for good in our community by widening our involvement in local charities?

Another question is how we would measure our success?

We would really appreciate your views on all these questions.

We also need you to be an active participant in outreach: your role might be to pray for guidance, or simply to let your neighbours know what happens at St Andrew's. You may have skills which will help with this.

There will be an opportunity for you to get involved after this initial information gathering stage as we are aiming to set up a group to help the Elders and Minister with the outreach work. Please let your Elder know if you would like to be involved.

If lockdown has taught us anything it is that we don't know what we can do until we try. Thank you for reading this article and please think about your response to it.

Carol Lee

While walking along the pavement in front of his church, the minister of St Andrew's Shottery heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, his 5-year old son and his playmates had found a dead robin. Feeling that proper burial should be performed they had secured a small box and cotton wadding, then dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of the deceased. The minister's son was chosen to say the appropriate prayers and with sonorous dignity intoned his version of what he thought his father always said: 'Glory be unto the Father and unto the Sonnn and into the hole he goooes'

(Thanks to St Andrew's Shottery newsletter 'Searchlight' for this contribution)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

So sang Bob Dylan, and times are a-changing at St Andrew's - or should that be that they have a-changed? Following a hand-over month, Anna has now finished as Church Secretary and Carol is fully in post. We wish Anna well as she now assumes the role of "Former Church Secretary", very much aware of all that she has done during her time in office. We also wish Carol well as she takes up the challenge, conscious of the words of William Shakespeare, "some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them".

Good luck Carol. We have total confidence in you!

Michael Hodgson

THANK YOU

At the last Church Meeting, Michael surprised me by acknowledging my time as Church Secretary. It is hard to believe that it has been 11 years. We have gone through a time a time of change and stability, two very different Ministers but both a privilege and a pleasure to work with. My job has been made so much easier because of the support of the Elders and congregation. My sincere thanks to you all.

Michael also surprised me with a card and gift voucher, which I used whilst up at Westminster College to purchase this necklace (right), which I shall treasure.



I wish my successor, Carol, all the best.

Anna Crawford

AND ANOTHER THANK YOU

I felt so much joy attending the church Harvest Festival on Sunday with Norma. Especially as one of my favourite hymns from Harvest Festivals at school was sung ('We Plough the Field and Scatter'). It was a huge pleasure to meet you all. Zooming in from Norway on Sunday mornings helps me to feel connected to "home". Being part of your church has given me a comforting sense of "belonging". Thank you all.

Thanks to Norma, for always sending me the zoom codes. Without her, I would not have known about your church. In fact, I stopped "attending" (via zoom) my local Anglican church services in Stavanger as I much preferred yours!

When I find the right ones for me, I look forward to displaying my ArtPeace sculptures at home in Norway. That of "Christ Arising" (on display in the church) is one I will never forget.

Beverley Anda

A Cyclist's Prayer (from Holy Wit - Revd James A Simpson)

Lord, Thou who has never ridden a bicycle, help those who have to. Only Thou knowest the dangers we are subjected to and the difficulties we go through. Help us on the upward slopes. There is no need to push us downwards. Sustain us when we go through a deep hole full of water that seemed a shallow hole. Deliver us from dogs that like to run after us to bite the wheels. And above all, **help us to buy a car.** Amen.

A VISIT TO NORWICH CATHEDRAL



The Peace Globe

Earlier this month I had the joy of visiting Norwich's majestic Romanesque cathedral, begun in the late 11th century by Herbert de Losinga, and set in 44 acres of beautiful grounds. It boasts the second tallest spire in England (where peregrine falcons took up residence in 2011) and its monastic cloisters with stunning vaulting and roof bosses inspire contemplation and have an aura of complete peacefulness. On the left you can see the Peace Globe where visitors are invited to pause and light a candle.

For the first 450 years of its existence, Norwich Cathedral was also a Benedictine monastery and whilst there are no longer monks here the ethos of this tradition is a continuing influence on Cathedral life. It can be identified across three key values, worship, learning and hospitality. The Rule of St Benedict expresses a vision and values for life as a community. The copper baptismal font was made from bowls once used for making chocolate in the Norwich Rowntree factory and was given to the cathedral after the closure of the factory in 1994.

Dippy the Dinosaur is at present the star attraction and is on show until the end of October. I had not seen him before and was blown away by this huge size and in particular the tiny head in relation to his body.

The Revd Canon Andy Bryant, Canon for Mission and Pastoral Care at the Cathedral, writes:

"A dinosaur roar of hope!"

Who would have thought a dinosaur in a cathedral would be so popular? After just six weeks in residence, Dippy the dinosaur welcomed over 100,000 visitors to the Nave of Norwich Cathedral. And from the feedback we have received Dippy has clearly made a very good impression on his visitors. ...It was always our intention that after seeing Dippy the visitor would be drawn into space for reflection. Dippy makes you think. To be in the presence of an animal from 150 million years ago challenges all our usual statements about creation, and demands something more than a human-centric view of this planet. To know that this gentle giant became extinct due to climate change focuses our minds on the climate emergency that we are facing and, standing there, fossilised in time, Dippy reminds us that this issue cannot be ignored."

God of creation

*As Dippy makes us marvel on the wonder of life before our time,
We thank you for the wonderful world you have given us.
Help us to see the world through your eyes, and to work together to return the world
To a place where all life thrives;
Where waters run clear
And rain quenches the thirst of our crops;
Where the wind brings freshness and changes of weather;
Where ice holds back the floods; where sun and moon continue to light up our lives.
And where the rainbow marks your promise of love and holds us together in our diversity.
Amen"*

Ed

Tom Allan used to tell of once being left in the sitting room with a four-year old while his mother went to make a cup of tea. The wee lad kept looking at him and then finally said, "You're not good looking." When the mother returned, the minister thought he would make a joke of it. "Your wee lad was telling me that I am not good looking." "Oh," said the mother, "You always get the truth from children, don't you?"
(From *Holy Wit* - Revd James A Simpson)

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

PULLING TOGETHER! I am delighted to report lots of good news this month thanks to responses from last month's tale of woe. Donations arrived from Scotland, Wales (2), Fleetwood,



Kettering, Toddington and nearer to home, Claygate and Weybridge. This gave the artists a huge boost and lifted morale. They were overjoyed and expressed their appreciation via a video which can be seen on our website or via the link shown later in this article. The money was put to good use. EG: Readers will recall Tapiwa the 12-year-old orphan (left) who largely fends for himself. Tapiwa was given 35 dollars by artist Ignatious. Tapiwa (right) holding donation, was thrilled and gives grateful thanks to his newfound UK friends. He



used his donation to buy 40kgs of maize, 2 ltrs cooking oil, sugar, rice, salt, flour, 2x500g beans, matches, 250g powder milk leaving him with 5US dollars to pay for grinding maize into meal.

DIVERSIFICATION: Artists like Fortune (below left) have used their money to diversify into chickens and rabbits to provide protein for their families and sell surplus eggs and meat. Our donations also helped Fortune's neighbour Maria (below) a single mother with four children including twins. Her husband was a diabetic and died from Covid. Fortune said she was over the



moon with her 60US\$ donation and shed tears of joy at being able to buy sugar, flour, mealie meal, candles, firewood, second-hand shoes and clothes – even a treat of sweets for the children!

COMMUNICATIONS: Many of the artists' old mobiles are broken so 8 eBay buys + Poundland reading spectacles will be winging their way to Artpeace next month thanks to Catherine, a splendid Zimbabwean nurse from Bristol visiting family – without mobiles, I could not operate.

SHARING: Our service via WhatsApp audio/mobile continues to be transmitted to Artpeace who are unable to attend their own services unless double vaccinated. This 'pulling together' on many fronts from kind people makes a real difference to the quality of our friends' lives. They were also uplifted by supportive words from Rev. Michael Hodgson & visiting minster Rev. Derek Wensley.

OUR SUPPORT helps people in numerous ways. Struggling artist Herbert has been able to pay off school fee arrears enabling his son Elias (left) to re-join his classmates. Herbert (far right) is still recovering from a savage attack and hospitalisation when his mobile was stolen so was grateful for our help. Also, Edinah (right), who used to work in Silveira House's craft shop, was desperate to buy blood pressure tablets. She said: *'The tablets are a life saver therefore I am so very happy – may God bless whoever who helped me.'* Sometimes light seems to shine through little cracks more effectively than an explosive blaze.



SALES: Artpeace also enjoyed an excellent month of sales courtesy of the Southwark Cathedral shop. The congregation was encouraged by Dean Andrew Nunn (left) to buy sculptures and they responded wholeheartedly. On receipt of the recent sales money and general donations, Artpeace responded with a heartfelt thank you on video which was forwarded immediately to each donor and Southwark. Andrew, never one to let the grass grow under his feet, arranged for the video to be displayed on their comprehensive website accompanied by a supportive write up. Shop manager Jon Dollin's actioned this quickly – see link: <https://cathedral.southwark.anglican.org/about-us/news/practical-help-to-friends-in-zimbabwe/>



MARLOW URC COME UP TRUMPS AGAIN! Last but certainly not least, at their recent quarterly church meeting Marlow URC's congregation once more agreed to finance the entire cooperative's seed and fertiliser requirements. This is no mean achievement in these difficult financial times. The artists were overjoyed and mightily relieved. I sought CAFOD'S Regional director's help as she has access to professional government agricultural advice re the most suitable time for sowing. **BONUS!** - **St Andrew's URC** Harvest collection for Artpeace will be used to buy chemicals and hire sprayers to prevent attack by the dreaded army worm which can devastate a field in a week. Below left, artist Shingi and his wife Beauty prepare their field for the next sowing. Below right, artist Lizeni with last year's bumper crop.

Johnston Simpson





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Covid-safe services start at 10.30 am. Services are also accessible on Zoom.

Anyone who wishes to take part in the Zoom service should contact the minister, who will be able to send them a link to enable easy participation.

You are all most welcome to join us!

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

I Peter 4 vv 8-10