

May 2015 – forthcoming events						
Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Key to abbreviations LTF= Ladies Thursday F'ship MITM = Men in the morning B&B = Bumps & Babes WLTD0= Who let the dads out YE = Younger Elements OE = Older Elements HC = Holy Communion TMS = The Morning Service TES = The Evening Service HotS = Healing on the Street				1	2	3
				9am Re:Fresh	Work day 10am HotS 6.30pm Youth band	7.45am HC 10.30am HC 6.30pm TES
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Bank Holiday	9am Re:Fresh 4pm Blend 4.30pm YE 7pm OE	Prayer day 10am BB 11am HC	Election 10am LTF 10am MITM 7pm Managing childrens behaviour	9am Re:Fresh	10am Steps open Day 10am HotS 7pm The Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am TMS 3pm Football 6.30pm TES
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
8pm Resource training evening	9am Re:Fresh 4pm Blend 4.30pm YE 7pm OE	10am BB 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3pm Blend 7pm Managing childrens behaviour	9am Re:Fresh	9.45am WLTD0 10am HotS	7.45am HC 10.30am Bpt 6.30pm HC
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	9am Re:Fresh 4pm Blend 4.30pm YE 7pm OE	10am BB 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3pm Blend 7pm Managing childrens behaviour	9am Re:Fresh	9am Re:Fresh 10am HotS 7pm The Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am AAS 2.30pm Afternoon Tea 6.30pm TES
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Bank Holiday	9am Re:Fresh	11am HC	10am MITM	9am Re:Fresh	9am Re:Fresh 10am HotS 6.30pm Youth band	7.45am HC 10.30am TMS 6.30pm TES

HALF TERM

In memory of Peter Robinson

Mansell reflects on Peter's time here

My wife Ann knew Peter for over 60 years. Peter and I both served as trustees at Petley Court and St Eanswythes for over 20 years. We both also served as Church wardens where Peter's long membership of St Stephen's brought much wisdom and knowledge to our serving the Lord in this position.

It was under mine and Peters reign that changes began to be made in the building of the church as structural repairs had to be made before we all fell through the floor! In all this Peter brought his business knowledge and confidence at putting decisions into practice.

As a personal friend he drove daughter Sheila on her wedding day nearly 25 years ago and so was very much part of the family.

Mansell Evans



Immigrants - how should we respond?

Migration is ever-present in the media as we hear stories of those fleeing their towns and cities ahead of advancing fighters or those risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean in the hope of a new life in Europe, and in the debate ahead of the General Election as the levels of and controls on immigrants being allowed into the UK becomes a party political issue. There are strongly held views on all sides, and even in church there are bound to be different opinions. So I began to wonder what the Bible might have to say to us about immigration and our attitude to migrants.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi in the UK, has written, "The Hebrew Bible contains the great command 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18), and this has often been taken as the basis of biblical morality. But it is not: it is only part of it. The Jewish sages noted that on only one occasion does the Hebrew Bible command us to love our neighbour, but in 37 places it commands us to love the stranger".

Perhaps this is because many of the major figures in the Bible were migrants. Some of them move voluntarily; most of them migrate involuntarily to flee famine, escape persecution and some are forcibly deported in military conflicts. The story begins with Adam and Eve, forcibly evicted out of Eden. Abraham migrates to Canaan, but upon his arrival famine forces him to move to Egypt. Jacob spends his early adulthood seeking asylum in Mesopotamia to avoid his brother Esau. Joseph is deported as a slave to Egypt, and his family are forced to move there as famine again hits Canaan. David is forced to live all over the place as he seeks to escape the murderous intent of King Saul. Jeremiah goes with the Israelites taken into captivity in Babylon...and of course, Mary and Joseph are forced to flee with the baby Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's blood bath.

You could probably add many others to this list, and taken together, the Bible is a story where the issue of migration features persistently, and time and again God tells his people, "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34). The book of Jeremiah makes this behaviour a measuring stick of just governance (Jer.22:3-5), and Jesus goes on to make it a moral principle for us all when he told the Parable of the Good Samaritan making it clear that those who are not 'like us' are still our neighbours and require our love and mercy.

Moreover, Scripture affirms that we who are not migrants in the earthly sense are nonetheless foreigners and strangers in the heavenly sense. Peter addresses an audience of Gentile believers as 'sojourners and exiles' (1 Peter 2:11), even though most scholars agree that the readers are not, politically speaking, foreigners. Likewise, Hebrews 11 holds up the patriarchs of the Old Testament as models for believers, insofar as they "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland" (Hebrews 11:13-14). Thus the same God who commanded Israel to love the migrant also commands us to become neighbours to those in need of mercy, for we too are strangers and foreigners in this world, awaiting and longing for that day when we will one day claim our place in heaven – our eternal home.

So what is our attitude to migrants and to the issues today of immigration? How do we react to the stranger in our midst? Who is our neighbour? The recently released letter from the House of Bishops in the Church of England calls for a dialogue about migration that rejects negative stereotyping and unfounded suspicion of migrants because such an approach shows 'scant regard for the Christian traditions of neighbourliness and hospitality'. And whilst there are no simple answers to the political challenges associated with immigration, perhaps those of us whose worldview is derived from the Bible should ponder afresh the command to love our neighbour, to show mercy to the stranger, and to treat them like our brother and sister.

Mark Barker



Who's Who

Craig and Jessica Spickernell

Hello! We're another set of Spickernells; Craig, Jess, Elisha (11), Amy (9) and Reuben (7). We only joined St Stephen's in June last year but feel like we have a history here. Jess came to the church as a teenager and was confirmed here. We both met at St Stephen's in 1994 at a youth service, before getting married here in 1998. You may also be aware that Jean and Douglas Spickernell are Craig's parents, Roy and Stephanie Smith are Jessica's and that Lesley Gregory is Jessica's aunt, so we had lots of lovely family to welcome us here when we came back last year.

Having both been Christians since we were children we have tried to make God the centre of everything we do and every decision, and we felt that it was very much God who encouraged us to settle back in Tonbridge after our university years. After numerous promptings from God, Craig gave up a job in marketing in 2008 and started to work full time for a church plant, whilst training as a church leader with Newfrontiers.

We both had a life-changing six years, but in January of last year the church plant in Tonbridge merged with the church in Southborough which was an enormous change for us as a family. Shortly afterwards Craig received redundancy from the church which brought even more change. As we prayed that God would guide us through a rather foggy time, the one thing we felt loud and clear was that he wanted us to be serving him in this town.

We have felt very blessed by the lovely welcome we have received at St Stephen's. As we have begun to settle in and see how God is moving in this church we have been increasingly excited to be part of it. We are fully behind the new church vision and look forward to playing our part, particularly through coordinating Alpha both within St Stephen's but also with all the churches together in Tonbridge. We have just started a connect group in north Tonbridge and you may also see us on the prayer ministry team or helping out with children's work.

What about the rest of our time? Earlier this year Craig started a local business which reclaims old wood and upcycles it into beautiful and useful items for the home and garden (Find out more at www.facebook.com/pallettreeskent; apologies for the shameless plug!) Jess had trained as a secondary school teacher, but currently works part-time as a housekeeper to enable her to be available for the children.

Thank you once again for the warm welcome and we look forward to getting to know you all better.



A postcard from Sidmouth

Firstly, thank you for your prayers, cards, emails and phone calls. We arrived here surrounded by love. Three months on we feel very settled in Sidmouth and in our new home.

We love; picnics on the beach, walks with the dog, getting to know the neighbours, chatting to folks in the street and shops, felling trees in the garden and being with family.

We are getting used to; being a long way from our children, travelling miles to B&Q, Argos and M&S, chatting to folks in the street and shops, and having to be at church at 9.40am or miss the start!

We have joined the sailing club and Paul has restarted bell ringing at the 'Parish' Church.

We decided to stay at All Saint's church. The church family were so welcoming and it is where all the Christian youth work in the Sid Valley happens. We did not visit any others! With around 100 at the 9.45 service and 50 at the 11.15 it is a small congregation but they love Jesus and have the values we are familiar with.

Churches are like helicopters, the closer you get, the harder it is not to get sucked into the rotas! Need we say more?

Paul and Mary Parkes



App of the month

This is the first of a series we would like to do for smart phone and tablet users, highlighting apps you may find useful as aids on your spiritual journeys.

Pray as you Go is a daily audio devotional from the Jesuits. For anyone who enjoys listening to reflections or finds their busy schedule difficult for engaging in daily Bible reading and prayer (such as commuters) it can be an excellent spiritual tool. The daily audio, of approximately ten minutes, is available Monday to Friday with one audio for the weekend. It is accessed under 'Today's Prayer' and follows a regular pattern of an introduction with an excerpt from a piece of Christian music, a reading of the day's scripture (usually 5-10 verses), some questions for reflection, a rereading of the scripture, final thoughts for reflection. There are lots of quiet spaces to reflect and pray. The full text of the devotional is also written out if you want to read along. It should be noted that the music tends to be quite traditional so may not be to everyone's liking. The audio can be played unlimited times and can be paused and moved forward or back. You can access previous audios, in case you have missed one.

There are additional audios available as well including some focused devotionals for seasons such as lent and a daily 'examen' (an Ignatian tradition for reflecting on your day with God). The app is free and versions are available for android and iphone/ipad. It is quick to load and not known to have many technical glitches.

For future editions we would really like some people to:

- tell us about apps they find helpful as an aid to their spiritual lives (if you have a favourite Bible app please let us know)
- trial some of the apps we are considering featuring

Please contact me via the church office email address enquiries@ststephenstonbridge.org Many thanks.

Cathi Fredricks



Thought for the month

Does it matter what our Prime Minister believes?

I'm writing this piece a couple of weeks before the election with the polls neck and neck, so no-one knows who will be prime minister on 8 May. Whoever he is (I say 'he' assuming the Greens won't surprise us all by winning a majority), I wonder what kind of personal faith, if any, he'll bring to Downing Street.

Will it be David Cameron's traditional Anglicanism which he describes as being 'a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes'? Or Ed Miliband's self-confessed 'Jewish atheism'? It's possible we won't yet have a prime minister if the main parties are still negotiating with Nick Clegg (atheist), Nicola Sturgeon (supporter of the Scottish Secular Society) or Nigel Farage whose bookshelf at home prominently displayed a Good News Bible during a BBC interview last year.

And does it matter? Unlike America where presidential candidates routinely parade their Christianity, the British electorate is suspicious of overt religious belief on the part of its leaders. Alastair Campbell famously claimed that New Labour didn't 'do God' and you can understand that politicians don't want to alienate voters of other persuasions by being too up-front on matters of faith. Any leader who claims to have a hotline to God tends to ring alarm bells.

Other things being equal, I'd prefer a prime minister who acknowledges a responsibility to God as well as to the electorate. The record of political leaders who deliberately exclude God (Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot) is not a pretty one. On the other hand, I wouldn't ask a bus driver to believe in God before entrusting my life to him. Explicit faith and being good at the job don't always go together.

Perhaps what's more important than a prime minister's personal religious beliefs is the national religious mood. We can't influence the former, but we can make a difference to the latter by being salt and light in the community. If the policies of our leaders reflect what we, the electorate, say we want, you'd expect a broad correlation between a godly society and good government.

But even if we don't like the government we end up with on 8 May, we're reminded in Romans that the authorities that exist have been established by God. Our job then is to trust that God knows what he's doing and to get on with praying for those authorities.

Graham Jones