

So I decided that I ought to change a few things. I'm sure many of us will have had encounters with God in the beauty of the natural world – on a mountain, by the sea, watching the sun rise or set, in quiet moments – when God breaks through in all his awesomeness, and our doubts disappear and our faith is restored. But during lockdown in November there was no point kidding myself that there would be too many of those mountain-top moments.

'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. I went on a prayer walk around the village. No prayer agenda, no list, no set route. No phone, no music. But with 'BIG EYES, BIG EARS, little mouth'. And I tried to be open to what God was prompting through the sounds I heard and the things I noticed. As well as the obvious prompts from the village landmarks – the school, the doctors' surgery, the churches – there were other more subtle prompts from road signs, house names, children's voices, and the signs of autumnal changes all around. I went out in the morning before breakfast and was out for about half an hour. It didn't feel as though I'd bombarded God with a long list of my needs and concerns, but more that we'd walked together and, in the space and quietness, shared something. It was peaceful and uplifting.

I recognize that a prayer walk isn't possible for everybody. But there are other ways of doing something similar. Find a place – and it could be a room within your home – where you can be undisturbed and not distracted by other people, the TV or the radio. You might want to set a time to do it, make an appointment, put it on your calendar. And then try 'BIG EYES, BIG EARS, little mouth'. Look with fresh eyes at your surroundings – the photos and pictures in the room, the patterns on carpets and curtains, the light and the shadows, things taking place outside. And in the quiet, listen to the noises inside and outside. Let God focus and order your thoughts. Although you are in familiar surroundings, God will be your prompt and lead the conversation.

'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. By creating some space and some quiet time, we give God a chance to come in. By leaning into God, we give him a chance to whisper something in our ears.

Drop thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.



All Saints'
at the heart of the
community

SUNDAY 13th DECEMBER
ADVENT 3
GAUDETE SUNDAY
(Sunday of Joy)



Barwick Angel Trail

Help Barwick sparkle this Christmas!

Saturday 19th December
Trail from **4pm - 8pm**

As part of the Barwick Angel Trail,
All Saints' Church will be open between 5pm - 7pm
with a nativity scene and opportunity to take a picture with angel wings!
You can also pick up your Christmas family parcel at the end of the trail
to help you celebrate the Christmas story.

6pm Community Carol singing outside church
(weather dependent).

Please keep socially distanced.

Remember to wrap up warm and bring a torch or lantern.

Visit <https://www.barwickcofechurch.co.uk> for current details
and how to submit your Angel for the trail and download the latest map.

Happy Christmas!

Letter from the Rector

Dear all

Tomorrow is the third Sunday of Advent, when we remember John the Baptist.

John is an awkward figure in the New Testament. A wide-eyed, sharp-tongued prophet crying in the wilderness and calling all to repentance. A locust-eating, camel-hair-wearing, scruffy vagabond, dunking all and sundry in the muddy depths of the Jordan river. Looking like an Old Testament Voice of God, he nevertheless points to Jesus as the great Messiah.

It is this final attribute that sets him apart from all the others. John sees with clear eyes the truth of who Jesus is and points us in his direction instead of pointing to himself. This is a message we should likewise take on, shining the light of Christ in and through our lives. Pointing to him and not ourselves.

As we come towards the Christmas season when we would normally be out carol singing, attending Christmas parties and frantically buying up every scrap of tinsel and turkey available, we are ever more aware of the absence and difference this year. Aware of what we can't do, aware of what isn't available, aware of the darkness more than the light and joy.

In such an environment it's worth pointing away from what we normally surround ourselves with and pointing to Jesus, without whom Christmas is just –mas.

Like John the Baptist, doing so is awkward, uncomfortable and slightly out of place, and yet it brings us back to the essence of what it is all about.

The baby in a manger is a conundrum we cannot hope to solve, we simply have to live with it, and live it in our lives.

I love the opening lines to the Midnight mass liturgy, which poetically encapsulate the strangeness of Christmas' true meaning:

Welcome all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span.
Summer in winter, Day in night,
Heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great little one whose all-embracing birth
Brings earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

Please note that if you wish to attend one of the services in the three churches over the Christmas period (Midnight Mass and Christmas Day) you will need to book in advance (details in the email).

Blessings, Andy

very different. Some people are bored, some people are burnt out, some people are experiencing breakdown. And for some people it has even been a time of blessing.

Whatever our own situation, we will certainly have experienced many changes over the past nine months. One of the changes for me has been the arrival of an email in my inbox every month, from Andy or Hilary, with the benefice reflections rota. It's a bit like taking the top off Pandora's box. Sometimes when I look at my allocated reading, it's a familiar passage, and very quickly some thoughts pop into my head. Other times I read and reread the passage and I haven't a clue what I'm going to say. On first reading, today's was one of those. My normal strategy is to mull the reading over for a few days, looking for inspiration, and then take my random thoughts out on a run with me, where I can often clear my head.

In this reading the phrase that kept coming back to me was, 'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. My thoughts turned to prayer and how we listen to God. My own prayer life has changed quite a lot over the past nine months, as retirement and lockdown have given me more time. I've adopted new habits and new disciplines, and have found some of these really helpful.

But what struck me was that, despite all my good intentions and all the excellent resources I have available to me, I seem to be doing all the talking. I've got lists of prayer topics for each day, I've got different forms of service for morning and evening prayer, I've got a Spotify playlist of Christian music, and I've got the daily reflections to use. If God wanted to get a word in edgeways, he'd struggle!

'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. I was reminded of something I used to practise when I was working. I was a general manager in the health service and it was considered good management practice to regularly 'walk your patch' – in my case, to get out onto the wards and clinical departments to meet staff and patients and to understand what issues they had and if they needed any support. I used to have a sign on the wall in my office which said, 'BIG EYES, BIG EARS, little mouth'. It was a reminder to me that the purpose of my walkabouts was more about looking and listening rather than speaking. And it struck me that I needed to bring the 'BIG EYES, BIG EARS, little mouth' practice into my prayer life. I need to be more gentle with God, lean into him a bit more, to tune into him, just in case there is something he wants to whisper in my ear.

if my son came to me wanting a book and I say, 'Here you go, son, have a car'.

Friendship, faith and forgiveness are all themes in the passage, but the overarching theme that draws them all together is not an 'F', but an 'I': interconnectedness.

The friends cared for their paralysed companion because they felt that interconnectedness to him, and were willing to go the extra mile in the hope of making a difference in his life. Their faith is interconnected with the outcome of the friend's illness and it was thanks to their faith that he became well. And, though he didn't realise it, what the paralysed man really, really needed was not physical healing, but spiritual, and when the spiritual healing was effected, the physical healing followed; they were interconnected. Friendship, faith and forgiveness are all interconnected in this story of ultimate healing.

When we allow God to inhabit our lives, perhaps we will see the interconnectedness that we have with all people, from the least and most disabled to the greatest, and that our faith is not something to be seen in isolation but connected with those around us and their faith journeys. And finally, perhaps like the paralysed man, we will come to know the true inner spiritual healing that Christ can offer, and which is of greater importance than any physical healing can ever give.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we pray that you will teach us the importance of friendship, faith and forgiveness as we allow your word to speak to our hearts today. Amen.

Thursday 10 December: Reflection on Matthew 11:11-15 (Debra Wheeler)

'Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

'We are all in the same storm but we're not all in the same boat.' This saying has become associated with the Covid 19 pandemic. And I think it's really helpful because it emphasises that people's experience of the pandemic are

Christmas Eve service is at 10pm

Christmas Day Service is at 11am

Both these services will be Holy Communion

Because of the covid-19 restrictions
and the need to keep everyone safe, we only have
30 spaces in church.

The Christmas Eve service will be **ticket** only.
To make it as fair as possible, we will draw names out of a bag and inform
the lucky ones by Wednesday 16th December.

There are still seats available.

How to apply for a ticket

Either by **phone**:-

Carole 0113 281 2149 or Leslye 0113 281 2488

Or by **email**:-

Carole Cassidy<carole.cassidy39@gmail.com>

leslyeanglican@btinternet.com

Please indicate how many are in your family group/bubble.

Also indicate if you will be coming to the Christmas Day service.

For **Track and Trace** purposes, we will list names and contact details for both services, before the day.

Masks must be worn in church.

Services in All Saints'

are on Wednesdays and Sundays at 11 am.

Monday 7 December: Reflection on Luke 5:17-26 (Andy Nicholson)

A year ago I spent a whole half-term doing assemblies (or collective worship, as they're now known) in Thorner school, each week looking at one of the school values of enthusiasm, perseverance, responsibility, courage and ambition. For each collective worship I used the same Bible passage to point to ways in which people in this passage showed those different values. Our reading today is that passage of Scripture. I say this as an introduction to show just how full of meaning this passage is and how much can be taken from it if only we're willing to spend a little time unpacking its messages.

One day, while Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralysed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' – he said to the one who was paralysed – 'I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.' Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'

I'd like to unpack three themes that arise for me in this passage, each of which is more surprising than the one before: friendship, faith and forgiveness.

Firstly, friendship. We have no backstory to this situation. We don't know how the man became paralysed, whether he was paralysed from birth or by accident or illness. We don't know where he came from or who these friends

of his were; whether they were family members or not. What we do know is that, having been paralysed, he was a burden on society. He would have had no form of employment. He would be taking food out of other people's bowls simply by being alive, and this was not some rich nation which could easily afford to show generosity to beggars. Many would be living hand-to-mouth, scraping a living from earth or sea. In such a situation this group of men showed extraordinary friendship. They cared sufficiently for their friend to carry him to this miracle worker and then, when their way was blocked, to dig through the roof to let him down in front of Jesus. That shows true strength of friendship.

As Jesus says in John 15: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.'

The paralysed man's friends are showing a similar friendship here. This is quite startling friendship, but what Luke writes in the next sentence is for me even more startling. He writes: When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.'

Note, when Jesus saw the faith of his *friends*; not the paralysed man, but his friends. When Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the paralysed man 'Your sins are forgiven you.'

In our individualistic Western culture we see faith as a personal relationship between God and me; it has nothing to do with anyone else. If I want someone else to have their sins forgiven, I might tell them about Jesus and suggest they ask God to forgive their sins. There's no way that *my* faith can cause somebody else's sins to be forgiven. That's just not how it works. Yet here Jesus is forgiving the paralysed man's sins because of the faith of his friends! It completely blows out of the water what I normally understand as how faith works, and makes it a communal, corporate activity. That my faith can impact on another's eternal salvation, and their faith on mine.

That leads me on to the final 'F', forgiveness. The man is paralysed. He needs a doctor, or at least a physio, to help him get a bit more movement back into his arms and legs. Can you imagine taking someone to the hospital because they're paralysed and the chaplain taking one look at your friend and saying to them, 'Because of your friends' faith, your sins have been forgiven, now get up and drive yourself home!' It makes no sense on the surface of it. It's as