



**WITHAM URC CHURCH MAGAZINE
APRIL 2021**

Our Vision: "To celebrate God and share the love of Jesus."

Pastoral Letter

How are we viewed?

Many people in Witham have never been into any of the Church buildings in this town, and do not attend on a Sunday. They may have attended weddings, funerals, or christenings, but have not joined authentic Christian teaching and worship! Most have never attended Sunday school, and have been taught about religion under the national curriculum, covering the key facts of the seven major religions. This leads to a confusing mix and match, and in which the unique claim of Christianity, Jesus, and the restoration of a father-child relationship with the creator God, which only requires acceptance of the need. Instead, students are left with a view that all religions are much the same.

Many people have therefore heard and identify Christianity with the 10 commandments. These are taken to be a list of "do not's", and often viewed, reenforced by images from Songs of Praises to be "do not have fun!". Sadly, we are known by a list of don'ts, and for being a community only too ready to judge people against these standards. People see us as being against so many things, against non-heterosexual marriage, against abortion, against adoption by non-heterosexual and/or non-married couples, and many other activities.

Are we the do not's, the killjoys, the no fun allowed?

We need to replace this narrative with a positive. Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, and he gave this answer. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40).

Jesus then goes on using the parable of the Good Samaritan to explain the scope of who should be shown this love. This is "Love your neighbour" and

not "judge your neighbour". Specific warnings about judging others are given elsewhere in the bible.

In Salvation Army folk law, it is reported that as William Booth was on his death bed, he sent a telegram to a meeting of the Salvation Army, his message was one word "Others". The church is not about us, but about others.

Who are the Others? Remember the parable of the Lost Sheep. These are the others, who are currently lost, and who need to be found. The people who are not in church today are the others

In Luke 10:2, we read the words of Jesus. "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields". We sit surrounded by many people in Witham, who do not know the Good News of Jesus, and are waiting, lost.

This verse is self-fulfilling, if our prayer is for the lost harvest in Witham, we may find ourselves being the workers being sent! Based on the last census, the median age of adults (excluding under 18 year-olds) in Witham is 31!,

A few years ago, I had a year out from Witham URC, and went to Skylark in Chelmsford. Skylark has a harvest field - it is the city of Chelmsford. Whilst it was great to be there, they were never going to focus on the harvest in Witham. The harvest in Witham needs to be gathered in by workers in Witham! I came back because this is the mission field I'm called to serve, not Chelmsford.

Whilst not starting another bus project, we need to have vision to be a place that these lost people hear about, that we sign-post, and make available. We need this to be a place of welcome, for many a place of refuge, where they find support, and in-directly, see the love of Jesus in action thru the workers. We need this to be a place that is non-judgemental and safe. Where all who are lost find welcome, where, in the model of several

disciplines, they spread the message - I have found a place where I count. I have met people, and thru them, I have met Jesus!

We need to re-ignite our passion to see people saved.

Over the years that I have been at WURC, many young people have passed thru our doors. Many subsequently move away, but some remain in Witham. Sadly, they do not worship with us, but go elsewhere, where the beat is faster and the format modern. One view is that this is good, it allows them to develop, to become adults in a context where they are not remembered as toddlers but start afresh as adults. A new place gives a new challenge.

The alternative view is that this is a tragedy. Even our own young people are telling us this is not a place where people under 20, or under 30 will stay. These are our potential leaders, our next generation to maintain the history and legacy of WURC, and we let them go elsewhere!

We have a duty to see the baton of worship at WURC continue, and to pass this on.

As we emerge from the current year of Covid, let us hear the call of Jesus to save the lost. To be different, to be a place of love and hope. We need to become the church that focuses on the Others and puts them first. We will need to change to re-think how we see our role in Witham.

We need to be a place focused not on us, or I, but on others!

God bless and stay safe!

Gavin



Easter Hope: Canon Paul Hardingham considers the eternal promise of Easter

“So many people right across the country are anxious about employment, anxious about food, isolated from loved ones and feel that the future looks dark.”

These are words from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s sermon on Easter Day 2020. Who would have thought that we are experiencing the same uncertainties this Easter!

Yet the Easter story remains one of hope overcoming darkness and despair. The women arrived at the tomb on Easter morning with mixed emotions, as they came to anoint Jesus’ body. *‘But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.’* (Mark 16:4). They were confused, as they tried to make sense of Jesus’ death. Their hopes were dashed with an uncertain future. In the current pandemic, we too are left asking: *Where is God in all this?*

The young man at the tomb reminds them that God is still in control: *“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* (Mark 16:6).

The women had forgotten Jesus’ promise to the disciples that He would die and rise from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection is also the sure foundation of hope for us in the present crisis. He turns our confusion and fear into joy and wonder! We can trust Jesus’ plan for the future of our world and lives, despite the fact that things can’t return to the way they were: *“There needs to be a resurrection of our common life, a new normal, something that links to the old, but is different and more beautiful. We must dream it, build it, make it, grasp it, because it is the gift of God and the call of God.”* (Justin Welby).

Article from Parish Pump

The origin and cost of our bible

Light after Darkness. Part 3. Keith Moscrop

The English Middle ages

Alfred the Great was king of the Saxons from 886 to 899, he spent several years fighting Viking invasions and won a decisive victory in 878 in the north of England and influenced the conversion of Guthram, the Viking leader, to Christianity.

Alfred had a reputation as a learned and merciful man of a gracious and level-headed nature who encouraged education, proposing that primary education be conducted in old English rather than Latin and improving the legal system, the military structure and his people's quality of life.

William the conqueror invaded England in 1066, building castles in strategic places to subdue and control the regional populations. People living north of the Thames river continued to live a rural Saxon way of life and others a Danish lifestyle, gradually regional rulers and landowners were replaced by King William's people.

King William, and his barons ruled in French, however most of the population spoke middle English in various dialects. They suffered greatly and the poor were exploited, abused and down trodden, living in dire circumstances, especially in London and other towns which grew rapidly.

The Catholic Church became immensely rich and powerful, answerable to the Pope and continuing to use and interpret the Vulgate Latin version of the bible which most people could not read. The church exploited the populations all over Europe with the sale of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins and other dubious fundraising activities, as pilgrimages became popular.

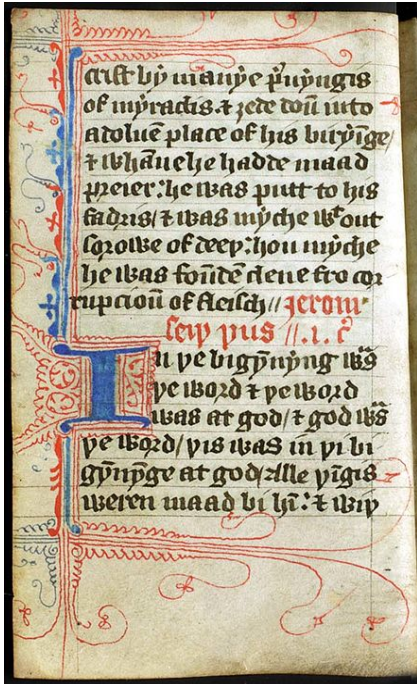
In the following 300+ years many people struggled on with disease and poverty and eventually the black death (bubonic plague 1348-9) which wiped out 50% of the UK population. The peasants revolt took place, against a new poll tax, in 1381 and was harshly suppressed.

John Wycliffe was born in Yorkshire in 1320; his father was a humble blacksmith but surprisingly Wycliffe became a leading theologian with an independent mind, a thinker and a writer and in 1360 became Master of Balliol College Oxford. He became an adviser to what has been called 'the good Parliament' and was sent to France to negotiate peace. He worked with the present King Edward III and his son the Duke of Lancaster (John of Gaunt), who became a powerful ally.

Above all Wycliffe had great integrity and compassion and was determined to face down corruption in the church in England and Europe. He described the Pope as the antichrist.

Wycliffe's and his helpers translated the Bible into English which was completed in 1384, with further updated versions being done by Wycliffe's assistant (John Purvey) and others in 1388 and 1395. Rather than welcoming his translation of the Bible, however, the established church was furious. Their wrath knew no bounds.

The Latin bible (the Vulgate), in all of this turmoil, continued to be owned and controlled and interpreted by the Church, but in the coming years English versions were produced which were eagerly read by anyone who could buy or borrow a copy. Anyone caught owning or reading one or a part of a translation were severely punished, often by imprisonment or burning to death.



Beginning of the Gospel of John from a pocket Wycliffe translation that may have been used by a roving Lollard preacher (late 14th century)

In 1381 the peasant's revolt against a poll tax took place and the authorities cracked down hard on dissent. Wycliffe's followers, called Lollards by their orthodox contemporaries, adopted many of the beliefs attributed to Wycliffe. The similarity between Lollards and later English Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Puritans, and Quakers also suggests the continuation of Lollard ideas through the Reformation.

My next article will highlight the continuing struggle of many great and brave people to keep the light of truth burning by producing a bible to be read by people in their own languages.

Jimmy Carter, perhaps the greatest of former presidents of the United States as well as a humble Christian man, wrote these words recently:

“What are the things that you can’t see that are important? I would say justice, truth, humility, service, compassion, love. You can’t see any of those, but they’re the guiding lights of a life.”



The open baptism policy worked, up to a point...

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JESUS - Peter Howard a taste of his book of poems

Jesus

Lonely man with a message
On his lips the words of life
Eyes that see the past and future
Walks with sorrow and with strife.

Word of hope foundation stone
Hands the heaven are help upon
Humble King with shepherd's crook
Stands along now all are gone

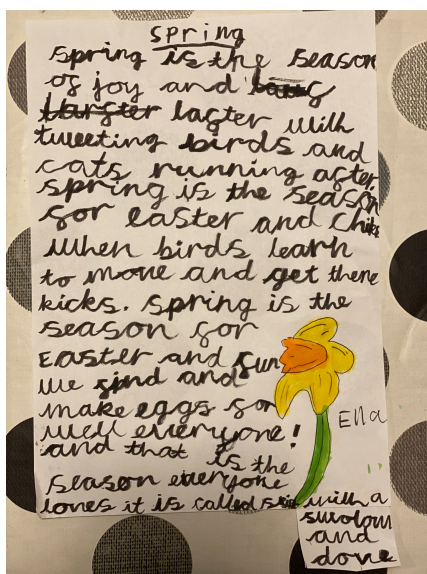
Shoulders bruised, punctured brow
Mankind's cross upon his back
Life he carries to Golgotha
While whips across his frame do crack

On the tree withy outstretched arms
No leaf for shade, no scent of balsam
Blood and water freely flow
As love meets death so awesome

This was man at his most tender
And God at his most humble
his back a bridge for all to cross
So none need fall or stumble.

Spring - Ella Larkins age 6

Spring is the season of joy and laughter,
With tweeting birds, and cats running after.
Spring is the season for Easter and chicks,
When birds learn to move and get their kicks.
Spring is the season for Easter and fun,
We find and make eggs for - well, everyone!
And that is the season everyone loves,
It is called Spring, with a swallow and dove.



This is Ella our lovely
great niece,
(Editors prerogative !)

Fellowship Profiles

This month we are delighted to feature Eve Murfitt and Jack Campbell. Thank you so much both of you. We would very much like to keep this going so we would be very pleased to hear from you. You can decide if you wish to be the slightly older or slightly younger person!

Eve Murfitt



Hello, my name is Eve Murfitt.

I was born in Edmonton, North London in 1941 . I do not remember the war, but do remember the struggle and hardship coming out of it: the ration books.

How hard it was for my dear mum to feed and keep us all safe. My dad died when I was 10: I was the youngest of eight children. Before I was born one of the twins died who was only three weeks old.

Edmonton was such a lovely town to grow up in. We went to a Church of England Sunday School until they started pulling down churches to make way for redevelopment of the area. Ours was the first to go so we went to the local Methodist Church.

I met my husband at the Royale Tottenham dancing. We were blessed with boy and girl twins followed by a boy and girl, I had always wanted four children so my fifth was a bonus. Sadly he became ill at three and went into hospital when he was four and spent the next 13 years in and out of hospital.

I had moved to the other side of town and joined All Saints Church and went there for 30 years until I came to Witham. They were such a caring church family whilst we went through 15 plus very hard years losing my mum and husband. I nursed both of them and my son who was so ill. God was with me throughout the bad times.

My youngest son and I decided we wanted to move to Dorset and for 15 years I tried, but property was as expensive as London, but wages were lower. However God had other ideas.

Whilst at All Saints we had a visit from Franciscan monks from Canterbury; they invited us to visit so we planned a pilgrimage. We left after church on the Sunday, walked 8-16 miles a day, stayed in church and school halls. We had a van to take the heavy equipment which meant my youngest son was also able to keep the driver company and walk when he could. We cooked a meal every evening and prepared next day's packed lunch. It was a large group with several teenagers and children; we had so much fun.

We arrived on the Friday evening, spent Saturday with the monks, had a service in the cathedral and returned home by coach. This was 45 years ago.

Twenty-two years later, still looking to leave London, God decided it was to be Essex.

My middle son had moved to Witham and while waiting to move he said to go and have a look at his new house, which I did; thought it was nice, but had no thought of coming to the town. The following summer they invited me to stay for a week.

I went for a walk while they were at work, and as I turned out of Newland Precinct and I looked into the window of Bairstow Eves and there was a

bungalow. I viewed it the next day and went home on Friday and then arranged for an estate agent to value my house and 10 weeks later I moved to Chelmer Road.

I went to St. Nick's for two years and then came to URC one week. Two weeks later I went again and God spoke clearly to me: "I have work for you here" and as I looked at the cross I had peace again.

Soon after I asked Rev Richard Church if I would join the church. A few weeks later he asked me if I could take over the role of leader from Shirley Ratnage for Child Contact.

I was an Elder for 6 years, Centre Director for one year on my own, then a few years later Deborah Robinson and I shared the role for 6 years.

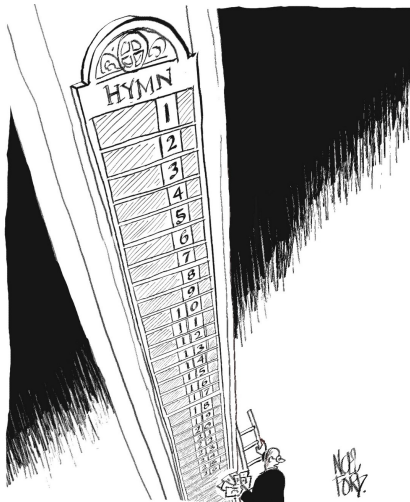
In 2011 I started an afternoon group for Small Talk as Jill Ellis was running the morning group and had a large waiting list. I loved the years with the children and the helpers and am still in touch with parents from the first meeting.

Sadly a family from the first meeting lost their dad/husband to Covid in January but I am so glad I am still in touch with them. So God meant it when he said he had work for me.

God has been by my side throughout my life; happy, sad and hard times. The Lord has been so special, He has used me in many ways. The peace I have comes from my close walk with Him.



As I close I pray you will all have a very blessed Easter, my favourite time of year. God bless you all, may you know the presence of Jesus walking with you on your journey.



"Are you sure the Guinness Book Of Records people will turn up, Vicar?"



Jack Campbell

I've been going to church all my life. My parents took my siblings (Tom, Abbie and Charlie) to the Bethel church based in the old John Bramston school since we were all born, and I was lucky enough to have two of my grandparents go, as well as about a dozen other relatives. In 2009 we left Bethel and moved to the URC, a church where my other set of grandparents attended.

Throughout most of my life I have been a member of Witham Boys Brigade (BB) - starting at the age of five and finishing with the Queens Badge award at 18. Without a doubt the experiences and friendships I made there have shaped who I am and how I see the world, and I am all the better for it.

I am currently studying law at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. With the exception of one two-hour seminar, the entirety of my second year has been online. I receive about nine hours of recorded lectures to listen to a week, with approximately 15 hours preparing for seminars. I also spend a lot of time writing up notes and I am starting to revise for exams which will happen at the start of next term. In other words, I spend a lot of time in my room at my desk, which does drain me a bit. The struggle of applying for vacations schemes and internships only add to this stress. But I love learning about the law - with all its faults and complications - and at the end of the day I am glad I have this opportunity.

I share a house in Norwich with three fantastic housemates. None of them are Christians, but I try to talk about my faith whenever I can. Having had most aspects of my life Christian-based, I am often surprised by how little they actually know about Christianity. Even the mention of some famous stories or prophets are not understood. This often makes me realise how blessed I am to have been educated about God and the teachings of Jesus.

In January, I was lucky enough to become engaged to my girlfriend Samantha. She is a Christian, but was not raised in a religious household, so often asks me about my own faith and is always eager to strengthen her relationship with God. I am very much looking forward to continuing our life together with God, and am lucky to have someone to lean on when I need help. She is an incredibly skilled artist, studying fine art at the Norwich University of Arts, and she runs her own art page on facebook offering commissions on paintings.

As mentioned, I was raised in church since I was born, with all my family and friends being christians, and well as going to Catholic primary and secondary schools, and attending fortnightly house groups. Despite all this, there wasn't a personal relationship with God. I especially struggled when my Papa (Alistair Campbell) died when I was 11. However at a BB trip to America, I first experienced the Holy Spirit. I had complications with my feet, and was in intense pain, and asked my dad and others to pray for me. Immediately, the pain went away - I had invited God into my life and he had blessed me with the Holy Spirit. Thus I had my personal connection. That began me on a journey that culminated in my baptism in 2017. I have tried to find and accept God in all other aspects of my life and in my behaviour, but I do struggle sometimes in doing that.

Being stuck in Norwich does have its struggles, but I still manage to stay connected to Church. I am lucky enough that my church in Norwich does online bible study; and the monthly house group run by Viv for young people away from church is wonderful to attend. If there is one thing I've learnt whilst at uni, it is that there is nothing that compares to the feeling of being surrounding by fellow minded Christians. Even if you don't know them very well, the personal bond that is shared brings so much comfort and joy.

This year I haven't given up anything for Lent, but rather have tried to do new things in my day that better me. I am watching what I eat, and am

trying to exercise when I can, and have taken up reading one verse from Psalms each day - a quick task that leaves me thinking about that little bit of Scripture for the day. I have been watching - often with Samantha - the service live-streamed each Sunday and I am surprised but joyful when it turns out my mother and sister are singing that week. It is refreshing to listen to the sermons but does make me miss life in Witham.



Give thanks for your vaccine

The URC hopes to raise £10,000 for Christian Aid to use to give practical support to the poorest communities

where there is little hope of a vaccine roll out. All donations will support Christian Aid's response to the coronavirus pandemic in affected communities around the world, including Commitment for Life's – the URC's global justice programme – partner regions.

If you or your family member has received a vaccine and would like to express your gratitude by helping the campaign follow the link below to find out how to donate.

<https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3740-give-thanks-for-your-vaccine-through-urc-fundraiser.html>

*Closing date for articles for the May magazine 23rd April
email to bjstibbards@gmail.com*

Experiencing God through Scripture - Lorna

This is our next series of themes for worship: 'Experiencing God through Scripture'.

This is really exciting because it is about experiencing God, going beyond head knowledge to our hearts, to our personal relationship with him which is fundamental to our faith. It is only when we have a personal experience with God that we have a faith experience to share with others.

It is very broad-ranging. Subject includes both Anger and Jealousy – ours or God's or both...? Join us to find out! With Worship, Blessings and Intimacy in the mix it will draw us closer into the heart of God and the many treasures of God's word, bringing us into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus.

As we slowly emerge from lockdown over the coming months, these are exciting times in which we prepare ourselves to be God's people and be part of the work of bringing his kingdom to earth.

May God give us the power to accomplish all the good things our faith prompt us to do. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honoured because of the way we live and we will be honoured along with him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. (From 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

Bless you



Shopping List April 2021

Thank you for your continuing support during the Coronavirus crisis.

Foodbanks within the Trussell Trust network have seen unprecedented increases across our network and by continuing to support us with your donations you are continuing to support those most in need.

We are very thankful for any donations you can give

We currently need:

Food Items:

Other Essentials:

- Washing detergent (in a gel form if possible please)

Our food parcels are made up of specific food groups so that those in need have enough food for at least nine meals. **The list above shows what we are in need of as we currently have good stocks of pasta, pasta sauce, biscuits, rice, fish, soup, tinned meat, beans, baby food and cereals.**

We also ask for small packs of food as larger packs do not fit in our parcels, making it difficult for our clients to carry home.

Thank you

We are grateful for your donations to the Braintree Area foodbank. However, we can only accept donations of freshly-bought, unopened and undamaged goods which are still well within their "use by" date (no less than 6 months). We cannot use items which do not meet these requirements, and the donation is wasted.

Thank you Muriel for the photographs



The lace is for a wedding tablecloth and edging for a communion runner.
Lace making has kept me sane!

From Church of England Lent Reflections - 20th March 2021
Bible reading - *Matthew 28.16-20 (NRSV Anglicized Edition)*

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’

Reflection

Many Christians find the thought of talking to other people about their faith in God quite scary. Today’s reading, which comes after the resurrection and just before Jesus ascended to heaven, gives us three encouragements, if we are feeling nervous about this.

First: Doubt is no barrier. All of them saw Jesus. Some of them doubted. But Jesus commissioned them all, doubters included.

Second: We do this together. The commissioning is for the whole group, not just certain individuals. Everything is easier and more exciting when do it with others.

Third: Jesus himself is with us. He promises that he will be with us always, when we are conscious of that fact and when we are not.

Anxiety about talking about things that mean a lot to us is understandable, especially if we haven’t done it before. But as we share our faith with others, we are never alone.

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