

October 2015, thoughts from Father Charles:

The Vicar's Letter

This is my first letter as 'Vicar'. And before I move on I would like to say how touched and affirmed I have felt by my welcome into this role. All of us, Helen, Isobel and Cynthia, have appreciated the warmth and support of everyone as we make a shift into a new way of living.

Quite clearly this is a new way of living. There is a transition from one way of working to another which does actually feel very different. And there's a good understanding that the warmth of the welcome also has a sense of real expectation. All this is very positive and exciting, and what makes it more so is that over the last few years there's a feeling that the worshipping community at All Saints has also shifted significantly. There's no doubt about the firm catholic foundation and tradition and it's upon this that there is a refreshed or fresh appetite for opportunity and desire to look beyond our own boundaries.

A Tale of Timothy and Titus

Rather fittingly, during my first week 'in the job', we were reading the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy as the lectionary readings for the daily Mass. This was fitting because three Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are collectively known as the 'Pastoral Epistles'. They stand apart from other Epistles in that they were addressed to individuals who had pastoral responsibilities in local churches. Essentially, they were gathered from fragments of material and are often claimed to be written by an older person, Paul, coming to the conclusion of his own ministry and who had real concerns for the future growth and development of his successors, the pastors, and churches for which he felt responsibility.

Much of the writing about these Pastoral Epistles is focused on authorship – are they Pauline or the product of another author? Arguments are developed from a wide variety of angles but this is not the focus of my attention here.

What the Pastoral Epistles say

All three Epistles appear to be directed at the 'principal elder' for these new and active churches. Their content is primarily concerned with Christian living, doctrine and leadership. As you can imagine such 'direct scriptural instruction' felt quite appropriate in week one.

However, whilst the recipients of the epistles are Timothy and Titus, much of the language is plural. Clearly the author was speaking to the whole church in Ephesus or Crete as well as the intended recipients. These Epistles are rich in insight and provide great opportunity for exploration, but I would like to focus on three themes.

Generational Faithfulness. Timothy received his learning from those who preceded him, and the author expects that he will also pass this learning on. Here we are reminded of the importance of the legacy we inherit and the responsibility we carry, to ensure that this is

handed on: *“What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well”* (2 Tim 2:2). The purpose and mission of the Church remains constant and yet still needs to be made fresh for each generation.

Relational Ability. There are numerous references within these Epistles for the need for integrity between members of the church and that they should have the ability to relate well with one another. The context that the author uses to emphasise this is the comparison of behaviours in the family household and in God’s household. The author’s clear suggestion is that the traits of respect, commitment, open communication, and care that should characterize our family relationships should also characterize our relationships with those in God’s family, the church.

Zeal for Good Work. The author reminds readers that they are saved, *“not through any act of righteousness that they may have done, but according to God’s mercy”* (Titus 3:5). He then goes on to say that Jesus gave himself to *“purify a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds”* (Titus 2:14). We are reminded that for us, as with the early church, just as we are made acceptable to God by our faith, so too is there an expectation that our faith will lead to good deeds.

On reflection, not only were the themes emerging from the lectionary readings during my first week as the vicar were very timely, but they also provide a useful foundation as we all move into the next phase of life at All Saints.

With Every Blessing

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles Sutton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sermon preached by Fr Paul Roberts, Trinity 17 2015

Mark 9:38 – end

'Lord, we came across someone casting out demons in your name and tried to stop him, because he was not following us ...'

There's an irony in this comment by the disciples. For just earlier in the same chapter of Mark, the disciples had entirely *failed* to cast out a spirit in Jesus' name from a little boy whose father had brought to the disciples. One of the besetting sins of Jesus' followers is that we get proprietorial about our relationship with God. We start to look around and judge the faith of others by an over-glamorous view of our own faith. We tend to believe that if others do not understand God, or follow God in the same way that we do, they are somehow doing it wrong. We judge others by the benchmark of **us**. In doing this, we conveniently gloss over our own failures, which might call into question the strength or quality of our faith, and focus only on the fact that others are not doing it the same way as we are. As a result, the church community can become a very judgemental place.

Sadly, the wider Church has fallen into this state itself, again and again, in its history. We develop our own esoteric orthodoxies, which correspond to the way we like things, then – as the disciples did – start to judge others who do not conform to us. Yet the gospels have a clear doctrine of non-conformity which shines through in this passage. Just because someone isn't like you, or following your way, does not mean that they are not also a follower of Jesus. Without a clear hold onto this doctrine of non-conformity, the Church splinters the Good News into ugly, sharp fragments which cut and divide the witness to God's glorious kingdom. Ironically, our human understanding of 'orthodoxy' can actually break 'catholicity', since the word 'catholic' comes from the Greek 'kata-holos' which means 'across the whole'. Catholicity does not mean general conformity. Quite the reverse: it is impossible for the Church to be 'Catholic' unless it has within it the space for non-conformity.

Another point in the gospels when the disciples tried to 'stop' people was when they tried to stop children coming to Jesus. Children were of low status in Jesus' time, yet his approach was to elevate children – who were least significant and at the edge of society – to be central icons of the Kingdom. Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of Heaven like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:15) When Jesus talks in our gospel reading of 'putting a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me', was he just talking about children? I think not: when it comes to the Kingdom and God, we are all children, we are all fragile, we are all vulnerable – no matter how 'strong' or 'organised' or 'important' we might pretend to be. Once people of Christian faith start to 'organise' ourselves, we need to beware of our power to exclude and to hurt those who have been drawn close to Jesus, yet manifest their faith in him in different ways. Too many times, the Church has caused many to stumble by guarding the way to Jesus' arms with rules, injunctions, inquisitions and brutal dogmas.

This is not to say that we should not be concerned with orthodox belief in the Church. The New Testament itself has plenty of warnings about false teachers. It is entirely appropriate for the Church to argue against any teaching which would obscure the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done. We need to confirm any new expression of faith with reference to the New Testament and with reference to the way the Christian community down the ages has

understood our faith. That is not the point of what I am saying here. What the disciples say is significant: 'we tried to stop him ... because he was not following us.' We need to distinguish between a teaching which makes it impossible for someone to encounter Jesus, God incarnate, crucified, risen and alive today – and a kind of religious club, or tribalism, which focusses less on following Jesus and more on conforming to the club rules. This is a deeply catholic instinct, not only because of the meaning of the word 'catholic', but also because we know that many of the saints of the Church have frequently been deeply non-conformist. This is so, because in their close following of Christ, the saints often chafe against the all-too-human manifestation of Christian faith in their age. It is in their non-conformity, that they are liberated to challenge the community with a fresh, direct form of Christian discipleship: whether it be St Francis, who stripped naked before the gathered townspeople of Assisi, or our present pope, Francis who scrapped plans to have lunch with the members of congress and chose to eat with the homeless of Washington instead. Is the pope a Catholic? Well some institutional forces within the Vatican might have some fairly clear opinions on that one.

But our reading is less focussed on the saints, and more on the weak, the 'little ones' who are in danger of stumbling when faced with the harshness of unyielding conformism. Too many people in our age see the Church as something deeply harsh, deeply conformist and deeply uncompromising. Understandably, they – perhaps because they are all too-aware of their own ambiguities – turn away. When that happens, the contemporary church has merely substituted a demand to follow us for the Gospel call to follow Jesus. The sole purpose of the Catholic Church is to point to Jesus and witness to his life and message. When we point to ourselves instead, we cease to follow our core vocation.

I want to end by giving two examples of how non-conformity can witness to the Church of the life of faith. The first is the rise of Pentecostalism in the early 1900s. At first sight, the rise of Pentecostal faith would be about as far away from Catholic faith as it's possible to get: born in a sub-sect of American Methodist Holiness revivalism, Pentecostalism grew steadily in the 20th Century. Yet in turn it influenced the Catholic traditions of both the Roman Church and Anglicanism, bringing about a revival not only in charismatic spirituality, but also in dogmatic theology concerning the Holy Trinity. In turn, Pentecostal influence has opened Rome up to a greater dialogue with the Orthodox churches, who differed from the West on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. All this, from a small group of Black Methodist Holiness Christians in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1901.

The second example is of an Anglican priest who died a fortnight ago. Kenneth Leech was probably the best modern example of the Anglican social catholic tradition. Yet he was remarkably unromantic about Anglo-catholic tradition. He became a much sought-after spiritual director and wrote a modern classic on the subject, called *Soul Friend*. He upset bishops, and ruined his chances of preferment (which he never thought much of anyway) by describing the bishops of the Church of England as "state nominees, charming and pleasant, but bear the marks of the Beast". After leaving parish ministry in the East End, he worked in Soho, among sex workers and homeless youth. He set up the homeless charity Centrepoin, ironically named after the tower block which was empty for years, as it proved cheaper to keep it empty than to use it for any useful purpose. As his ministry developed, it moved further and further from the Anglican parochial norm, eventually ending with him acting as a "community theologian". When he eventually retired, he moved up north and lived with a woman-friend in Manchester, eventually marrying her. Ken Leech was a borderlands priest,

working at the outer margins of the Church's life, yet making its message accessible and welcome to those who probably were most needing and ready to hear the Good News of Jesus. Despite an impeccable Staggars training, his ministry was a lived message of grace and mercy, contemporary and deeply compassionate. Above all, he was certainly, in no way, a conformist.

The most important thing to take away from this gospel incident is that we must never confuse closeness to Jesus with proximity to our way of going about things. Let us be unafraid to love our tradition, but not to love it more than our neighbour, still less our little brothers and sisters who work and pray and live 'in Jesus' name'. For otherwise, we are in danger of losing the essence of true catholicity. And if remember rightly, Jesus wasn't much of a conformist either.

General Synod 2015 to 2020

During October the elections for the new Synod will take place. Voting slips have been sent out to the electorate, and each Diocese, over a 21 day period, will elect their representatives, with results announced this month.

Both the House of Clergy and Laity have 406 places available in total. In the Diocese of Bristol we have three seats for each House. For Bristol, there are seven Clergy Candidates and eight Lay Candidates and at All Saints we are very well represented within the Diocese with Fr Charles and Brendan Biggs both standing for their respective houses. Also, there are other candidates who are well known to us, these include Ian Yemm and David Froude.

The election addresses and video statements of all candidates are available on-line and in-full; either on YouTube or the Diocesan Website. Below is an extract of the address given by Fr Charles.

Extract from Election Address of Fr Charles:

“Looking Forwards:

There are, of course, a wide range of priorities and challenges that face the Church right now and to which General Synod must address itself. The response to these must not be at the expense of everything else we do. It is about maintaining a focus on these specific subjects, to release new energy, apply fresh thought and create a sense of urgency.

It is also about opening ourselves to a better understanding of God's purpose. It is through worship, prayer, study and reflection that we are better able to act as Christians of our generation. Sometimes 'acting' means 'doing' something, but often it requires skills of influence and persuasion, or simply standing our ground and saying what's right, out-loud.

Priorities for the Next Five Years:

These are the topics I believe to be of consequence, 'now', and in saying that I recognise the complexities that lie behind them, and the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement between them:

Challenge of Limited resource. A common response, in the face of limited resourcing, of both money and people, is 'cost reduction'. Sadly I see this now, especially in my cross-Diocese SSM role, in some of the less positive Diocesan responses to falling income, limited numbers of ministers and reducing congregations.

It does not seem to me that the answer is in reducing costs. Rather this situation delivers opportunity. It is a time of reform and renewal. Limited resources are requiring us to think and act differently; to be more imaginative and creative in our responses; and to turn away from some of the inherited structure that shape and shackle the Church.

This sort of shift does not happen easily. Yet it is one, of which I have considerable experience, in creating a culture more open to consider change and in applying supporting influence, breadth of vision and balance of perspective.

Need to Reimagine Ministry. Ministry of all Christians - lay and ordained - is shaped by our understanding of mission. It's probably true to say that whilst our understanding of mission has moved from the periphery of the church to the centre, it has not been reflected in our understanding of ministry.

I believe that our emerging theology of mission must have an impact on our model of ministry. This moves us onto challenging ground, where some of the existing structures and expectations need to be reimagined. At the same time, there's a need to maintain elements of tradition that are important and right. This rethinking aligns with a positive response to the pressure of resource, and reshapes our thinking about growth and visibility.

Understand Growth and Growing. What do we mean when we talk about growth? For many it's a simple application of 'performance indicators'; size of congregation, positive change in attendance of young people, and increase in giving or revenue generation. These are important but, I believe, are only part of our understanding of growth.

Growth is also about how the Holy Spirit is living and working in our church, collectively in our communities, and in each of us, individually. In this sense it is both internal and external, and is about building our faith and the impact this has on the world around us. Whilst I believe that numbers are important and have a place in our thinking, we should be careful we do not allow them to limit the many and various ways that people encounter and respond to the Gospel.

Be a Visible Church for the Common Good. I believe that visibility is a central feature in our response to the needs of our world. This has always been the case and continues to be so. Our place is to have voice and the courage to use it, sometimes having to say things that are unpopular and that may not chime with the thinking of the present. We need to address complex subjects such as human sexuality or human migration – and have an opinion shaped by our belief.

In this sense our responsibility is, by nature, incarnational, following the pattern of Jesus' own ministry to present the Gospel and the life of the Church in today's context. For me, one exciting feature of this is that it draws the different strands of our church together. The evangelical concern with proclamation, the liberal tradition of social involvement and the catholic instinct for community, all blend, to enable the Spirit to speak through us with greater clarity."

IN THIS MONTH...OCTOBER 1979

The last section of the Vicar's letter

Unusually enough, I seem to have nearly a page to spare this month. What shall I talk about? Perhaps a word or two about the way in which we support one another by our presence in church on Sundays.

We have had some very "thin" Sundays lately as I expect you have noticed. We all need our holidays and have to be away on business or family visits on other occasions. But the number of people who would talk of All Saints' as being "their church" (especially if the local vicar called) is sufficient to make it puzzling that there should ever be an empty seat at the Parish Mass. Yet, on numbers of occasions recently, our bacon has been saved by visitors, themselves on holiday, and who have come to expect from All Saints "something extra" which they may not have at home. Our researches suggest that the number of people who come to All Saints sometimes has not declined. What has declined is the number who come frequently, or who can be depended upon to be there, rain or shine. Don't forget that, when it is a matter of deciding on the redundancy of a church, no account can be taken of people who pop in now and again when they "feel like it" (thereby putting worship among the non-priorities in their lives).

Perhaps it is no use to talk about the obligation of Sunday worship, though that remains. More helpful, possibly, to point out that we owe something to one another. An unnecessary absence lets down God and discourages others - and that, I believe, is unloving.

With prayers and blessings,

JOHN NORTON

“Anticipating Angels”

Meditation for Evening Prayer on Sunday 27 September 2015

(Title suggested by Jessica Smith)

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13.2

Angels and Archangels and all the Heavenly Host praise you, saying Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord.

On Tuesday we celebrate the Feast of St Michael and the Holy Angels. Who and what are these beings?

There are nine orders in the Heavenly hierarchy: thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim who are closest to God, then there are Dominions, Powers and Virtues. Finally there are Angels, Archangels and Principalities.

The **Archangels** are the heralds of good news. They reveal prophecies, knowledge, and understanding of God's will which they receive from the higher orders of angels and announce to the lower order. They strengthen people in faith, enlightening their mind with the light of knowledge of the holy Gospel and revealing the mysteries of devout faith.

The **Angels** are the lowest of all the orders and the closest to man. They announce the lesser mysteries and intentions of God and teach people to live virtuously and righteously before God. They are appointed to guard each of us who believe.

MICHAEL means ‘who is like God’. St Michael is an [archangel](#) in [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#), and [Islam](#). [Roman Catholics](#), the [Eastern Orthodox](#), [Anglicans](#), and [Lutherans](#) refer to him as "Saint Michael the Archangel" and also as "Saint Michael". [Orthodox Christians](#) refer to him as the "[Taxiarch](#) Archangel Michael" or simply "Archangel Michael".

Michael is mentioned three times in the [Book of Daniel](#), once as a "great prince who stands up for the children of your people". The idea that Michael was the advocate of the Jews became so prevalent that in spite of the rabbinical prohibition against appealing to angels as intermediaries between God and his people, Michael came to occupy a certain place in the [Jewish liturgy](#).

In the [New Testament](#) Michael leads God's armies against [Satan's](#) forces in the [Book of Revelation](#), where during the [war in heaven](#) he defeats Satan. In the [Epistle of Jude](#) Michael is specifically referred to as "the archangel Michael". Christian sanctuaries to Michael appeared in the 4th century, when he was first seen as a healing angel, and then over time as a protector and the leader of the army of God against the forces of evil. By the 6th century, devotions to Archangel Michael were widespread both in the [Eastern](#) and [Western Churches](#). Over time, teachings on Michael began to vary among Christian traditions.

There are seven Archangels, but the ones best known to us are:

Michael, the peacemaker

Gabriel, the Herald of Heaven, who appeared to Mary and told she was to be the mother of the Son of God

Raphael, the Healer, the Restorer.

Then there are the Fallen Angels, these are angels who have rebelled against God and been cast out of Heaven. When we speak of demons we are referring to fallen Angels, but with God's love and forgiveness they can be restored to Heaven if they repent. A previous vicar of All Saints told me to remember that demons were fallen angels and when I felt my demons were taking over to remember that God loved them too.

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word "angelos" which means messenger, and Angels were among the first part of God's creation. Saint John of Damascus tells us: "God is Himself the Maker and Creator of the angels; for He brought them out of nothing into being and created them after His own image. They are an incorporeal race, a sort of spirit or immaterial fire, even as the divine David says that ' His angels are spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.

Belief in angels can be traced back into the mists of time. The Church understands the work of angels, it is to assist and to mediate the presence of God among us and with us. Angels adore God, and as the hymn writer says, they help us to adore him and behold him face to face, they are constantly in his presence and therefore are constantly gazing on him. Think of Jacob's dream of angels going up and down the ladder into heaven. Think of the pure soul in the Dream of Gerontious who is allowed one glimpse of God and is blinded and begs to be taken a way.

Although the Church does not state that we each have a Guardian Angel, St Jerome said, 'How great the dignity of the Soul, since each one has from his birth an angel commissioned to guard him'.

Hildegard of Bingen, 11th century Abbess, Philosopher, Spiritual Director, Doctor, musician and Mystic, wrote an antiphon the The Angels,

Spirited Light! On the edge

Of the Presence of your yearning

Burns in the secret darkness,

O angels, insatiably

Into God's gaze.

Perversity could not touch your beauty;

You are essential joy.

*But your lost companion,
Angel of the crooked
Wings – he sought the summit,
Shot down the depths of God
And plummeted past Adam –
That a mud-bound spirit might soar.*

When a devout Muslim prays, he turns to his right shoulder, then his left shoulder to acknowledge his Guardian angels.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13.2

Tonight's theme is 'Anticipating Angels' and I feel that this verse from the Epistle to the Hebrews sums that up well. If we reach out to the stranger, to those in need:

“Feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner.”

My mind immediately leaps to the vast number of refugees fleeing to safety and hoping to make a new home in Europe. Maybe many of them are angels in disguise, and if we reach out to them offering them hospitality we will come nearer to seeing the face of God. The rule of Hospitality is strong among those from the Middle East and it is something that I have absorbed from my late step-father who was from a Syrian/Lebanese family, though he was born and brought up in England.

I also think of the Homeless on our streets who also need our love and our hospitality, they too may be angels and bring us closer to God. How many times do we say to people 'Thank you, you are an angel', when they have done something good for and to us? So may we welcome strangers into our midst with joy.

God our Father,

in a wonderful way you guide the work of angels and men and women.

May those who serve you constantly in heaven

keep our lives safe from all harm on earth.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

OUR VISITORS

The Visitors Book on the back pew is almost full. It has been there since March 2008. If you have never read it, now is the time to leaf through it, before it is consigned to the archives and replaced with a new one full of empty pages.

The book gives an intriguing insight into the way in which others see All Saints. It is striking – but not surprising – how many enthuse about the beauty, peacefulness and tranquillity of the church. Many welcome the fact that the doors are wide open all day.

Overseas visitors in the past seven years have come from at least 14 countries.* Many of those who drop in prefer to write a prayer rather than their address details. One is from a new bride In December 2011, asking us to pray for her new husband and herself as they set out on a new life together. In another, R. Sheen writes a prayer for his cousin and his wife who died together in a car crash. Some prayers have been illustrated with sketches of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Close scrutiny of the book reveals some interesting visitors, including the Bishop of Gibraltar and G. Singh who describes himself as a Servant of the Universe. A Canon of Durham Cathedral records his return to All Saints for the first time in 50 years. In October 2010 visitors included W.R. Hodding who tells us he was the last Head Boy of All Saints Choir School in All Saints Road when it closed in December 1962.

If there was a prize for the best handwriting it would go to John Francis Bucknall from Wells. His fountain-pen flourishes are evocative of an earlier age. During a visit in March 2011 he explains that his great-grandfather was Cedric Bucknall, an organist at All Saints Clifton for 45 years. He composed a Mass to be sung in the church.

John Francis Bucknall visited again in January the following year and wrote in the book a moving description of the beauty of the church as the light faded at sunset.

TIM STANLEY

** They include Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Budapest, Canada, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and the USA.*

HARVEST PROJECT 2015

Our Harvest Project this year will support **WATERAID** and their campaign to provide sanitation to many parts of the world.

We all take for granted having a safe, clean toilet at home, work and many public places.

WATERAID have identified one of the world's most neglected issues.

Did you know –

2.5 billion people – around 1 in 3 of the world's population do not have a safe, clean and private toilet.

Last year **WATERAID** helped 2.9million people gain access to toilets - that's 8000 people a day.

Every year around 60 million children are born into homes without access to sanitation.

More people in the world have a mobile phone than a toilet.

In many countries young girls and women are only permitted access to 'public' toilets after dark. This puts them at great risk of rape and other horrendous forms of attack.

So this Harvest let us help ease this crisis by supporting **WATERAID** to provide the millions without basic sanitation, access to the most simple but essential of necessities which we take for granted.

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE
PARISH CHURCH CRAWL**

There will be another Parish Church Crawl on **10 October** to the following churches:

St Mary's, Deerhurst and Odda's Chapel

Tewkesbury Abbey

Ripple

Malvern Priory

We will leave All Saints at around 9.15am and the Crawl will finish with Tea with Fr Kim and Chryssa Taplin in Malvern

Please bring a picnic lunch

The cost will depend on how many people sign up, we will be travelling by minibus.

Please sign notice in porch.

Further details from Liz Badman

Bishop's Letter

Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon

Talking Jesus

This month Bishop Lee reports on the latest research carried out on attitudes to Jesus and His followers.

"Do you want the good news first or the bad news?" Most of us have heard a joke that begins this way with the punchline telling us the news is uniformly bad.

So, is the data emerging from research carried out by the highly respected Barna Group (jointly commissioned by the Church of England, the Evangelical Alliance and HOPE) *more* bad news for the Church and Christianity? The answer appears to be an interesting mixture of both good *and* bad.

The focus of the research was the person of Jesus and what Christians believe and practice, rather than the Church. The main themes were: What do adults believe about Jesus? What do they think about his followers? How often do Christians speak about Jesus, and lastly, how do Christians and non-Christians feel about these kinds of conversations?

Over 2,500 English adults nationally represented by their age, region and socio-economic situation were questioned in the research, plus another sample of 1,500.

In a few headlines the good news is that the majority of adults in England self-identify as Christian; 57% in fact. Around one in 11 of the population read the Bible, attend church or pray at least once a month and were defined in this study as 'practising Christians' to distinguish them from the larger body.

When the data is divided into age groups, the percentage of those aged 18-24 (15%) and 25-34 (18%) who are practising Christians, though lower than for the 65+ age group (20%), turns out to be closer to their representation in our relatively ageing population. An interesting finding is that the lowest percentage (14%) of practising Christians was found in the 55-64 age band.

Continuing with possible encouragements, the data reveals that practising Christians are regarded in very positive ways by non-Christians, that almost three in every four practising Christians (72%) feel comfortable talking to non-Christians about Jesus, and that two-thirds (66%) report having had a conversation about Jesus with a non-Christian in the past month.

When asked about how they would describe Jesus, the words most frequently used across all English adults were spiritual (48%), loving (47%) and peaceful (46%). Practising Christians also chose loving (93%), together with wise (88%) and inspirational (88%). For those in the age groups counted as 'millennials' (18-24 and 25-34) the description of Jesus as 'leader' figured prominently.

Arguably the most remarkable finding related to the resurrection; 43% of English adults believe the resurrection of Jesus from the dead took place. However, this is where some of the bad news needs to be highlighted. When asked, "Which of the following best describes your understanding of Jesus Christ?" only 60% regarded him as a real person who actually lived. Four in every 10 adults regarded Jesus as a mythical or fictional character or were not sure whether he was real or not, with more of the millennials not viewing Jesus as a historical person. This is clearly something which needs further research and addressing but anecdotally the miracles associated with Jesus and his ministry may be one reason why adults dismiss Jesus' historicity.

If the percentage of practising Christians prepared to speak about Jesus was an encouragement, the data on impact was less so. After such a conversation, 16% reported they were sad they did not share the faith expressed, yet 42% felt glad and 59% did not want to know more about Jesus! Just what is being said, and in what manner, clearly deserves further questioning.

Holding on to the positives, 36% of practising Christians say that a conversation with a Christian helped them come to faith, and one in five non-Christians remain open to finding out more or having an experience of Jesus Christ.

The results of the research which has only recently been published has been turned into a user-friendly animation, which can be found at www.talkingjesus.org. For those who prefer the more detailed report, this can be downloaded from the same site.

As someone once said, "Facts are our friends" and this research should provide helpful learning for us to proclaim the Good News of Christ afresh in our age. There are findings which ought to encourage all of his followers and inspire us in connecting people with the God we meet in Jesus.

However, there is no room for complacency. My hope is that this research will open up conversations inside the church which in time will ensure that there are more positive conversations with those outside.

Bishop Lee

October 2015

Two remarkable Saturdays in September...

One of my greatest fears about moving to South Gloucestershire from London was being able to find friendly and welcoming Anglican Catholic worship with good music not too far from Yate. We hadn't been here long when John Davenport invited my wife Helen to play in an orchestral concert to help raise funds for the organ rebuild; here was a 'blast from the past' as I took over the conductorship of the Bracknell Choral Society from John more years ago than either of us care to remember! So it was that we started coming to All Saints' when I wasn't playing elsewhere, and my only regret about my current post at St Monica's with the inspirational Revd Canon Dr Berj Topalian (a bit of a musician himself, as most of you will know) is that we can't come to All Saints' more often.

I suppose John and I were schoolboys when the 'organ reform' movement of the 1960's was in full swing, and in recent years I have had opportunities to play and listen at St Mary's, Woodford in East London - a Grant, Degens and Bradbeer which has fared well over the years, and which is still a favourite practice instrument for Wayne Marshall when visiting his sister Melanie in Leytonstone. Both that organ and the Walker at All Saints' lacked warmth at 8' pitch, and I was fascinated to see how things would turn out at All Saints', tonally and with regard to the action.

Trying out the rebuilt organ proved that the action was now nice to play, but what the organ truly sounds like is something of a mystery at the console (a not unusual situation for tall 'proper' tracker instruments). All of which helped to make David Briggs' re-opening recital on 19th even more of an incredible musical miracle than it already was...

Out of a programme of nine items, only three were conventional organ repertoire - two movements by the Frenchman Louis Vierne, and the opening G major prelude and fugue by Bach - all played with a vivacity, imagination, and stylishness which demanded attention throughout. Of the remaining six items, four were transcriptions by David himself of fairly huge orchestral pieces by Brahms, Berlioz, Debussy and Ravel, and two were improvisations - one as soundtrack to a locally-produced silent film of 1964, and one to Vaughan Williams' hymn tune 'Sine Nomine' ('For all the Saints').

In short, everything was jaw-droppingly virtuosic (in a good way, not merely 'flashy'), superbly paced and with endlessly inventive registrations. We were not just transported to Paris in spite of David being such a Francophile; instead he allowed the unique character of this wonderful and now greatly more versatile instrument to speak with its own renewed voice in your lovely acoustic. Being a player myself I suppose my personal highlight was the 'Daphnis et Chloe' Second Orchestral Suite of Ravel. Had I not seen and heard this towering re-imagining of such complex and kaleidoscopically

colourful orchestral music on a 3-manual church organ for myself, I would simply not have believed it possible. The volume and duration of the applause after this 'tour-de-force' said it all – and then he sold CD's and chatted happily to people during the Interval! We were very greatly privileged to be able to welcome such a creative genius who is also approachable and generous with his time; I'm told he played again at Mass the following morning.

The following Saturday saw a further new venture – a festival for Bristol choirs, inspired by the long-suffering Mrs Davenport, who saw another opportunity to stand on her feet dishing-out home-made cake and tea all day! This was huge fun for singers and audience alike, and those who were able to stay for the whole event learnt a great deal about the local small-to-medium sized choral scene. The participants on this (inaugural?) occasion were the Gurt Lush Choir (Director: Sam Burns), Bristol Chamber Choir (Conductor: Gordon Pullin), Avon Harmony Chorus (Director: Alex de Bruin), Bristol Phoenix Choir (Director: Paul Walton, Accompanist: Matt Davies), and your very own All Saints' Choir (Director: John Davenport, Accompanist: Eric Tyson). I sat and wrote reviews of all the performances (apart from that of Bristol Chamber Choir, with which I sing tenor too loudly), but I won't share the details of my adjudications with you now.

This rightly non-competitive festival had no winners or losers, but of course the All Saints' Choir (which my wife and I occasionally have had the privilege to sing with, and in my case to conduct) and the Chamber Choir (Gordon and I both used to 'dep' at St Paul's Cathedral) came joint first! All the other choirs came a very close joint second, and no-one came last - except perhaps those left clearing away the tea things and tidying the church at the end.

To be more serious for a moment though, it was clear that Gurt Lush had the most members, had the youngest age-range, sang the most enterprising and varied repertoire, and wanted to rehearse the longest beforehand. I suspect also that their finances are the healthiest of any local amateur choir, and the two most immediately noticeable attributes for any prospective member are no requirement to audition, and no need to be musically literate. Food for thought for all of us indeed, especially as Gurt Lush make a real effort to diversify their repertoire far beyond that of most 'community choirs' or 'glee' groups. And of course with no sheet music they watch their conductor immaculately...

Nick Sherwood – occasional worshipper, and Old Friend of Canon John Pedlar