



Parish of St Andrew's and St Peter's, South Shoebury



Parish Magazine February 2021

Cost 50p

Loving God and our Neighbours in South Shoebury

OUR CHURCH SERVICES – FEBRUARY 2021

Update on church services from Revd Louise Williams

I will be honest and say I have been wrestling with what is the right thing to do at the moment about public worship. On the one hand, Public Health England have said we may meet so, presumably their assessment of the risk is that it is safe to do so. On the other hand, Bishop Peter, acting Bishop of Chelmsford, has encouraged us to stop public worship to keep everyone safe. Within our Parochial Church Council and the wider congregation, we have those who are staying at home and think we should stop meeting for now, and others who think we should keep on meeting. And it seems to me that everyone is right!

On the assumption that whatever we do will be both right and wrong, I have reluctantly concluded that for now, it will be better to stay at home to say our prayers. Do use this time to pray and read and think...it's not as though there's much else to do at the moment!! I'm really sad and sorry about this and particularly for those who live alone and for whom church is your family and primary place of friendship. Keep in touch with each other via phone or email; let me know how you are getting on. God is still with us and has not forgotten us. We will continue to send you the usual emails on Sundays and Wednesdays and Hannah is going to record some short acts of worship that can go on-line. Those who are not on email will continue to receive readings, prayers etc through their letter boxes. We have survived two lock downs, we can survive a third. And do keep all who are poorly in your prayers and all who care for them.

On January 7th the Essex Health Authority wrote to faith leaders to thank us for the way we have worked so hard to keep everyone safe but asking that we cease public worship for the common good. On January 12th the Parochial Church Council confirmed their agreement that, for now, this is the right thing to do. Thank you all for your patience and understanding in this matter.

God's greatest longing is that we should get to know him,
come to love him, enjoy his company.

And when we talk to God or listen to him, heart to heart, this is prayer.

<https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/exploring-faith/prayer>

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The great Shoebury
Virtual
QUIZ

Friday 22nd January 7:30pm

It's the second great Shoebury Quiz hosted by the Hardy family. There will be an extra special 'Christopher's Challenge'. It will be great to see you there on Friday 22nd January. Contact rev.hannah.robinson@outlook.com for the Zoom link

Dear Friends

I hope this finds you well and coping with these difficult and worrying times. Perhaps you have now had your vaccine? How wonderful! We pray it won't be long before we really see the difference that this can make. There are a number of nurses and health professionals who read our magazine so, thank you for all you are doing to help us.

Earlier this week we had a Bible Study Group using Zoom. We looked at Psalm 63 together. It's a beautiful psalm (poem/song) written by King David when he was hiding in the Judean Desert to keep safe from people who were trying to kill him. It's written from an experience of isolation, loneliness and fear. In the psalm we noticed how David yearns for God with a deep longing and desperation . . . like a traveller in a hot and dusty desert where there is no water.

Psalm 63

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

1. You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.
2. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.
3. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
4. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.
5. I will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
6. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.
7. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
8. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.
9. Those who want to kill me will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.
10. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.
11. But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

And David reminds himself of the times he has felt uplifted in worship and prayer. The times he has sung and prayed and how, in response to this, he felt encouraged and inspired to trust God. He makes the effort right there and then to lift his heart and mind to God. It can't have been easy in his fear and isolation. It isn't easy to pray when life is hard: I'm sure you know that. Perhaps sometimes we feel we should 'do better' in our Christian lives. Well, it isn't a competition and it seems to me we're all finding life a challenge at the moment. So, don't get hung

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Licensed Lay Minister Andy Clipsham	
Curate Hannah Robinson, 56 Waking Road, Shoeburyness	07498 208259
Churchwardens Jan and Bob Hemmings	
Deputy Churchwarden Denise Askew	
Authorised Local Preacher Geraldine Hansford, 79 Gunners Rise, Shoeburyness	294208
PCC Secretary Geoff Price, 11 Pentland Avenue, Shoeburyness	296249
PCC Treasurer	
Electoral Roll Officer Mike Bayliss	580430
Child Protection and Safeguarding Officer Sandra Baines, 112 Waking Avenue, Shoeburyness	294043
Churchyard Enquiries Keith Barham, 53 Broadclyst Gardens, Thorpe Bay	584546
Magazine Editor Geraldine Hansford	294208
Magazine Distribution Geoff Price	296249
Sunday School Sandra Baines	294043
Kids Club@St Peter's Sandra Baines	294043
Youth Group Revd Canon Louise Williams	292778
Men's Fellowship Keith Barham	584546
Tea, Toast and Toddlers Mary Fane	296393
Tuesdays @ Two Group Geoff Price	296249
UNIFORMED GROUPS	
Rainbows & Brownies, St Andrew's	Helena Hawkyard 292122
Scouts – 3rd Shoebury, St Peter's	GSL – Ernie Collins 295398
Rainbows, St Peter's	Jenny Burris 295870

up on whether you are doing well, or not. Let's see what David did in his time of trial.

He makes a 'sacrifice' of worship. He sings, he prays, he thinks about God. And in doing this he gains new trust and strength to carry on. In sleepless nights he reminds himself of God's presence. Counting sheep has its place . . . but maybe singing a hymn, reading some verses of the Bible or saying the Lord's Prayer could be a wonderful alternative?

In the dark night David says this:

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
I cling to you; your right hand upholds me. (Psalm 63.7-8)

David knows that God is with him. It isn't easy but, as he clings to God, so he finds that God is holding him tight. As the days unfold, may each of us find new hope, encouragement and comfort in the love and kindness of God.

With love, Louise.

LENT MODULES FOR 2021

The Lent Modules are a collection of education, training and skills events across the Diocese of Chelmsford during Lent each year. A series of short courses running across the diocese between Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Courses cost between £15 and £30 and themes include:

- *The upside-down kingdom of God*
- *Lost Christiansities*
- *Science and Faith*
- *The Book of Job*
- *Pilgrimage and Saints*
- *Living as a Christian in the scientific and technological world of today and tomorrow*
- *Jesus and the entrepreneurial kingdom*
- *The history, beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Seeing Jesus: Art and Meditation to prepare us for Easter week*
- *The big screen and the Bible,*
- *Surprised by Prayer*

For details about this year's courses go to:

<https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/discipleship/lent-modules>

WHAT IS HAPPENING THIS MONTH?

Bible Study

We continue to meet on Zoom every Wednesday at 7pm.

We have been looking at various Psalms in our weekly Bible Study. These are such rich resources for the times in which we live: very encouraging. These are not academic studies...more a time of reflection and encouragement in our faith. No prior knowledge is necessary; just an open mind and heart. Please get in touch if you would like to attend. revlwilliams@aol.com

For Lent we will spend some time considering a series of attitudes which affect how we live with one another. These are based on materials produced by the Church of England under the banner of 'Living in Love and Faith'. The attitudes are: ignorance, prejudice, hypocrisy, fear, silence and power. More information to follow.

We will also have a booklet of daily Bible readings available for a minimum donation of £1.50. This is called **#LiveLent, God's Story, Our Story** and has been produced by the Church of England. I know many of you have found similar booklets helpful when you have used them in both Advent and Lent. Please let me know if you would like a copy.

We don't yet know when the Bishops will encourage us to return to worshipping in church. Hopefully not too long. But, if we are unable to resume before **Ash Wednesday (February 17th)**, we will aim to put some form of worship on the website for you.

Weekly services and emails

We continue to provide materials for you to pray at home. Let me encourage you to take time on Sundays to be still with God and to read the sermons, prayers, Bible readings and hymn words that we send and provide on the website. We provide a link to YouTube where you can hear the hymns. You may have tolerant housemates or neighbours...in which case maybe sing along. If you would like to receive the email containing these resources, please let me know. We send two emails each week...one on a Wednesday as we normally have a service every Wednesday and one email in time for Sunday. (If you are not on-line and would



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10th December 2020

Dear friends of St Andrew and St Peters

Thank you for bringing some joy this Christmas

Thank you so much for your support for Blythswood Care's 2020 Shoe Box Appeal. The part you've played has been so important, and is so appreciated.

This year has brought challenges to us all and as I write, I realise that this has been far from an easy year for you. Schools and churches have been closed. Some have lost loved ones. Many have lived in fear. Securities and freedoms we perhaps didn't realise we had, let alone took for granted, have been taken from us. The world as we knew it has been changed beyond recognition. But in spite of all the turmoil and change, I believe strongly that God remains in control – He remains God and He remains good, even in what we struggle to understand.

Your support would be so valued and appreciated at any time, but in our 28th year of the Shoe Box Appeal, your support is more significant than ever. The need for shoebox gifts has certainly not gone away in 2020. Many needs that existed before have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the losses that it has brought with it. What joy these gift-filled shoeboxes will bring to people in need across Eastern Europe this winter – what light in what for so many has been such a dark time. It's been said before, but it's worth repeating here, every gift in every shoebox makes a difference. Your support for the Shoe Box Appeal counts more than ever this year. You have made a difference.

As a small thing to say a very big thank you, I'm pleased to enclose a certificate of thanks that you can display.

It's my privilege to be able to thank you on behalf of Blythswood Care, but thank you also on behalf of those you might never meet, but whose lives have been made better thanks to your kindness and care.

Wishing you every blessing for 2021,

Mairi Ferrier
Fundraising Administrator

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OUR CHURCH HALL

When very young and living nearby to St Andrews, I attended Sunday school in the church hall. I don't recall how long it lasted but Mum told me that I said, "It was alright but I had to sit still!" Now, assuming that I didn't sit still, I would not have studied how the hall was built inside!

Mum was pleased as, each time I came home, she would hear me at the door singing the song we had been taught that day.

Dad was called up and, not long after, Mum and I moved to a road a bit farther north. I got to know the four children next door, all older than me. I got to mix with and know the youngest brother and sister very well and I no longer had to sit quiet and still in the hall on Sunday afternoons!

More recently, during the last few years, we have worshipped in the church hall if work was being carried out in the church and, of course, during our recent restrictions.

Some weeks ago, between lockdowns, Revd Hannah gave a sermon in which she mentioned youngsters and children. I was taking it all in, honestly, but my mind went back to when I sat there in the front row of the audience, as a youngster just after the war and my two youngest neighbours were on stage in a small show. I was amazed, because they sang, they danced and tap danced, something I never knew they were capable of. In later years it dawned on me that their father was in the 'entertainment' business before the war. I suppose it was about 1946 when I first saw the stage in our church hall being used for what it was built for.

Over the years I have attended many meetings and gatherings in the church hall.

I promise, Revd Hannah and Revd Louise, that I won't let my attention drift, (well not too far) if you are giving a sermon in the hall and mention youngsters and children.

Happy memories.

Brian Theedom

like to receive paper copies of the prayers etc, please let us know. It may be possible to deliver the Sunday readings to you.)

Also, Hannah is now aiming to record a short service to put on the website every Sunday. If you have any problems finding this, do let us know. That is another resource to help you to pray and keep going in your faith journey.

Pram Service

We have been meeting weekly for half an hour of Bible stories, singing and a prayer. With the schools closing some of our parents have had to change their routines so please be aware the dates and times for this may alter from week to week. Please let Hannah know if you would like to attend. (07498 208259)

Virtual Christmas Fair

Thank you so much to everyone who made or provided items for sale for the Fair. And thank you to those who bought items and others who donated money to support the event. I'm delighted to say that we received around £1000 for church funds. That was a fantastic response and we are so grateful.

Thank you to those who continue to support the work of the church financially. Please continue to do so...the bills still need to be paid. Some of you have kindly put your weekly offering in an envelope and popped it through my door. Thank you!

If you write a **cheque** for the church, please make it payable to 'South Shoebury PCC'. This applies whether you normally attend St Andrew's or St Peter's.

It is also possible to give regularly using the **Parish Giving Scheme** which is tax efficient and is very simple to organise. If you are not a tax payer then it is possible to set up a **standing order** and I am happy to give you details about both of these ways to give.

From time to time we receive a substantial gift (£100+) for the church. It is helpful if you can let us know if you are a tax payer and if tax can be reclaimed on this. It's a very simple way to increase the gift you have given. Thank you.

We also now have a **card reader** so you are welcome to come to the Rectory with your debit card and we can receive your offering. **Revd Louise Williams**

OUR MAGAZINE FRONT AND BACK COVERS SHOEBURY LIVING ADVENT CALENDAR

Christmas feels like such a long time ago but Christmas Day, at the time of me writing, was only 21 days ago. Over Advent some wonderful residents, churches, schools and businesses decorated their windows, each on a different day, to create a Living Advent Calendar. These windows were revealed daily on Facebook. Over the month, the Shoebury Living Advent Calendar Facebook group grew and at the end of the month had just under 300 members.

The decorated windows and the Facebook group also helped members of the community who have been shielding or needing to self-isolate. Shortly after its launch I received an email from someone who had been shielding on their own since the first lockdown. They said that the Living Advent Calendar was the first time since March that they had felt part of the community. I think that helping people to feel as if they belong made the whole advent calendar worthwhile.

I knew when the windows were visited because various photos of them began to appear in local Facebook groups. I know that one family went out each day to see the latest window when it was revealed. The children were drawing each window every day and messaged me at the end to show me their designed window and which one was their favourite.

I would like to say thank you again to all the people who decorated their windows. They were all amazing and individual and it was exciting each day to see what was going to be revealed. I also need to give a big thank you to the schools who, under extraordinary pressure, joined in and produced some incredible work.

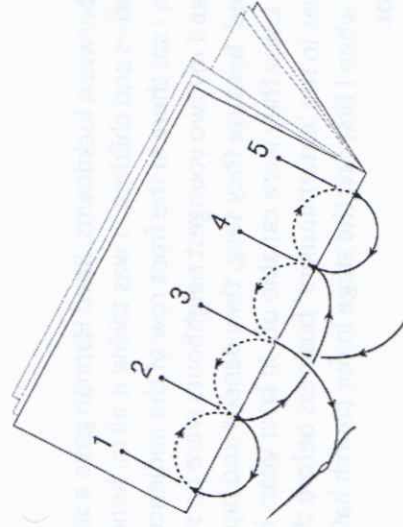
Thank you, too, to everyone who went to look at the windows and told other people about the calendar. The Living Advent Calendar would not have got off the ground without everyone pulling together to support the project.

Revd Hannah Robinson

with fewer leaves can be trimmed into fun shapes and designs, especially around images glued to the covers.

These books make great scrapbooks, but they also work well for organising small craft materials like embroidery threads and fabric swatches. If watercolour or pastel paper is used for the pages you can use them to organise colour swatches, or for sketching while out and about. With Spring on its way, they're also handy ways to organise seed packets with notes on variety and sowing times etc.

Having the knot on the outside creates an opportunity for decoration (especially if the thread is substituted with ribbon or yarn and tied with a bow or embellished with beads) but the stitching pattern can be adjusted to end with the knot inside the book for a neater finish. To do this, start the stitching from inside the book, sewing out through the centre hole, then back in through hole 2... etc.



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH US?

We are very appreciative of all the articles and items of interest that people send to us for inclusion in our magazine. If you would like to make a contribution, please do write to us with anything you would like to share.

You can email your piece to me at geraldinehansford@gmail.com or put something in the post to me at the address on page 20. We will be very pleased to hear from you.

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STEP BY STEP

A simple method to inspire creative hands, using minimal tools and materials, to produce handy little books to be filled with your sketches, notes and ideas, which can be adapted to use the most creative choices of materials, and provides a great way to recycle waste paper and packaging around the home.

Gather 4 - 8 sheets of light-weight paper for the pages (just about any type of paper can be used, and of any size) and 1 sheet of heavier-weight paper/card for the cover (pages from old magazines, cereal boxes, and especially old Christmas or birthday cards are ideal).

01. Fold each sheet neatly in half, burnishing the creases down to create sharp folds.
02. Gather the folded sheets together and nest one inside another to form a booklet, with the cover paper outermost.
03. Pierce 5 roughly equidistant holes through the spine of the booklet from the inside. First pierce a hole in the centre, then two holes about a centimetre from either end, and then two more centred on either side of the centre hole. Looking at the spine of the booklet, we'll number these holes 1 - 5 from left to right.
04. With a needle (threaded with about 3 booklet lengths of thread) sew into the booklet from the outside, through the centre hole. Then sew back out through hole 2; back in through hole 1; and then back out through hole 2.
05. Skip over the centre hole and make a long stitch, re-entering the booklet at hole 4. Sew back out through hole 5; back in through hole 4; and finally back out through the centre hole, ensuring that both ends of the thread end up on opposite sides of the long stitch
06. Pull the threads taught and tie the ends together firmly. Trim them off neatly, and you're done.

Notes:

Single, large sheets can be folded multiple times to form the booklet. It's okay if the folds aren't quite perfect, or if the leaves are connected by folds at the edges, as we can trim the books after sewing. I often use a single sheet of A3 cartridge paper folded in half three times to form an A6 booklet of 8 leaves. Thinner books

THE ADVENT WINDOW TRAIL

At the start of December, Geraldine and I were inspired by Hannah's Living Advent Calendar project and we decided to walk a weekly "Advent Window trail" visiting each of the windows that had been unveiled in the preceding few days.

We set off enthusiastically on week 1 and soon reached our starting point – St Peter's – where, as we pored over each pane, we were stunned by the amount of detail and marvelled at the skill and time it had required. Encouraged, off we went to find some more. If you saw us on our travels, you may have smiled at how, like excited children, we were so thrilled by each new discovery! So much imagination and time must have been needed to prepare each one.

Over three weeks, we saw every window. It gave purpose and direction to our walks and took us to pastures new in some cases. We enjoyed being able to study the designs at close range. Even then, to my shame, I didn't notice Lisa's stable until Geraldine pointed it out to me – how could I have missed that? It was brilliant. Also, I have to mention the jolly dancing figure from Mary's window that warmed our hearts and put smiles on our faces.

So, thank you Hannah for organising this and to every one of you who took part – your windows were wonderful.

If you missed them, they are all displayed on the front and back covers of this magazine for you to have an even better view than we did – all together in their illuminated splendour. **Lynne Waters**

RIBBON CHRISTMAS TREE

In St Andrew's this year we had a beautiful real Christmas tree. This was donated by Stibbards funeral directors. We thank them very much for this.

People who had been bereaved were invited to come to St Andrew's to tie a ribbon onto the tree – every ribbon representing an empty chair, a loss, a deep sadness. But also representing love, companionship and happy memories. People came along to spend a few minutes thinking, remembering and praying. It was very touching and greatly appreciated by those who attended. **Revd Louise Williams**



'Twas A Day In November

'Twas a day in November when Hannah did think,
"Let's lighten these dark times." The idea came in a blink.
Advent windows are needed, one for each day.
Individual and different, in its own way.

Ideas were suggested. Angels, a throng.
Swans, stockings, a stable, candles and so on.
Volunteers they came forward, then schools joined in too.
The dates were selected, we knew what to do.

Behind many closed doors, like elves we all toiled.
With tissue and glue, tinsel and foil.
"It's all gone so wrong!" cries of much desperation.
We started anew on another creation.

Then slowly, from out of the turmoil and tears.
Such wonderful things began to appear.
Colourful images spread across floors and tables,
Now just for the hanging and lights if we're able.

Much juggling and tweaking and many "Plan B's".
With each small success we became more at ease.
When at last the time came for the 'Big Reveal',
No one had told us how nervous we'd feel.

Onlookers gathered, distanced as told,
Opening speeches, the cameras rolled.
5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Such anticipation,
Would they fulfil our expectation?

Yes! The lights were turned on, a glorious sight,
Each tableau shone brightly out into the night.
One opened each day as Advent progressed,
Facebook or passers-by, all were impressed.

No parties or gatherings, we needed some cheer,
To bring us together as Christmas drew near.
Twenty-four special windows that became the wonder,
The Great 2020 Shoeburyness Advent Calendar. **Karen Hughes**

THE EZRA CENTRE



In a few of my newsletters I've mentioned in passing the work of the Ezra Centre and what I do within this ministry, but I thought I would explain a bit more what the Ezra Centre offers in Guatemala.

Guatemala has one of the highest Christian populations in Latin America; more than 90% of people identify as Christian and it's common in the Capital to see two churches within a hundred metres of each other. With this explosive growth of Christianity in the last thirty years, the Church hasn't had time to train pastors to lead these new believers and guide them in their faith; current estimates say that fewer than 10% of pastors and church leaders have any kind of training.

That is where the Ezra Centre comes in. As a ministry we travel to different parts of the country and teach courses in how to preach, how to counsel and everything you need to run a church. All of this is with a strong emphasis on social impact; how their churches can work in the local community to spark change for the better. Some of the graduates from our diploma programmes have started migrant centres and after-school programmes and have built playgrounds and housing for homeless people. The effect the Ezra Centre has in local communities can be seen across rural Guatemala.

My role within the Ezra Centre is co-ordinating the diploma programmes and teaching. I make first contact with a group of churches or an organization that wants to receive a course, I agree costs, register students, timetable teachers, and many other things. The great part is that it means I travel to different parts of Guatemala to teach and co-ordinate, although frequently I just see the classroom!

*If you would like to know more about the Ezra Centre, feel free to contact me at gwbaines89@gmail.com or 01702 294043 **Geoff Baines***

CONNECTED HEARTS



Since 2017, I've been working with a group of women in establishing a ministry called "Corzones Conectados" (Connected Hearts) to work with female prisoners just outside Guatemala City. We work with 85 women in a penitentiary reform centre. This centre understands the value that faith can bring to those who have lost it through the hardships of life. We have the opportunity every Friday to share biblical reflections, companionship, and love with these women. Each Friday we run activities including discipleship, worship and just take time to pray and talk with them. There are a lot of difficulties in a ministry like this, not just getting the right permissions to go into the prison, but also in building relationships of trust, which can take a long time.

Although at the moment we can't go into the reform centre because of Covid-19, we've been able to help at a distance by recording and sending Bible study videos, sending devotional books, and also fundraising and sending in essentials like shoes and soap. Normally the different prisoners' families would bring them these essentials as the government can't provide them but, due to restrictions, the family can't even bring these, so we are privileged to support in this way. We are blessed to share with them and also to be part of their lives and see how they can be transformed by God's love. We hope to see them again in the future when restrictions are lifted. However, there are many other things that can be done so we keep going and doing our part in the kingdom of God.

If you would like to know more about Connected Hearts, please feel free to contact me at cesiapascual@gmail.com or 01702 294043 Cesia Baines

BIRTHDAYS

If you would like to be included in the birthday list, please complete this form and hand it to Louise. (Your details will be held securely on a computer. They will not be passed to any third parties.)

Birthdays

JANUARY	
1 st	Constance Brown
2 nd	Geoffrey Price
8 th	Frank Pooley
18 th	Denise Askew
19 th	Louise Williams
20 th	Alan Camppling
20 th	Nicholas Oliver
24 th	Cynthia Meager
26 th	Maureen Pottinger
28 th	Jennifer Fensom

Name:

Address:

Address:

Address:

Birthday:

Birthday:

I give permission for you to hold my details for the purpose of adding my name to the list here in the magazine and sending me a card from the church.

Signature:

FEBRUARY	
3 rd	Barbara Holmes
4 th	Caroline Dedman
10 th	Judith Hand
13 th	Jeremy Shallis
17 th	Peter Kelly
27 th	Victor Andrews
27 th	Leonard Ball
28 th	Dean Dollman

FROM THE REGISTERS

Baptisms

October 20 th	Bella Knight
December 12 th	Hollie Shadbolt

Funerals

November 12 th	Vera Price (97)
November 18 th	Geoff Bromley (87)
December 1 st	Brenda Willis (84)
December 11 th	Hilda Bostock (93)
December 15 th	Ernest Prank (101)
December 22 nd	Norman Dice (88)
December 29 th	Joyce Scott (95)
January 11 th	Clive Seddon (81)
January 20 th	Doreen Greatly (85)



Burial of Ashes

January 15 th	Brenda Willis
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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Jesus was a master storyteller. He constantly found ways to take everyday objects, customs, and practices and use them to illustrate profound spiritual truths. This parable of the talents was told for the benefit of people just like us: people who lived in uncertain and trying times, who worried about their place in the world, who wondered if what they did mattered at all. 2000 years later, we are all worried about the very same things. Jesus tells this parable to people just like us.

It is interesting that the parable uses the word "talent". In this context a talent is not something a person is good at. It is an amount of money. And it is not a small amount of money. A talent would have been about 15 years wages. So, the master in this parable is entrusting his servants with something of great value. Each servant is entrusted with a capital sum in line with his business ability, and he is expected to trade with it.

God always gives us everything we need to do what He has called us to do. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). The master, in the parable, expected his servants to do more than passively preserve what had been entrusted to them. God expects us to generate a return by using our skills and abilities toward a productive end. The servant who received five talents had everything necessary to produce five more. The servant who received two talents had everything necessary to produce two more. The servant who received one talent had everything necessary to produce one more, but out of fear, he chose to do nothing. He did not so much waste his master's money; he wasted an opportunity. As a result, he was judged wicked and lazy. I am led to wonder how often you or I have felt that wasted opportunity, as it relates to using our talents or to sharing the gospel.

Jesus seems to be saying that every child of God has been given some amount of talent or skill. Some seem to have been given more than others but, regardless of the overall amount of our talent, we all have some. It is often easier to spot the talents of other people and not our own. Each of us is good at something, whether it be baking, listening, leading, caring, singing – the list is endless, and all are of equal importance in our church community. Jesus wants us to use our talents. He is always wanting to know if we invest our blessings to serve, to love, to make a

difference in the world; if we protect God's precious creation and build each other up; if we work for equity and justice for all.

The parable makes it clear that God expects us to use the gifts and talents we have been entrusted with to grow the Kingdom of God. We are not to ignore them or just use them for ourselves. God expects a return on his investment. In 2020, in the midst of this dreadful year, with so much going on about which we find ourselves afraid, it is tempting to hunker down and bury our talents, to wait for the whole thing to pass us by. But when we use our God-given talent to be all that God intended for us to be, He will give us even more.

So, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

- What are some ways we can use our gifts and talents to serve God?
- How can we encourage each other to make the best use of our talents and skills?

Let us challenge ourselves to spend some time praying about how we can use our talent or skill in God's service and increase his investment in us!

Sandra Baines

THANK YOU FOR THE HELP YOU GIVE TO OTHERS

Christingle Collection for the Children's Society

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed. £138 was raised.

Blythswood Shoeboxes

Thank you to everyone who supported our shoebox collection for 2020. 51 boxes were filled and taken to families in need. (See also page 19.)

Donations of Food and Toiletries

Thank you for your continued generosity. You are welcome to leave items in my porch (42 Church Road). Please avoid leaving items such as bread and cheese as it may be a day or two before they can be dropped off at the Food Bank or HARP and it would be a pity if they went off. Tins, packets and toiletries are ideal but please ensure that they are well within the 'best before' date. Thank you.

Revd Louise Williams