



Notes from the Riverbank

The newsletter for St Thomas of Canterbury Church in Goring,
St Mary's Church in Streatley and St Andrew's Church in South Stoke

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● Welcome to the twenty-ninth edition of "Notes from the Riverbank."

All contributions should be sent to Toria, the editor, by the 17th of each month at the usual email address webcontent.thomandmary@gmail.com. The on-line versions of the calendars are maintained by Glenn Cooke using the same email address. Bookings for the church or Canterbury Room should be made by contacting the UB Parish Secretary Jenny Hall at jandjh2@btinternet.com. We aim to produce the on-line and printed versions of each issue by the 25th of each month.



Pastoral Letter: God is not dead

Atheism in Britain used to be soft Atheism. Live and let live. However I came across a recent newspaper article which reckoned that about 30 per cent of adults agreed with Richard Dawkins (who wrote *The God Delusion*) that atheists should be much firmer in expressing their beliefs, a harder sort of Atheism. How accurate are these figures we cannot tell but there is a case to be answered. Stephen Hawkins has said: *It is difficult to discuss the beginning of the Universe without mentioning the concept of God. My work on the origin of the Universe is on the borderline between science and religion, but I try to stay on the scientific side of the border.* An even stronger affirmation of the Creator and His interaction with the Universe comes from Schroedinger, the Quantum Physicist and Nobel Prize Winner: *I am astonished that the scientific view of the real world around me is very deficient. It gives us a lot of factual information, puts all of our experiences in a magnificently consistent order but is ghostly silent about all that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us. It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet, physical pain and physical delight, it knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity. Science sometimes pretends to answer questions in these domains but the answers are often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously.* However we need more than good apologetics.

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church although the Western church is portrayed as being in decline. A television programme in Holy Week sought to probe the health of the Church in the UK. Yes there is decline in many areas, but also life and growth in many others. St George's in Barnsley, whose Vicar has been there for twenty-seven years, has seen sixty adult baptisms in the last year and employs a Muslim convert as an outreach worker. Hardly middle England! There is a massive explosion in African style churches who find white British people among their congregations. Hillsong draws eight thousand each Sunday. Many churches are using the Alpha Course written and supported by Holy Trinity Brompton which has sent members of its clergy and laity to support and transform dying congregations.

One such, in Brighton led by Archie Coates; from a handful, now, fifteen hundred gather to worship on a Sunday. Nevertheless there is nothing to make us complacent and much to do.

Spiritual life, the life giving power of the Holy Spirit is the basic necessity for life and growth. God approaches in offering the gift and life of the Holy Spirit to all who will open their hearts and lives to Him. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to bring the very life and indwelling presence of Jesus to us in our need. The danger of decline is to have more and more Commissions to arrest it, rather like shuffling the chairs on the Titanic, whilst failing to emphasize the need for personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Writing in the Times a few months ago, Isabel Hardman, Assistant Editor of the Spectator comments that: "Showing that it believes in something will secure the future of the church. If Archbishop Welby manages to impress this upon his clergy, it will be a far greater victory than over any shark."



The Revd. Canon Peter Downham

From the Vicarage...

● **Intercessors Training – Monday 6th June**

The way in which we lead prayers in Church is so very important because it helps to form the way that others pray. Consequently, I will hold a brief course for everyone who currently leads prayers and for anyone would like to explore the possibility of doing so in Goring, Streatley or South Stoke. The course will take place on Monday 6th June from 8pm to 10pm in Goring Church and the Canterbury Room.

What will we cover? During the evening we will explore such things as the difference between personal and corporate prayers, prepared and extempore prayers, what sort of language should I use? For what subjects should I pray? How long should my prayers last? What resources are available to help me? We will also spend a few minutes considering how, after spending time preparing prayers, we can make sure that everyone hears them.

Interested? It would be helpful if you would let Carolyn know that you intend to come (there is no charge!), but if you forget, don't let that stop you coming.

● **Archdeacon's visit – Sunday 19th June**

We are delighted that our Archdeacon, the Reverend Canon Judy French, will preach at the main services in Goring and South Stoke on Sunday 19th June. As she preached at Streatley last time she visited the benefice, we felt that this year she should visit South Stoke.

Do come and welcome Judy to our churches on 19th June!

● **Two summer Sermon series**

If you were asked to tell someone what you knew of Jesus, I wonder where you would begin? With his birth? Or his death and resurrection? As the way, the truth and the life? As the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy? As the King?

The first series will explore "who is Jesus?" from a number of different angles. We will look at how six different New Testament books describe Jesus, beginning with Hebrews and

concluding with the Revelation. It is based on the first part of a book by Bishop NT Wright called "Following Jesus." You may like to buy the book so you may explore at your own pace after an introductory sermon. The series will be launched at the 10.30am United Benefice Service on Sunday 29th May in Streatley.

The second series (being launched on Sunday 14th August) will explore the radical decision that we make when we choose to become a disciple of Jesus. Based on "Discipleship" by David Watson, we will explore lots of aspects of living as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is quite a challenge to permit God to lead the way that we behave, speak and think. Themes include "Being called into God's family," "Community" and "Sharing the Gospel." We will use the following two books to guide us through the series: "Following Jesus" by Tom Wright, and "Discipleship" by David Watson. Both books will be on sale in the Benefice churches from 29th May at reduced prices of £7.50 and £9.00 respectively.

● Churchwardens

I am so pleased that six wonderful people have agreed and been elected to serve as your Churchwardens for the coming year:

Goring	Brenda Kerr Muir	David Beddall
Streatley	Cynthia Hutt	John Rogers
South Stoke	Mike Codner	Harry Hogg

I am sure you will wish to join me in thanking Sally Stroud (formerly Horton) for her devotion to the church community in South Stoke ever since she came to the village and in particular for her work as Churchwarden for the last 13 years. It is a delight to know that Sally continues to be utterly committed to serving her Lord in the village, alongside dear Alan, in the years ahead.

Please pray especially for our new Churchwardens, Harry Hogg and Cynthia Hutt as they begin a period of service. Cynthia and Harry will be sworn in, alongside our other Churchwardens, at a special service at St. Mary's, Henley-on-Thames on Wednesday 8th June at 7.30pm. The service is open to everyone and no tickets are required so do please come and support the Churchwardens of your parish. There's sometimes a bit of celebrating afterwards!

● The Ordination Service: a date for your diary

Do come to support our new Assistant Curate, Steve Johnson as he is ordained on Saturday 2nd July at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford at 10am. Everyone is welcome to attend the service and you don't need a ticket. After the service, Steve and his family will spend Saturday with their family and visiting friends.

We will welcome them to the benefice on Sunday 3rd July. Steve will be at the 8am Communion, at Family Services in Goring and South Stoke and then the whole benefice will have the opportunity to share in a welcome lunch in the Morrell Rooms, Streatley at about 12.30pm.

It is likely that how we welcome them will be a significant determining factor in the outcome of Steve's ministry here. I have experienced so much warmth and love since arriving two years ago, that I feel sure that you will pray for Steve and his family daily, as he prepares to start a new ministry in the Benefice and as Lyndsay, Esther and Anwen begin a new stage of their lives belonging to this Christian community.



Paul Boughton, the Vicar



Thanksgiving service and birthday tea to celebrate the 90th birthday of HM The Queen

Everyone is welcome to join us for the service followed by a birthday tea at 5pm Sunday 12th June at St Thomas' Church. We will need some people to make sandwiches and cakes, and also to serve tea. If you are able to help, please contact me.

There will be a combined choir for the occasion; we will be singing Handel's *Zadok the Priest*, SS Wesley's *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace*, Parry's *I was glad*, Vaughan Williams' *O taste and see*, and Stanford's *Coronation Gloria*. If you would like to join the extended choir for this service, please contact me. There will be a workshop at 1.45pm on the afternoon of 12th June and additional optional practices from 7pm to 7.45pm at St Thomas' on Friday 27th May, Friday 3rd June and Friday 10th June.



Elizabeth Parkinson; 872020 or parkinsonfamily1@btinternet.com



"Happy and Glorious" flower displays

To coincide with the Queen's (official) birthday there will also be flower displays from Saturday 11th June until Friday 17th June.



Walking with God in Cambodia

I have written elsewhere about the amazing time Terry and I had in Cambodia, but wanted to share here the spiritual impact the experience had. Although common-sense would say that this trip should never have happened (negotiations on house sale/purchase, Terry's back problems...) I never had any doubt that leading the teachers' team on this new venture was what God had placed in front of me and I could trust him totally about any consequences. Nothing happened on the house deal and Terry coped very well!



I cannot recount all the incredible answers to prayer and experiences of God's goodness and faithfulness that were evident in this trip. When totally out of our comfort zone for every detail of daily living, faith becomes very real. In a completely strange environment yet needing to adapt rapidly, being surrounded by very few English speaking people and by a language not just spoken but written in a strange script, and getting used to temperatures of nearly 40 C, we could no longer rely on all the props we take for granted here for daily living. As for teaching, how do you get even a story over to children who cannot understand a word you are saying? And will there be facilities for showing a PowerPoint on the training day? What about setting up the rooms? Over and over again, we found that God is in the detail. He who created the majestic mountains also cares about the tiny detail of the sparrow and

therefore of us. Truly, nothing is too great for his power, nothing too small for his love.

That is why I have titled this *Walking with God in Cambodia*. 24/7 walking in dependence on our Heavenly Father meant a far greater sense of intimacy than back here with all the clutter of daily life and easy dependence on the familiar. My prayer is that daily this waiting on God should continue into a walking with God in Goring and wherever he leads. 'The secret of the worker's life is that he keeps in tune with God all the time.' (Oswald Chambers).

I was not prepared for the sense of darkness and despair that I felt when visiting the Killing Fields of Phnom Penh. How could mankind sink to such levels of utter brutality against their fellow men? Yet they did, and have done over the centuries and across the world, and sadly still do. But equal to that sense of darkness and despair was the wonder that God should step down into this dark, dark world. Being Holy Week that fact was even more poignant, especially when reading again the events of the first Good Friday. Jesus himself, God's son, experienced that utter brutality at the hands of fellow men – and did that in order to take on himself the punishment you and I deserve for our sin. 'He became obedient unto death – even death on a cross.' (Philippians 2:8). 'The Son of God... loved me and gave Himself for me.' (Galatians 2.20) How easily we take that amazing fact for granted and fail to respond in love, obedience and trust. Yet, if we do respond, what a privilege and joy to walk with God, not just in Cambodia, but wherever we are placed in the world he loves so much and died to save.



Thank you so much for your support over this time and in the lead up to it. For all you gave, for your encouragement and prayer. It was a remarkable time and we praise God for it.

 Sue Hookway



Prepare to vote in the EU Referendum

In the next few weeks, and I think almost everyone is agreed on this, we will as a country make a hugely significant decision – whether to stay in the European Union, or to withdraw from it.

And before you leap for your pens or keyboards, no I am not going to be so foolish as to try to tell you how to vote. What I do hope is that everyone who is allowed to do so will exercise their right to have a say in the Referendum on 23rd June. Christians will be reaching different conclusions as they weigh up the various issues involved, but it would be very sad if we simply park the question in the "too difficult" pile and miss our chance to have our say.

But what are the issues that should be guiding our decision making? Financial elements are clearly very important and the debates will continue to rage about whether the economy would benefit or suffer if we withdrew. National sovereignty remains another big question and how we balance "making our own laws" with influencing those of a much larger whole. Fear has dominated some of the output from both sides, not least in the debates over mass migration, and it is a pity that this issue has risen too acutely just at this stage of our decision making.

And so the list goes on. I have included a number of resources that you may want to consult further at the end of this article, but the key thing is to make up your own mind – and to vote. It would be tragic if a low turn-out on 23rd June meant that the decision, whichever way it goes, was made by a minority of the population of this country.

● Referendum resources: Introductions and overviews

The main Church of England page on the EU referendum with links to resources and campaign groups is at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/international-affairs/eu-referendum.aspx>

Reimagining Europe is a blog launched by the Church of England and Church of Scotland ahead of the Referendum. It contains blogposts on themes of relevance (sovereignty; unity and diversity; subsidiarity, solidarity and responsibility, etc) as well as "postcards" offering views from different places and can be found at <http://www.reimaginingeurope.co.uk/>

EU Focus is a joint project of Christians in Politics and Reimagining Europe:

<http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/eufocus/>

This site contains an EU quiz, some basic resources for individuals (guide to the EU, what is an MEP?, and so on) and basic resources for churches (Bible study for small groups, prayer, suggestions for holding hustings), as well as links to other organisations and groups.

There is a helpful **interview with Archbishop Justin Welby** in Politics Home:

<http://bit.ly/1Nz4Qeg>

in which he calls for "a visionary debate about what our country looks like" from both sides.

This call is quite similar to the call in *Who is My Neighbour*, the pastoral letter from the Church of England's House of Bishops before the May 2015 General Election. The letter remains relevant in the context of membership of the EU: <http://tinyurl.com/zgmp5ep>

Similar points are made by the **Joint Public Issues Team**: <http://bit.ly/1VzAkcD> speaking for the Methodist, URC and Baptist churches, as well as the Church of Scotland. They will be publishing more detailed materials for hustings by the end of April.

The Church's thinking on the EU and wider European affairs is framed by the **Synodical Paper – The Church of England and Europe**. For more on this see

<http://tinyurl.com/zrtvn4p>

● Referendum resources: Some Christian groups with particular standpoints

Christians For Britain <http://www.christiansforbritain.org/>

Christians for Europe <https://christiansforeurope.org/>

The Europe Experience <http://www.theeuropeexperience.eu/site/en/home>

Europeinfos <http://www.europe-infos.eu/europeinfos/en/home>

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The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher