

Life, Light and Love...

June 2014

I am in a home group (and I do hope that you are as it really helps in a large church to belong to a small group) and on Wednesday afternoon my group met, then on Thursday morning I read this at staff prayers. (I shouldn't have... wrong page... but perhaps it was God's plan that I did.)

*"I, the LORD... will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
"I am the LORD; that is my name! Isaiah 42:6-8*

We had started on Wednesday looking at the death of Lazarus and generally talking about death and our beliefs about eternal life – about the difference between a Christian funeral with hope of eternity and a secular or humanist one without. We talked about our friends and discussed how they explained death to their children when they had no faith and it led to a discussion about whether we should really challenge their beliefs and how to do it in a way that didn't cause offence – and so I have been thinking about this since.

Should we challenge a devout Mormon... Buddhist... Jehovah's Witness... Muslim... humanist? If they are our friends then we worry about keeping the friendship and not driving them away.

And yet it is with our friends that we are most likely to see lives changed and a response made as we explain our faith. They are, after all, our friends. We have already shared interests and shown interest in each other's faith. They are our friends and so surely we want the best for them - and the best, the very best, is to know the love of God and have a sure and certain hope of eternal life with Jesus who is love and light.

So, yes, we should always give them the opportunity to respond to Christ's love and we can do this in two ways. As my group are always keen to claim, we can do this through being like Christ to them, always kind and loving, hospitable and generous. But that is not usually enough; it is needed, but not alone. We also need words: *'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect'* 1 Peter 3:15. At this point people tend to panic – but it's simple. Start where they are, as Paul did in Athens, and so if talking to a Muslim they already know about the virgin birth and that Jesus died on the cross; so telling them about forgiveness and eternal life that we just have to accept, not earn, can be enough.

Or ask what they'd like to know. Again, a Muslim may worry that we worship three Gods because we refer to God, the Father; God, the Son and God, the Holy Spirit. Reassurance that we believe in one God who loves us unconditionally may be enough to attract them to Christ.

No other faith/belief is based on the truth of unconditional love and forgiveness – all the others have to earn their way to 'Nirvana'. No other God has overcome death to show us the way to eternal life. No other God has died to set the people free. No other God gives sight to the blind. No other God is described as light and love and life.

What have I left out? The essential: prayer! At the end of the day it is only your responsibility to pray for the words and then use them. God then works in them to bring them to faith and if they don't respond to God I'm sure you'll be sorry as you will want them to be in heaven with you for eternity.

My prayer is that each of us is given an opportunity to share our faith each day; that we are given the eyes to see that opportunity, the courage to use the opportunity, the words we may need to make the most of the opportunity and that God will give us that amazing privilege of being part of his work here on earth to grow his kingdom. Then, at the last, I pray that we will all be surrounded by our family and friends in God's light and love in his new heaven and earth for evermore – alleluia! How about praying that prayer for yourself each day?

Sheila Perkins

| June 2014 – forthcoming events | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri | Sat | Sun |
| 30 | Key to abbreviations : HC = Holy Communion WLTDO=Who let the Dads out SOW = Service of the word TES = The Evening Service BB = Bumps & Babes AAS = All Age Service HotS = Healing on the Street LTF= Ladies Thursday F'ship MITM = Men in the morning YE = Younger Elements OE = Older Elements HGL = Home Group Leaders CC = Community Centre YB = Youth Band Bpt = Baptism | | | | | 1 |
| 4.45pm Kic Cell 8pm HGL (CC) | | | | | | 7.45am HC 10.30am HC 3.30pm Baptism tea 6.30pm TES |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 4.45pm Kic cell | 9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE | 10am BB 11am HC | 9.45am Toddlers 10am LTF 10am MITM 3.30 Blend | 9am Re:Fresh Steps open evening | 10am HotS Steps open day | 7.45am HC 10.30 SOW 6.30pm No evening service |
| Church weekend away | | | | | | |
| 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 4.45pm Kic cell | 9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE | 10am BB 11am HC | 9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3.30pm Blend | 9am Re:Fresh | 10am HotS 11am Church Fete 7pm The Mix | 7.45am HC 10.30am Bpt 6.30pm TES |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 4.45pm Kic cell | 9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE | 10am BB 11am HC | 9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3.30pm Blend | 9am Re:Fresh | 9.45am WLTDO 10am HotS 6.30pm YB | 7.45am HC 10.30am SOW 6.30pm HC |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| 4.45pm Kic cell | 9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE | 10am BB 11am HC | 9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3.30pm Blend | 9am Re:Fresh | 10am HotS 7pm The Mix | 7.45am HC 10.30am SOW 6.30pm United service |

St Eanswythe's Mission

A short history of the mission hall

Who was St Eanswythe? Well, she was the granddaughter of Ethlebert King of Kent, who was converted to Christianity and baptized by none other than St Augustine in 597 AD.

Eanswythe herself was beloved for her tenderness and charity to the poor and is said to have set up a nunnery in Folkstone, where there is a beautiful edifice to the glory of God and His blessed Saints Mary and Eanswythe. The mission in Priory Road is dedicated to her memory.

So how did the chapel get there? Well, it is the second chapel of this name on the site, now built within a block of flats, three of which are owned by the trustees.

It was Miss Mary Caroline Gorham MBE who founded the mission, the daughter of William Gorham, a well known solicitor in Tonbridge. Miss Gorham, a committed Christian and a member of St Stephens, was a member of the British Woman Temperance Society and a friend and associate of Lady Somerset, working as organizing secretary of Duxhurst Home's for inebriate women based in Reigate.

At the same time, here in Tonbridge, St Stephen's was struggling to find space for a growing Bible class, which by the late 1880s was being held in two sessions in the vicarage kitchen.

Funds were raised for a permanent home, thus St Eanswythe's Mission Hall was built in 1890, a large corrugated iron building capable of holding two hundred, although Health and Safety would have something to say about that today.

From these small beginnings grew a vibrant Sunday school, Bible classes for men and women and lantern slide shows, organized by Miss Gorham herself.

As Miss Gorham aged, a missionary was appointed in 1922;

he was the first of five, the last being David Smith, a Reader who retired in October 2013 after twenty years' service.

Numbers had declined drastically by the time David came, the Sunday school had been closed and a weekly evening service was all that was left.

In 1995 David introduced a regular Sunday morning service at 11am and the evening service was discontinued except on special occasions.

The old 'Tin Tabernacle' was well passed its sell by date and was demolished about eleven years ago; a new chapel was built as well as several flats.

Since David retired our links with St Stephen's have been greatly increased and they now supply the clergy and readers to take the services.

We would welcome more worshipers, those who prefer a more traditional Anglican morning service based on Common Worship, where we sing those hymns you used to love. We also have a Holy Communion Service once a month.

We look on that as not in any way taking from the congregation of St Stephen's but adding another string to their bow, encouraging those new to Tonbridge who might prefer more traditional services, whilst still being a part of St Stephen's.

We hope that soon we will be fully integrated and become a part of St Stephen's and what it has to offer.

Joe Clark
Licensed lay minister,
St Stephen's

Picture by Noah Ramsden



New churches are starting up

Growth across the south east

The Census figures for 2011 might tell the story of a church in decline as fewer people in the country are happy to declare themselves as Christian (59.3 per cent, as opposed to 71.7 per cent ten years earlier). However, those on the inside of the Church of England have reason to feel differently. If you read the piece by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the *Radio Times* in April you might recall he talked of one friend in Reading with a growing church filled with young people who have no church background. Another friend had been forced to plant two new churches because his own was 'bursting at the seams'.

Up and down the country there are stories of new churches opening, often with worship styles rather different to the traditional Common Worship which some still favour. Between London and Oxford a barn-based church named after Hugh Latimer, the Protestant martyr, has grown to such proportions they've had to order a big top to accommodate their growing numbers. Latimer Minster, run

by Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing, focuses on reaching out to the communities around whilst using a missionary model that was more common before the parish system developed in Britain. Key components of their success are not dissimilar to those seen by Alpha participants: prayer, food and community.

Over in Essex the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Right Rev Stephen Cottrell, has incorporated similar styles of churches across the diocese and seen substantial results; he claims that on Sunday mornings about 2,000 people are to be found in one of these new types of church. For every two churchgoers who are starting up the new churches, eight additional members may be found. It seems some of those eight are lapsed members but often about five are completely new to the church.

The 'fresh expressions' trend encompasses a range of worship styles, including messy church and café church. According to Dr George Lings of the Church Army, the growth created by these fresh expression churches would seem to be offsetting the decline in the Anglican's church's weekly attendance seen from 2006 to 2011.

Joanne Ramsden

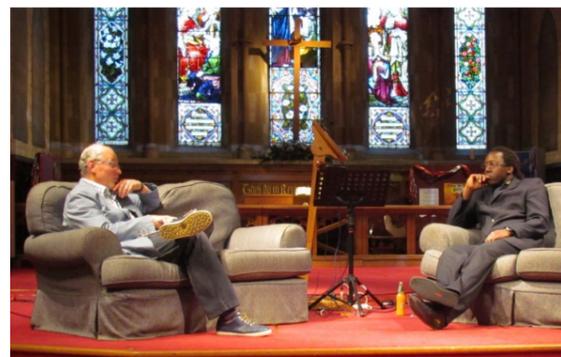
Cricket rebel at St Stephen's

Former Zimbabwean cricketer, Henry Olonga, talked about his remarkable life to an audience at St Stephen's on 26th April.

The first black cricketer to play for his country, Henry made headlines when he and his team-mate, Andy Flower, staged a protest against the Mugabe regime at the 2003 Cricket World Cup in Harare. Forced to flee Zimbabwe to avoid arrest and a possible death sentence for treason, he now lives in the UK.

Interviewed in church, he talked about discovering his sporting talents as a boy in Africa, his experiences in international cricket and the Christian conviction that gave him the courage to risk his life for what he believed. He also revealed an impressive singing talent, mixing his talk with songs from the musicals and others that poignantly expressed his faith. He ended an inspiring evening by taking questions and signing copies of his book, *Blood, Sweat and Treason*.

The event was the culmination of a six-month fund-raising campaign to buy a generator for Matthew Rusike Children's Home in Zimbabwe. Thanks to generous support from many at St Stephen's, the generator is now installed (below right) and is making a huge difference to the home. 'The generator has brought tremendous relief to everyone,' says the home's director, Margaret Mawire (left in the picture with some of her staff). 'Our appreciation goes to all involved in this very worthy cause.'



Who's Who

Sabrina and Richard Taylor talk about their relationship with God and with each other

It was just last weekend that Sabrina and Richard tied the knot at St Stephen's, although they met many years earlier when they both attended Bennett Memorial Diocesan School as teenagers. However, it was Facebook that brought the two together when Richard left a comment on Sabrina's sister's page.

The couple reflect on their journey of faith. Sabrina comments: 'I've been coming to St Stephen's since I was a child and even attended the Beacon at one point. I used to be in the worship group. I've always had my faith since I was a child, I can't imagine not having it. Quite a lot has happened when sometimes I've questioned it. 'Ages ago Courtney's godfather had a vision of her as a bridesmaid at around nine years old, which is what's happening at our wedding. I think God has a plan – he always has a plan,' says Sabrina.

Richard remembers, 'As a child we went to St Mary's of Goudhurst then later St Lawrence in Bidborough. As I've grown older I've found my faith has also grown and God has always been there for me.

'Both Sabrina and I know that God has been a massive influence in our relationship and we do spend a lot of time praying that God will guide us in our future. We have a Bible verse that Courtney's godfather wrote on a card which has got us through difficult times from Jeremiah 29 verse 11.'
"For I know the plans I have you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jim Prestwood gave the talk at the couple's wedding based on this Bible verse. Mark Barker conducted the service. Joanne Ramsden

