

Penge Congregational Church

Christian Aid Week
14-20 May 2017



May 2017
Newsletter

From the Minister

A minister is called to be “in pastoral charge” of a church. In olden days, this was known as the “cure of souls”. In practice that means many things, but the nucleus of his or her responsibility is to look after the spiritual and pastoral health of the church fellowship. Looking after the church spiritually involves teaching and preaching. Obviously, I went through the Congregational Integrated Training course before being commissioned on the Roll of Ministries and ordained: I was taught, and wrote numerous essays and other assignments, on Scripture, theology, Biblical languages etc. I have begun every day for at least 20 years by reading a passage of Scripture and a reflection on it, and in praying about it. I try to keep up what in other occupations is called “professional development.” Congregationally speaking, immediately after Easter, I “should” have gone to the Congregational Conference which would have involved Bible studies, various workshops and fellowship with other ministers and leaders.

What I did instead, however, with the support of the church, was to take myself off to Ashburnham Christian Trust at Battle, Sussex for a few days of what I think of as Psalm 23 time.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.”

Because, you see, I have come to realise that a minister, if he or she is to keep on curing the souls of the fellowship, needs nourishment for his or her own soul. And the nourishment I needed wasn’t theological or scriptural, it was spiritual. And, happily, I went to exactly the right place.

Ashburnham Place is a Christian centre set in 220 acres of the most glorious Capability Brown designed gardens, lakes and woodlands. Going there in spring, at a time when there had been no rain for a month and therefore, *there was no mud*, was indeed food for the soul. I spent my mornings sitting in the Prayer Garden reading a book on Prayer Walking, and my afternoons rambling the grounds amidst beautiful woodlands, verdant lakesides and more formal gardens. On these walks, there were carpets of bluebells and of primroses to admire, heart-melting birdsong to listen to, and, at one point, a young rabbit that sat and let me walk right up to it and take several photos!

Ashburnham was set up as a Christian centre after the house, in such dreadful condition that the National Trust wouldn't take it on, was left to a theology student called John Bickersteth. He formed the Ashburnham Christian Trust after he had a vision based on Haggai 2, 9: "The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord God of hosts, and in this place I will give prosperity."

While I was there, there were two or three groups in residence following their own programmes, as well as several individuals like me on private retreats. On my last afternoon, two of these private visitors unwittingly gave me the most tremendous spiritual boost. I was walking in a wooded area surrounding one of the lakes when I heard voices raised in what was evidently praise although they were speaking, and sometimes singing, in, I think, an African language. Looking across the lake (and who couldn't have thought of the Sea of Galilee?), I could see a man with a white cloth on his head walking slightly ahead of a woman, similarly adorned. Both were praising and singing, but the man's most glorious deep voice was reverberating around the whole area. This went on for a long time, until, as I neared the house, they raised their voices together in singing "How great Thou art". I'm not ashamed to admit that I was near to tears. I later discovered that this couple had very simply arrived too early for their room to be ready, and had chosen to fill in the time, not drinking coffee in the Orangery or fretting at the delay, but in walking through beautiful landscape on a beautiful afternoon praising God for his creation.

The next day, I came home. The day after that, I was lucky enough to have a ticket for a special event at Westminster Abbey, "All Places that the Eye of Heaven Visits", in which actors from Shakespeare's Globe performed speeches and sonnets in honour of the Bard's birthday. As I was queuing up outside the Abbey, I was startled to see a London bus with its sides adorned with posters announcing, "Jesus said, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". This set the tone for the evening really: once inside the Abbey, we were invited to wander around wherever we wished only to be approached suddenly by actors in ones and twos who would quietly speak a sonnet or a speech from Shakespeare. It was slightly surreal to stand next to Sir Mark Rylance as he gave "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" from *The Tempest*! I had just had a one to one with a young lady giving the views of Rosalind, from *As You Like It*, on the nature of love, when there was music which drew everyone to the area in front of the High Altar. Suddenly all the actors were there walking round in a circle and repeatedly singing, unaccompanied, the blessing

composed by Thomas Ken in the 17th century. I was brought to tears a second time in a couple of days by the beauty and simplicity of God being praised in song. And this is what I have learned from these experiences: there is nothing more important or more essential to the Christian soul than rendering praise to our Lord and King.

Here is what I heard in Westminster Abbey:

'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
'Praise him, all creatures here below;
'Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
'Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Alleluia!
God bless us all this month and always,
Pam

14th-20th May is Christian Aid Week.

We shall be collecting house-to-house, and need volunteers to distribute envelopes on the Sunday afternoon, and then collect during the week. Some people prefer to collect alone, but we also go out in a group. **Please, if you are able, volunteer to Pam or Lynn** for this valuable service, which raised nearly £700 last year towards the work of Christian Aid.

We shall also be having a Frugal Lunch at 12.30pm on Sunday 21st May (between Morning Worship and the Church's Annual Meeting in the afternoon). We will supply a simple meal of bread and cheese or soup (we haven't decided yet), and ask everyone to donate the cost of a "normal" Sunday lunch to Christian aid.

Good Friday Walk of Witness 2017

As usual on Good Friday, after a 30 minute service at PCC, we travelled up to Beckenham to join the Walk of Witness through the town centre. By the time the walkers were augmented by those people who joined us on Beckenham Green for the open air worship, we were upwards of 400 strong. The walk through the town, largely in silence, following the cross, was a powerful witness as was the short worship service led by Fathers Leon, Stephen and Graham from St James' Eden Park and St Michael's Ravenscroft Road. We were joined in St Edmund's, on the Walk, and on the Green by a Priest and two Deacons from St John Coptic Orthodox Church, Beckenham; Deacon George, whose day job is as a consultant surgeon at Guy's, gave us a testimony concerning the Palm Sunday terrorism at two Coptic churches in Egypt. He remarked on the solidarity required to stand up to such acts not only for the minority Christian community in Egypt but for their Coptic brothers and sisters throughout the world. He expressed thanks for the support of Churches Together, and it brought home to all of us there, able to witness to our faith openly, the importance of witness and of unity in the Body of Christ. The Walk of Witness this year had special (first world) challenges in the form of the extensive road works in Beckenham Town Centre: we were thankful for the stewards, including our own Chris McShane, who quietly and competently organised the walkers and kept us all together and safe.



Organ Tuner

Since 1990 Michael Broadway has been looking after our organ. It is an honour for us that our organ has been included in a group of instruments that he has cared for, including the organs at St Paul's Cathedral, the newly rebuilt organ at the Royal Albert Hall, the chamber organ at St John's Smith Square, and the organ at St Bride's Fleet Street.

Michael has written to us to say that he is retiring, and has graciously expressed thanks "for the opportunity of being associated with your fine Lewis organ over all these years". (Several years ago, John Taylor quoted Michael as saying that he only tunes organs that he likes, so it has been to our benefit that he apparently has liked our organ!)

One of Michael's enthusiasms is the pianola, or "player-piano", and he has given recitals at St George's Beckenham, accompanying the soprano Vaninne Parker, as well as at the South Bank and the Barbican. Abroad, he has performed in Prague, Rome, and at the Venice Biennale.

We have been privileged to have Michael, and his wife Frances as his assistant, caring for our organ during these years. I hope that they will have a long and enjoyable retirement together.

Marilyn Nicholson



Churches Together in Beckenham Lent Courses 2017

Way back in April 2016, Neil Draisey, Minister of Beckenham Baptist Church and Chair of CTiB, suggested that this year the churches should hold a united Lent Course in 2017. There would be five sessions; and churches were asked to find people who would be willing to offer courses, so that there would be a variety to choose from. A lot of hard work and planning followed: by Christmas we had a venue, St John's Eden Park, which had enough rooms and facilities; we had 5 courses offered; and the next step was to produce course leaflets to be distributed round the churches.

The courses on offer were:

Singing Messiah Choruses;

The Bible through Art (led by our own Chris and Lynn);

Decisions, Decisions, a Lent Course looking at passages in the Bible where decisions were made (ie Peter's decision to deny Christ; and his subsequent reinstatement by Jesus), and how these Biblical examples might affect our own decisions making as Christians;

Franciscan Spirituality, looking at the founders of the Franciscan Orders- Francis himself, Clare and Elizabeth of Hungary-, and at the present day Third Order of Franciscans;

The Lord's Prayer, based on Book 2 of the Pilgrim Course, which looked each week at a different phrase of the Prayer, using Lectio Divina, discussion, reflections, and prayers.



For the first four weeks, the 130 people who had signed up started gathering from 7.30pm, with plenty of time for refreshments, kindly served by the folk at St John's, and, most importantly, chatting and getting to know each other. Then about 7.50, we had a short act of worship, led each week by a different person. At 8, we went into our groups, gathering back together at 9pm for closing worship. As the weeks went on, more and more people lingered behind at the end to continue in fellowship.



The fifth week was a celebration of the previous four. After the usual "soft start", which on this special occasion involved cake, we all stayed together in the church and each group presented its work. A final act of worship, then definitely not goodbyes because, as so many people said, when we go on the Good Friday Walk of Witness this year, we will know so many more people than usual, and we really will be the Body of Christ witnessing to the community.

The photos here are of two of the four canvases of paintings produced by the Bible through Art group; and of Chris presenting the art at the final session (the legs you can see belong to Lynn!)

Flower Rota 2017

May

7: Joan Sole, in memory of Ken, Janice and Victoria

14: Kathleen Sewter

21: Joyce Perry

28: Diane Pask

June:

4: Pat Clarke

11: Melanie Cogan

18: Jean/Rosemarie

25: Marilyn Nicholson

July

2: Pat Clarke

9: Johnson family, in memory of Mollie

16: Jean Sumner

23: Friendship Club

30: Melanie Cogan.





Penge Festival starts this year with the Fete on Royston Field on Saturday 3rd June.

The next day, Sunday 4th June, PCC is honoured to welcome the Penge Festival Committee and, hopefully, members of the community to our morning service at 10.30 am. This is of course Pentecost Sunday and we shall be celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit to the first Christians in Jerusalem, noting that the church was thus born in the midst of the community there, and celebrating our community in Penge.

A few days later, we host another Festival event in the form of an Organ Recital in the church on the evening of Wednesday 7th June.

We are looking forward to celebrating the Penge Festival this year at PCC, and cordially invite everyone to these two special events at the church!

News from Joan Sole

Joan writes from Wales: "it is now 29 years since we moved from Penge where we brought up our 3 daughters, 2 married at PCC by Rev. John Travell. I enclose a donation for the flowers on 7th May, in memory of my late husband, Ken, my daughter Janice and granddaughter Victoria, all known to PCC in many ways. I hear and read news of PCC and wish you all well."

Church Diary May 2017

Tuesday 2nd:

9am – 11am: Café Church.

Sunday 7th : Church Anniversary and Spring Gift Day

10.30 am: Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth. Led by Jannett Ashley and the Minister.

6.30 pm: The Lord's Supper, led by Marilyn Nicholson..

Wednesday 10th;

10.30am-noon: Friendship Club. The Vestry.

Thursday 11th:

7.30pm: Deacons' Meeting. The Vestry.

Sunday 14th:

10.30 am: Sending out the 70, led by Chris and Lynn McShane.

**3.30pm: CTiB Christian Aid Service at St Mary's Shortlands.
NO EVENING SERVICE AT PCC.**

14th-20th May is Christian Aid Week. We need volunteers to help with the house-to-house collection in our local roads.

Sunday 21st:

10.30am: The Damascus Road, led by Chris Parker and the Minister. Includes the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

12.30pm: Christian Aid Frugal lunch

2.00pm: Church Annual Meeting.

6.30pm: Chris McShane.

Sunday 28th:

10.30am: The Great Commission, led by the Minister. Includes the Sacrament of Baptism.

6.30pm: Taizé service, led by Lynn McShane.

Penge Congregational Church

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Church gathered May 1908

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Mrs Lynn McShane
Mr Douglas Rathbone
Ms Jannett Ashley

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