

January 2017

Recognizing Acts of Goodness: some thoughts from Father Charles

New Year's Honours

It is a great thing, that amongst the well-known names on the Honours List, there are so many individuals of whom we have never heard. These are ordinary people who are recognised for doing extraordinary things. This is much as described by HM The Queen in her Christmas message.

From the thirteen year old who has walked and cycled around Britain to collect £250,000 for cancer research; to the ninety-nine year old who has, and continues, to serve the community though volunteering for much of her life.

Or in deed the Jewish escapee from Budapest in 1944, who avoided Auschwitz and came to Britain as a child, where she founded the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust; and the Red Cross worker who provided primary care at the Shoreham air disaster in 2015.

One of these recipients, Dr Michael Jacobs, honoured for his work in fighting the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, pointed out an essential truth associated with the awards. He said that whilst the awards are designed to recognise individuals, the truth is that in nearly every case individuals work within teams who share the same purpose and dedication.

The Science of Goodness

I agree that it might be stretching things a bit far to use the word 'science', but there is a good deal of research relating to kindness or goodness. Recognizing that kindness might be a feature that gives humankind a survival advantage, researchers have attempted to discover the 'rewards' which benefit and encourage us to continue to engage in kindness or goodness.

Interestingly, watching an act of kindness increases our levels of oxytocin which lowers blood pressure and is considered to lift optimism. Doing an act of kindness seems to produce endorphins that benefit the individual (this is sometimes referred to as the 'helpers high'). On a long-term basis it would seem those who frequently engage in kind acts have significantly lower levels of cortisol, are less anxious and live longer more satisfied lives.

Others benefit too; observing an act of kindness has a domino effect, those who watch are more likely to engage in an act of kindness themselves. Also, observing an act of kindness seems to have a contagious aspect that elicits happiness.

Whatever the 'science', there is little doubt that engaging in kind or good acts provides a positive benefit to each one of us and to those who are around us, not simply the target of the act.

Accounts and Observations

Over the last year, whilst I have been the Vicar at All Saints, I have heard many accounts of self-less actions from which people have benefited. These accounts are not just from those who have seen things take place but also from the individuals who were the recipients. I have also observed actions and listened to kind words in so many different contexts.

It also pleases me when visitors to our church talk about the positive welcome and feeling of inclusion they get when they join us for worship. I should add that people also say similar things about All Saints when they come in and the place is empty. Even when there is no one inside the building people describe the atmosphere as having something special – perhaps the prayerfulness or the sense of the sacred – which seems to make our church welcoming and comforting.

Clearly, all is not goodness and kindness all the time! Yet these are features of our worshipping community, of our prayer and worship, and of the wide variety of activities in which we engage in our different contexts – work, family, volunteering and so on.

The Interests of Others

Paul, when writing to the Christian community in Philippi from his prison in Rome, directs his readers saying “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others”. This verse comes from a part of his letter when he is describing how our ‘instruction’ in unity, humility, warmth and sympathy comes from trying to put into our own minds the mind of Christ Jesus. Paul says “Make your own mind the mind of Christ Jesus.”

To attempt making our own minds that of Christ Jesus, in completeness, is a challenge to which we are unequal. But what we can do, and what will benefit each one of us, is to become more aware of the acts of goodness carried out by those around us and engage more in these acts ourselves.

In the belief that such acts are contagious, we will be making some small headway against the overwhelming pressure of news, local and world, which over the last year has often seemed devoid of kindness.

With every blessing for 2017; may it be a year littered with act of goodness to the benefit of ourselves, others and all of creation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Socks Galore!

Many, many thanks for your generous donation of socks for the Julian Trust. So far we have collected more than 100 pairs and they're still coming in.

We have a constant need for socks and men's underwear both new and second-hand. These items are needed all year round.

Please leave any such donations in the Flower Room with my name on them.

If anyone would like to have further information about the Julian Trust please do not hesitate to contact me, either at church or on the phone (01275 814002).

Many thanks again,

Vera Saunders

IN THIS MONTH.... JANUARY 1931

An excerpt from the Vicar's (Canon Gillson's) notes

There is at last good news of the prospect of a Retreat House in the neighbourhood of Bristol. Ever since the year of the National Mission we have been hoping for one. In the summer of that year a whole series of Retreats were held in Clifton Hill House, they were well attended and all who took part, both men and women, begged that a permanent Retreat House should be established so that the annual Retreat might be part of their regular life's programme. No opportunity presented itself, and I fear that many of those retreatants have never been to a retreat since. Now that we are to have one, I hope they will remember their happy experiences and good resolves and avail themselves of opportunities that will be given.

The House in question, as some of you know, is the Abbey House, Glastonbury. It stands off the main road, and so far away from traffic, to the east of the ruins and looking down on them from rising ground. It is a large house, able to accommodate twenty retreatants at least, I hope. There are beautiful gardens belonging, and country walks at the back. Its position in relation to the Abbey and its associations is to many a peculiar attraction. A Committee has been meeting during the past year and decided to take the grave responsibility of accepting the offer of the Trustees to take the house for a term of years at the nominal rent of £1a year, the Committee being responsible for repairs and rates, etc. Sufficient money has been subscribed to pay for the necessary alterations and to provide a considerable sum for running expenses for the first five years. I confess that personally I hesitated at first in supporting the scheme, on two grounds. First, it cannot be denied that the house is difficult to reach from Bristol. The train service is so bad as to be almost

useless; the road service takes some time and adds to the cost. My second difficulty is much more serious: Are there any signs that Bristol Church people as a whole have any desire to go into Retreat? It is said that the supply of such a house will go far to create the demand. That most of us need the special help of Retreat if we are to make progress in Christian living there can be no doubt. But we don't always realise our greatest needs. For this reason above all others we need to pray that this venture may be blessed and guided by the Holy Spirit, that many may be moved to use the Retreats and to find in them a new means of growing in the knowledge and love of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

PARISH RETREAT 2017

This is a date for your diaries.

Our next Parish Retreat will take place from 5pm on Friday 3 February to 4pm on Sunday 5th February, at Abbey House, Glastonbury.

We are very fortunate that our Retreat Conductor will be The Rt Revd John Armes, Bishop of Edinburgh.

The cost will be £144 each, plus a donation towards a book token for Bishop John.

Please sign the notice in the porch.

Further details from:

Liz Badman