

*Parishes of
St. James, Greater Barlow
St. Peter and St. Paul, Old Brampton*

Rambling Rector

Issues 1-6, 2008

Issue 1

I've been with you two weeks now, and while the Old Brampton folk decide what to do about the magazine, I'll be writing this newsletter, which may even continue when the new magazine arrangements are decided.

What sort of Vicar have you got?

Someone who'll sit in his library having fine thoughts and preparing wonderful sermons that few will hear? Someone who'll be around the houses all the time, knocking on doors and generally making a nuisance of himself? Or perhaps the vicar in Dick Emery's comedy show (are you old enough to remember him?): protruding teeth, bad breath, insincere smile ... and the rest? Well, I hope there's none of the last character in me, but I hope I will inspire you in word and deed, I hope you will see me around, and I hope I will make you think a bit. For the last 30 years I've been a teacher, and there are few things I like more than helping others to explore notions of God. I encourage you to ask questions, to ask why? One of my jobs is to lead people to a vision of the Divine that lifts us up from the experience of daily life. That is why good pastoral care is important. That is why good quality church services are important: good sights, good sounds, good smells, inspiring thoughts.

We've recently had the festival of the Ascension, a kind-of Christmas-in-reverse, when Jesus' human experience—that's yours and mine—is taken to God. Humanity is made glorious: it is good to be human, to be ourselves. We don't need to be anything other than ourselves: no pretence, no acts. When we are truly ourselves, we are fulfilled, free, and best able to help others. So I hope that you'll find your new vicar always himself: no airs and graces, no pretence, honest and straightforward. As I say, I hope. Like everyone else, I can get tired and ratty and narked, but I hope not often. And please be warned: I was brought up at a time when every second on the phone cost money (do you remember the 'pips?'), so I'm not good at wasting words on the phone!

A joint benefice

The legal processes to make Old Brampton and Great Barlow a single joint benefice are in hand. I've no idea when they're likely to be complete, but I'm acting on the understanding that it won't be before too long. I'm treating the two parishes as if they were already part of a joint benefice: *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one job, one vicar*, and two churches, each with their own traditions. I've no intention of changing those traditions, partly because I know you value them, and partly (selfishly) because I value them myself. It would be good to have more joint activities as well, for example like the *Wesley Songs of Praise*, so perhaps the occasional joint meeting would be a good idea to plan services, social events and other initiatives.

I said I would make no changes for at least six months. Oh dear, I was wrong: the Old Brampton folk are already getting a psalm in the Eucharist. But relax: substantial changes will be made in consultation with you—and remember that if one church community wants something, it may have an impact on what happens at the other. In terms of services, there will be at least one Eucharist or Mass in each church every week. For the rest, it's up to us to explore.

You'll have noticed that I like a good sing, and I like singing the Collect and some or all of the Eucharistic prayer. Please join in the sung *Amens* loud and enthusiastically. Bishop Humphrey recently said to me that it's a pity that we don't sing the creed any more (do you remember Merbecke?). Well, we do at Barlow, and perhaps we should from time to time at Old Brampton as well. This has nothing to do with 'high' or 'low' church (go to the Church of Ireland for 'low' church done with lots of music and singing), but everything to do with giving our best to the Lord.

What's in a name?

One of our churches uses the term Mass and the other does not. Perhaps some explanation might be useful. I can think of at least four terms for this service: Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Eucharist, Mass. They became associated with 'high' and 'low', catholic and protestant. Whether or not this was once justified, it certainly isn't now. I've been to Roman Catholic masses that are almost exactly the same to the observer (give or take a few words) as what goes on in most C of E churches. Common Worship Order 1 (which we use at both Old Brampton and Barlow) has the same structure as the RC Mass, and the words are substantially similar. I've seen Anglican Holy Communion services celebrated with far more ceremonial than in most RC churches. The term that is most in use, I guess, is *Eucharist*. *Eu* means good (eu-phonium = good sound machine [well, that's a matter of opinion!]) and *charis* means gift, so Eucharist means good gifts, thanksgiving. It certainly is that, of course. We give of our best, ourselves, to the Lord, and we receive the Lord. A wonderful exchange, and exchange is the meaning at the root of *communion*. The term *Lord's Supper* does not to my mind incorporate this element of exchange. *Mass* comes from *missio*, the Latin root of mission, and it's a good word to reflect our duty to go out to live and serve the Lord.

So different terms, different shades of meaning. They come to some of us with prejudices built in as a result of our upbringings. Let's try to demolish these prejudices—indeed, let's try to stop prejudging altogether (very difficult, I know). The term I like best is that used by the Orthodox (e.g. Russian and Greek) churches: *Liturgy*. This comes from the Greek for public service, and I like to think that *service* is used in both senses: serving the Lord, and serving people. But then love of neighbour is love of God.

Old Brampton website

Do you folk at Old Brampton realise how very lucky you are to have such an extensive website, and someone like Paul to manage it? Paul and I are working through the website, updating and editing the text. Now that the interregnum is over, some of the text needs changing anyway, and for the rest, regular edits help stop it becoming stale. On the 'Services' page you'll notice some changes already. Details of the services at 'our sister church of St Lawrence, Great Barlow' are there. People might find it handy to know where the 8 am Eucharist is this week by a few clicks of a mouse rather than by working out what week of the month it is. If you're like me, such calendar calculations are confusing and contorting.

First impressions

You've all been most welcoming, and Susie and I thank you for that. Please feel free to call in at the Rectory to make yourselves known. I feel as if I've been in a tornado, rushing from one church to another, trying to get to grips with different ways of doing things, and a sea of faces passing before my (defective) eyes. I'm not certain yet that I would know to which church you belonged if I happened to meet you in the street. In my job as a medical school teacher, I was used to dealing with a class size of 250 or so, and I got to know most people by name, but there the context was always the same. So help, please! Rather than expecting me to know your name, how about saying to me 'Flora here, hello Stanley.' Of course, if your name isn't Flora, that might not be so good, but maybe you can think of a way to deal with this problem. Most trying of all is coping with wedding banns, rehearsals, fees. Old Brampton seems to be the wedding capital of the northern part of the diocese, and if I am to be an effective pastor, comforter (strengthener) and teacher, you don't want me to be spending all my time on wedding administration. And I do want some time to think and write. I can't be an effective pastor and teacher (two different aspects of the same thing) unless I have time for this. So maybe we need to think creatively about wedding administration.

It is good to be here: Susie and I look forward to being with you. *Oh yes, before I sign off, here's the most important thing you need to know about me: I prefer tea to coffee. And I like it strong with the milk in last!*

Love to you all

Issue 2

Demands and possibilities

By the time you read this I'll have been with you about six weeks. I'm beginning to get a grip on what people expect from me. This includes Barlow school, for which I have statutory responsibilities, three other schools, two care homes, Ashgate hospice, two churches, and—most important of all—parish life (I've already done more baptisms and weddings in the first month than I did in my entire 2 years at Wirksworth) and you yourselves. On top of this, there are clergy meetings, training meetings, deanery meetings, and other groups that meet from time to time. So now I need to work out how much of this I can deliver, bearing in mind that my prime task is the cure of souls in the parishes, which includes leading you on your spiritual journeys and the maintenance and enrichment of worship. And to fuel all this, I need time for study, reflection and relaxation.

Compared to life as a medical school teacher, what strikes me about clergy life is its relentlessness (always on call), unpredictability (the phone can go any time with demands that need action now), and the sheer variety of things I'm expected to do. There are so many bits of knowledge I need to be able to find (for example, schools, graveyards, marriage law, social services to name but a few). I simply can't manage all this myself, and that's why I am fortunate to be amongst people who are so knowledgeable, hardworking and willing to help. It is, they say, a mistake to name names for fear of offending those you leave out, but I'll take the risk and name Sally and Anne, Brian and Pete, Celia and the treasurers, and my local clergy colleagues, who must all be quite sick of the phone calls that start 'Stanley here, have you got a moment?' —although I think there are fewer of these calls now than there were five weeks ago. As more weeks go by, and as I turn my attention to other aspects of this job, other people's phones will start to ring, so watch out everyone as I start to grapple with schools, visiting and social events.

Eternal life

The thing that takes most getting used to is that in this job there are lots of projects on the go at the same time: it's not a case of finishing one job before starting another. Indeed, some jobs don't seem to finish at all, they're like a sluggish river oozing towards the sea, and it's often difficult to see if they are completed at all, as they flow in to the sea of daily life. There's a messiness and unpredictability to clergy life that seems pretty much in tune with day-to-day living for most people on the planet, and it reminds us all that, despite what anyone may tell us, or what we in the privileged, pampered and prosperous West may think, we are not in control. We simply don't know what's around the corner. It's certainly a good idea to 'live each day as if 'twere thy last' as the hymn tells us, and it's a good idea to make peace now with people who are estranged from us, so that when we come to shuffle off this mortal coil, there are no regrets or feelings of guilt left behind. I know from my funeral ministry (unlike weddings and baptisms, I did lots in Wirksworth) that most of the grief in those mourning the loss of a loved one comes from guilt, shame and regrets about unreconciled fallings-out. Acceptance of this uncertainty is a key factor in living in the moment, and living in the moment is the key to eternal life—eternal meaning outside time, not everlasting, which is a misleading translation.

Attachments, or the lack of them

Acceptance of uncertainty means not clinging to the past (very Anglican) or worrying about the future. It means getting rid of unhealthy attachments (to family, to attitudes, to possessions) that Our Lord was always keen to encourage, such attachments being, to the Buddhist mind (I think) the causes of all disease of the spirit, of the body, of humanity. This link should cause no surprise: the reverence for which, for example, HH the Dalai Lama holds Jesus' teachings is well known. Disposing of such attachments is liberation, moving into a wide, unrestricted, unlimited place, and this is a potent image of salvation for the Hebrews: the promised land. It is a potent image for me too. And when we acknowledge our powerlessness, and discard attachments, there is nothing to be proud about, so pride goes to. Think how much better the world would be without pride. We would have no shame or regrets when the pain of parting hits us.

The long finger

Trying to be on top of things all the time is an attempt to control the future. It's a disease to which I am very prone, but it is in truth doomed to failure. Maybe I should just relax, and let it wash over me: maybe we should all just relax and let it wash over us. Some things just have to be done, and we can't escape death or taxes, but others can wait. When I worked in Dublin, I had a 'long finger' file where I put stuff I didn't know what to do with (putting something on 'the long finger' is an Irish expression for a delaying tactic). Occasionally, I'd get out the long finger file and discover that what was in it had either resolved itself, or the deadline was past, and the world had not ended, so the stuff went in the bin. Fantastic!

Holiness

We need 'right judgement in all things' as the prayer for Whitsunday has it. And in the midst of the messiness of life, this is often hard to come by—or at least I find it so. For right judgement we need proper nutrition with periods of rest, relaxation and reflection. Every cell in our body needs nutrition and waste disposal, and so do our minds and intellects. Nutrition for the intellect comes from stimulation: provocation, new challenges, new experiences. Waste disposal is provided by reflection, thinking about changes we need to make—doing the things that we ought to have done but haven't, and resolving never again to do those things which we ought not to have done but did. We need to spend time being still and letting thoughts come to us. We are human beings, not human doings. These thoughts can be things of great beauty and delight, and, as eating good food brings pleasure and delight, so the right mental stimulation can lead to the most delightful thoughts and reflection. Some people call this prayer. I do. Prayer isn't just sitting or kneeling in church with your eyes shut and hands together, it's a broad term for hearkening to, listening to and heeding, something bigger than humanity, as we'll see in some sermons. And all this is why holidays are so important. A short holiday every day, a minute or two here and there. A longer holiday every now and then. Holy-days, properly taken will lead us, whether we like it or not, towards holiness, wholeness, liberation, enlightenment, salvation—all the same concept.

I hope this summer you are provoked and are able to seek out new experiences to feed your minds, and that you are able to find rest and recuperation—holy-days—to lead you on life's journey.

Issue 3

Water and beauty

You can't escape water at this time of year. Wells and well dressings are famous in Derbyshire, even in this small patch, with Cutthorpe last month and Barlow this. The Barlow festivities begin with Mass at 7 am in church on Wednesday 13 August (come on, out of bed!), then the main service at 6.30 pm same day, the festivities continuing through the weekend. When folk heard that I was coming to Barlow, they all told me about the Barlow cream teas. They're the reason I came.

It's right to use as many excuses as possible to create beauty. Well dressing brings together all ages, all skills, and mixes creativity with fun. It is delightful. It's an act of love. Is there any difference between love and beauty? When we look at something beautiful, whether as creator or observer, we are moved by it and possessed by it. It enfolds us, and we enfold it. A wonderful exchange. A holy communion. Divine. And there is no better focus for celebration than water.

Water is wonderful stuff, created when hydrogen explodes with oxygen. It sustains its own vast community of things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts, home to the smallest amoeba, the largest leviathan (aka whale) and everything between. You and I begin life in it in our mother's wombs. It makes up most of you and me. It's in and surrounds every cell of our bodies. It allows nutrients to reach our cells, and allows the removal of rubbish. Without it we shrivel up and die, dehydrated.

Images associated with water in Holy Scripture are much like its functions in the body. It sustains the Hebrews when they're wandering in the desert. Moses struck the rock and water gushed out. I've been to that place, Wadi Musa (wadi is a valley or riverbed that's dry most of the time; Musa means of Moses) near Petra. It really exists. When we live in a part of the world where rain is taken for granted and reservoirs are close by, it's easy to forget that in the middle East water is precious, not a drop to be wasted. Water cleans. We remember this in Baptism when water signifies washing away of the old, ready

for the new start. One of the hymns we sing at well dressing services speaks of 'streams of living waters'. And as water rehydrates and washes, it enables healing. For Christians, this cleansing water is Jesus the Christ showing us the way to enlightenment. It stands to reason that if water removes all the grime that we collect, we must, at the end of the process go on our way lighter—in both senses: looking brighter because less grimy, and not as heavy either, since we're not carrying so much muck. Think about it.

It's as well to remember that however badly off we think we are, with water companies charging us for what we pour down the drain, much of humanity is without access to clean water. No wonder life expectancy is short in those places. Old Brampton church has links with Malawi (and so do I since I helped establish the medical school there about 15 years ago). What can we do help them?

Church and community

The Russian word for church is *sobor*. It's also the root of the word soviet (small council, decision-making body), and if you change the v to a c you have society. Three words linked in derivation and meaning. Church is pointless unless it reaches out to society to enfold, cherish, and, like the shepherd, tend the folk on the fringes, the ill, the disadvantaged. Our churches and communities are good at this: we have school links, concerts, support groups, social networks—a union of soviets in a way—but let's always ask what we can do to contribute more. I'm not talking money here, but time. Have you thought of giving your time to the disadvantaged? There are lots of opportunities to help, especially in Chesterfield and Sheffield. If you're interested, contact me and I'll help you find something that suits you and your talents. If you're feeling in need of being tended, and don't know who to turn to, contact me if you like. I won't shove religion down your throat.

Taking time out

As I said last month, we need time for refreshment. Unlikely as it may seem to some readers of the magazine, church can provide that. Sit and enjoy the ritual, the sense of otherness, of peace. The sense of continuity with the past. This is particularly so in a reflective service such as Evensong, or Compline (from Latin meaning completion, the end of the day). Such things can be truly healing events, and to reinforce this message, I want to have regular, though not frequent, healing services. The first of these will be at Barlow at 6 pm on Sunday 31 August. Think about coming to enjoy some peace: no strings attached and you won't be made to sign up to anything. If there's something troubling you, come and let go of it. It's funny how this month's ramble started with wells and healing water, and has come back to healing. Maybe there's something important here.

Opinions please

Are these too long? Is the content interesting? Does anyone read them? Well, some folk must because I've already been told that they're, too long, too short, the print is too large, the print is too small, I use too many brackets, the colour of the paper makes it difficult read. I've even been told that last month's was the first Vicar's letter someone had read without falling asleep in the middle of it. Pretty good, huh? Keep 'em coming. I don't want just to be, in the immortal words of William Whitelaw (anyone remember him?), stirring up apathy.

Irregular verb: lighter, lighten, delight

Next month means new schools for many young folk. Remember how you felt at that age: the mixture of excitement and apprehension at being thrown into an unfamiliar situation. Remember too the sadness at leaving old friends. There's something in this of the Christian journey as we say goodbye to things that have done their job and that we don't need any more, and go on our way ... *one more step along the road I go*. To where? To enlightenment. A lighter burden. Illuminated by the light of the world, the Divine light of our Lord's teaching, the Divine light that is in us all, ready to shine to lighten the way for others. Enjoy yourself. Bring delight to yourself and others.

Issue 4

Trip to Jerusalem

It's a pub in Nottingham, at the foot of the cliff under the castle. The story is that the pub got its name in 1189 because it was founded at the time Richard I ('Lionheart') came to the throne, who was active in the crusades to claim Jerusalem for the Christians. Despite living in Nottingham from 1976 until 1988, it's not a pub I ever went to so I can't tell you anything about its facilities, its atmosphere or its beer. But I can tell you that in January this year, Susan and I went with about 30 others from Derbyshire on our own trip to Jerusalem with altogether more peaceable intentions than those of Richard and his mates. The weather was cold and sunny, the company congenial, and the food middle-Eastern—that is to say, healthy and toothsome. All the holy sites have been so built-on over the centuries that it's difficult to imagine them as they might have been. There comes a point when an alleged site and an archaeological dig becomes just another pile of rubble in a field. But we saw the steps that Jesus was dragged up for torturing. 'Terribly sad story that', as (Lord) R A Butler said of the St John Passion. The site of Calvary, the church of the Holy Sepulchre, is shared by Catholics, Coptics, Orthodox and Armenians. It's good to be reminded that English churches are just a minor part of Christianity. Sunday morning at the Anglican Cathedral was lovely: service in Arabic, with hymns, prayers and responses by them in Arabic and by us simultaneously in English: a glorious babble. Why do we so often insist on reverent silence in our churches?

We also had a few days in Galilee. It's very beautiful. Green and hilly, like round here, but on a bigger scale. Why would an itinerant speaker like Jesus draw such crowds? A prophet? A subversive? A healer—yes, that's it, surely—people would flock to a healer. We stood in the ruined synagogue in Capernaum, where the paralysed man was healed. We sang in the warm acoustic of the church over St Peter's house, and celebrated Mass by the sea of Galilee.

There were some disturbing sights. The 9-metre high concrete so-called 'peace wall' separating members of the same family, separating Palestinians from their means of earning a livelihood. The new road that Palestinians may not use, but that they can see tunnelling under their city. Unemployment. Water and power only 3 days a week in Palestinian settlements like Bethlehem, Bethany and Jericho. The prosperity of the Jewish settlements. Old Testament prophets bewail the plight of the oppressed: well, think about the Palestinians of today. I was reminded of the recent history of South Africa. In the midst of this, I met the holiest woman I have ever seen: Alice Sahar whose family runs homes for abused, tortured and abandoned children in Bethany, the town of the risen Lazarus.

I would love to take a group from these parishes on a similar trip some time in 2009 or 2010. If anyone is interested, please let me know. I would need about 20 for it to be viable.

Exploration

A trip to Jerusalem is one way to discover more about Christianity and the other faiths that arose from Abraham—Judaism and Islam. For all three faiths, Jerusalem is a holy city. Another reason to go is to exchange views with other people, and to see for ourselves that Christianity is, as I say, much bigger than just the local church, or even the English churches. These activities, discovery and exchange, are exactly what I'd like to see more of, and so starting in September there will be a series of discussions here at the Rectory. They are open to anyone, and it would be good to have some sceptics there to provoke us. The first group of discussions is entitled '*Cosmos and Christianity*' and begins on Wednesday 10 September at 7.30 (come for meat and beans beforehand, but let us know if you want feeding). You can come to as many or as few as you like. Nothing will be *demand*ed of you—if you want simply to listen, that's absolutely fine. They will not be boring lectures, but thought-provoking explorations.

It does us no harm to remember that the New Testament was written in Greek, so for us it has had to be translated. How can we know what was meant by writers who wrote in a different language with a different mind-set in a different culture? Holy Scripture needs not only to be *translated*, it also needs to be *interpreted* in the light of what we know about the world (biology, physics, chemistry), and *informed* by archaeological discoveries. Such discussions are a step along the road to letting you see that you are all theologians. All you need is courage to explore fearlessly and apply Jesus' words and church teaching to today's circumstances.

Healing

What is health? Is it realistic or reasonable to expect that we'll always feel on top form? Why should we expect the state to look after us when our own deliberate actions have brought illness upon us? These are difficult questions that society has to grapple with. They are also relevant to Christianity, and by healing I don't mean medical cure (anyway, cure of what? cure of being human? cure of being alive? we're all going to die), but salving, relieving, coming to terms with, accepting, feeling at peace, being liberated from guilt, living in the moment. This, surely, is healing—being made whole.

All Christian teaching is, or should be, about healing. Every Christian encounter should be a healing encounter. We've lost sight of this, I think, partly because many Christian encounters in the past have been finger-wagging thou-shalt-nots, and so healing was often seen as dependent on obeying man-made rules. Not so. We can all be channels of God's healing grace, freely given. The response required from us who are sick is merely to say 'yes, I accept'. As far as I can see from the Gospels, Jesus' healings were always and only at the request of the afflicted. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the bulb has to want to change.

Over 10 years ago in Dublin I witnessed my first healing service. A young man from the streets came in and knelt at the altar rail, had hands laid upon him and then sobbed for many minutes. The cynic in me muttered about psychological manipulation, but to be honest I heard none. What is all this about? If you're interested to find out more, come along to some of the occasional healing or reflective services (as advertised from time to time) as a new way of trying 'no-pressure church'. And, there's always the Eucharist—there's no better healing service than this.

Back to the grind

Yes, it's awful! I hope you had some rest and refreshment and are ready to cope once again with the daily battles with traffic, temper and taxes. You know where I am if you think I can help or just want someone to moan at.

Issue 5

Season and mists and mellow fruitfulness

Fruitfulness concerns us at this time of year, and we like it! Mists also feature, and maybe we like them less. Harvest—time is upon us, and in communities like ours, the point of harvest is pretty obvious. Some of us (I suppose I should say ‘some of you’, since I’ve never been a farmer) work very hard indeed to gather the harvest of the earth to give us our food, and food for the animals we depend on one way or another. Fruit of the earth also provide the essentials for much of the stuff we pour down our throats: tea, coffee, beer, lager, gin, whisk(e)y, ... even ‘coke’ (don’t get me going on the *Coca-Cola* industry). So it’s understandable and proper to pause to be thankful for what the God-given earth, and God-given natural processes of the cosmos, do for us.

Imagine, though, for a moment what a city dweller who has never set foot outside the city thinks of Harvest (and I know plenty in cities quite nearby). What about schoolchildren who think milk comes from bottles and are disgusted to find it comes from an animal’s breast? What about people who have no idea that there is a connexion between what they eat in McDonald’s and the stuff they tread in, or drops on them, when they go for walk in the fields, if they do? We can also use this time of year to celebrate the harvest of the hands, eyes, ears and brains. The skill of the craftsman who produces beautiful things; the creativity of the novelist, the painter, the musician; the brain-work of the scientist that improves our quality of life and helps us to know more about the world around us; the work of family providers who ‘harvest’ their families and enable them to make their way in the world. All this is Harvest as well—the harvest of the spirit and mind.

A right judgment in all things

It’s perfectly possible, unfortunately, to use the fruits of the earth and of our human minds to do things that make life *more* difficult and *less* beautiful. We can’t live without food but many of us eat too much (well, I do—just look at me). Plants give us alcohol that can enliven us—sure—but spend a night in a Casualty department and you’ll see what else it can do. The coca plant gives us chocolate and cocaine. A little bit of what you fancy certainly does you good, chocolate wise, and cocaine is a valuable drug—Ear, Nose and Throat doctors find it a useful local anaesthetic (and did you know that cocaine used to be in *Coca Cola*?), but Whatever we invent, or use, can be put to purposes helpful *and* unhelpful. Despite the piffle of political correctness, we have to make judgments all the time, accepting some things and rejecting others. There is nothing unchristian about making judgments—indeed to make right judgments in all things is demanded of us. The thing that we are warned not to do is to condemn others—it’s this that gets us into trouble. I suppose the key word is *discernment*—that’s what we need as we try to go through life causing least discomfort to all, and enabling maximum delight for all. And ‘all’ includes ourselves: it’s entirely right to have a good time—and to enable others to have a good time too. When what we want to do causes problems for others, that’s when we need unselfishness, and if people can’t use it for themselves, then society should take action. And so after this long ramble I come round to the need to use the resources of the earth ‘with right judgment’ so that we can strike the balance between allowing the earth and all that is in it to evolve (not stay the same), whilst not destroying it for our own selfish ends. Thoughtfulness is what we need.

Olympics and heroes

The Olympics have finished. Media gurus already bore us with the next ones in London that we will have to pay for. Olympic medal winners are hailed as heroes. As I go about my daily work in Barlow, Old Brampton, Cutthorpe, Holme Hall, and Linacre Woods, I see a different set of heroes. I see people who bear long-term illness. I see people who care for the long-term sick. I see people who care for family members significantly disabled since birth. I see people who look after churches, churchyards, village halls, community resources and so on—all for no material reward. I see so much generosity of spirit, and beauty of human nature, that I am ashamed at my own cynicism. I was in hospital last month with breathing difficulties, and I saw real heroes in neighbouring beds, much worse off than me, who bore truly and evidently life-threatening conditions with great dignity, calm and forbearance. All these folk are real heroes, folk who bear what has to be borne (that is the true meaning of ‘suffer’), and who’ve not had vast resources lavished on them to help them to be heroes. These real heroes light the way for others, and to these real heroes who display the divine light that is within every one of us, I say thank you.

From Emily Ball

India 2008

Thank you for supporting my trip to India; the whole experience was amazing.

The first week was spent travelling the golden triangle, Delhi, Jaipur, and Agra. In Delhi we visited many places, like the India gate and Mahatma Gandhi's house. Jaipur, the pink city, is the most beautiful city of the three, and we went up to the Amber Fort on elephants, a fantastic experience! We also visited the city's palace, the only building in the ancient city that is cream instead of pink in colour. Then, after a long journey to Agra, we went to the Taj Mahal, a breathtaking experience. It felt almost surreal standing in front of it.

Then we flew to Pune, to the Guiding World Centre, Sangam. The two weeks we spent there were brilliant. I met so many people and made lots of new friends, and we had a great time meeting the children at the children's camps, a part of the programme *You, Me, English*.

The first camp was a group of children from a school called the doorstep school. Their classroom is on a bus, and the 30 children and their 2 teachers were given a couple of days off while we played games with them, all based around simple English, to help them learn some of the language. We also took them swimming in the centre's swimming pool, which was really fun, for the children and for us. Some of them had never swum before, and the smiles on their faces were priceless. We also took the doorstep school to a place called Sanskruti, a park with traditional cultural activities like mendhi (hand decorating), pottery and dancing for us all to try. We had a traditional meal, which was very spicy, but I enjoyed it.

The second children's camp took place with a school from just down the road from the centre, the Rashmi English School, who were of a higher class, and had much better levels of English. Again they were great kids, a little more boisterous, but still keen to learn English. The highlight of their camp was again the swimming, where they had a great time splashing around with us. It was really lovely to feel that we had given all of these children a happy time to remember at Sangam.

During our stay at the centre we also took part in a varied programme of activities, like shopping for saris and bangles, a trip to Bollywood, the Pune challenge- a morning sightseeing with auto-rickshaw transport, and the highlight of our stay, the Indian afternoon. We had a go at making rangoli patterns on the floor, had our mendhi done, and learnt how to tie our saris, ready for the traditional Maharashtra dinner, served on plates made of leaves, sitting on the floor.

My time in India was such an incredible experience, even though I was glad to be coming home to some British food and a long morning in bed. I have so many super memories, I know they will stay with me forever.

Kathleen Percival writes from hospital:

'Bring it on'..... 'I'm up for it'

From time to time a new phrase will infiltrate the English Language. Everyone uses them- like the two phrases in the heading. I think that they mean, 'I'm picking up the gauntlet', and 'I like a challenge'. Let me tell you a story.

Once upon a time there was a farmer who had a herd of pedigree cattle, until, due to an outbreak of foot and mouth, the whole herd was destroyed. The farmer was devastated and very depressed. One morning, over breakfast, the farmer's wife, a resourceful woman, said, 'Why don't we plough up a field and grow some corn?'

By the next day the farmer was so convinced that it was his idea that he set about cleaning and oiling his plough. He then turned over his field leaving long brown furrows. After a soil analysis he visited the local seed merchant for advice and bought enough quality seed to plant out his field in due time.

The villagers looked on. It was the talk of the local George and Pussycat (I don't believe in dragons!). Months went by and the villagers watched with interest. First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn appeared, but the farmer didn't notice.

At harvest time the villagers decided that action was necessary. After a pint or five, they set off for the farm house and knocked loudly on the door. Eventually the farmer appeared in his nightshirt. 'What's to do then?' he asked. 'You know that field you planted?' they said. 'Oh arrh', said the farmer. 'Well', said the spokesman, 'It's ready to be harvested, when are you going to bring it in?' The farmer looked surprised. 'Grown, has it?, well I never!' (*I'm not his actual words here!*)..... 'I'm up for it..... Bring it on'.

I won't take up any more space to tell you the heavenly meaning to this earthly story, except to remind you what Jesus said. 'Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, they are ready for the harvest.' When the farmer's barn was full he sank back into his armchair with a glass of cider in his hand. 'Had a good day dear?', asked his wife. 'Wicked!', he said, 'Dead wicked!' (*If necessary ask your children the meaning of this*).

The local barn, known affectionately as St. Peter and St Paul's, Old Brampton, which can hold 220 people is currently usually only one third full!

Issue 6

It would be easy to start this piece with a rant about the economy. But I am so incandescent with anger at the greed, pride and evil that has brought us to where we are, and in which we are all complicit, that maybe it should wait until I've cooled down. All I will say is that it's the job of the church to seek out those who are hungry, homeless and ill. Point me to them, or them to me.

Instead, my theme is memory.

On 18 October, I went to a posh hotel in Nottingham to speak at the 25-year reunion of doctors I taught back in 1978-9. It was a lovely evening, and they received me with graciousness, generosity, and more affection and respect than I think I deserve. It brought back to me many memories of them, of our exploits when I was younger and less careworn, and of aspects of my own personal journey that brings me here. It was not altogether comfortable. Memory rarely is.

On All Saints (or All Hallows) Day at the beginning of the month, the church remembers those who have inspired us throughout the centuries—and continue to do so. There's a mistaken notion that saints never put a foot wrong, but the truth is otherwise: 'they wrestled hard, as we do now, with sins and doubts and fears'. St Paul says that instead of the good things he wants to do, he ends up doing the bad things he doesn't want to do. That's true of me too—of all of us I suspect. They did daft things, silly things, glorious things, inspiring things. Like us all. What kept them going was a vision of how things might be better, an image of beauty and perfection in Christ the King. I wrote last month of the heroes we see around us every day: maybe these people should be made saints. I rather think they should. It's a pity that the Church of England does not have the mechanism to make new saints. It's good to remember that the saints lived life to the full, with passion and verve, and were not the dried up, pious and 'churchy' objects that some imagine. They were bold, daring, and courageous in the cause of the common good. They took risks. They were not comfortable people to have around. They were disturbing. *Be disturbing.*

The evening before All Saints, or All Hallows, day is Hallowe'en. Like many Christian festivals it took over a day in pre-Christian culture, this one marking the end of the harvest season when evil spirits responsible for a bad harvest needed to be kept at bay. Recent influences from America seem to have driven us back to these pre-Christian influences, so it's as well to remember that the evil in the world comes not from the dead, but from the thoughts of the living—evil thoughts that grow into evil actions. Keeping in mind the saints and all who have inspired us is the beginning of the road to abolishing evil.

All Souls Day comes after All Saints Day, and it's the day when we pray and give thanks for those who have died. When we remember friends of years gone by, we are touched by a whole set of emotions. We may feel delighted at what we had. We may be saddened by what we have lost. Saying goodbye and grieving for them can be very difficult, taking years, decades even. It's no good bottling up these feelings: we need to let them out, and different people have different ways of coping. At 6 pm on All Saints Sunday (2 November) there's a church service for exactly this purpose. If you'd like to remember someone, no matter how, when or where they died, come to a holy place and surround yourself by a sacred atmosphere, sacred sounds and sacred smells. You can light a candle for them, hear prayers for them (and yourself), and join in some gentle music if you like. Or simply sit still. May you be comforted in your remembering.

Remember, remember the fifth of November recalls a plot to blow up parliament (no, I must resist the temptation ...), and while we enjoy the bonfire and fireworks, let's reject the cruelty that kills people (Guy Fawkes) for protesting at what they see as injustice. We will *never* have peace until we have established justice, and this takes me to Remembrance Sunday, with the Old Brampton service at 9.30 and the Barlow ceremony at 10.50 before Mass. I find it difficult to write coherently about this. Read *Testament of Youth*, an account by Vera Brittain of Buxton. Thinking of the pointless death and horror of the Great War brings me to tears. I spent 16 years in Ireland during most of which time the continuing British occupation of six counties of Ireland caused more trouble than it does at the moment. Today we continue to witness the stupidity of thinking that violence solves anything. And yet, and yet ... is it right to lie back and do nothing when we see people abuse others? I am always moved by the rituals that surround Remembrance Sunday, and feel rather guilty when I realise that these evoke feelings of patriotism in me. I fear that we English have nothing to be proud of in the way that we have often equated patriotism with superiority and the notion that we have a duty to show others how to behave 'englishly'. So in November my head is in a muddle.

What my head is NOT in a muddle about, though, is ritual. Any study of animal behaviour (and please remember that we are apes) shows how important ritual is. In fact, ritual is part of our genetic makeup, biological memory writ large. From the moment we get up in a morning to the moment we drift off into our zeds (zzzzzzzzzz), *ritual rules*. Think, if you can bear to, of what you do first thing in the morning in the bathroom: ritual takes over. The rituals of national events, and the rituals of remembering those who inspire us and those whom we miss, are a vital part of healthy emotional and psychological existence. Churches use ritual too: flags, processions, stylised movements, lights ... Every social group uses ritual: Scouts, Guides, classrooms, clubs. We need our rituals: they say things that words can not. What we do NOT need is to belittle the rituals that we don't use but others do. That's how wars start, and in November we are reminded that we don't need more of those.

My theme is memory. November and memory. As we get older, we recall more easily our younger days, and sometimes we retreat into them. There are perfectly understandable biological reasons for this, as the more recently evolved brain systems decay sooner than the more primal animal systems, but it can be distressing for us and those who love us. Sometimes, memory ceases altogether, and disease seems cruelly to rob people of their humanity. Pray for all those who suffer. Pray for all those who undertake research into memory. And pray for the saints of today who care for and support the afflicted.

May our loving God bless us all.

Oremus invicem – let us pray for each other.

Why not write something?

Then you could ramble with the Rector.

Contact Stanley if you're interested, or better still, just send it to him.
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