

Chaplain's Blog - Star date July 2016

This month:

- **A Trip to Bath; of opulence and homelessness – a challenge?**
- **Of my surprising response to embroidery!**
- **The Bath American Museum and the referendum**
- **A tale of two contrasting churches and services**
- **Sea Sunday and a Modern Parable**
- **Cathedral Chaplaincy- a first day of a Reader in Training. (Jane Osborne)**
- **Books of the Month – Rev Canon Julia Wilkinson**
- **prayers**

Lez (long suffering wife) and I spent a long weekend away heading for Bath. On the way we visited Knightshayes a fascinating National Trust house. For those of you who do not know the property, it was designed by an architect who was probably often under the influence of opium. When the family moved it they had much of his internal work on walls and ceilings covered up, they thought it too fussy now the trust has restored much of the original decoration one can see why.

Colossal opulence and expense.

In Bath we went out for a meal and visited the Roman Baths afterwards which were open till 10pm. We had seen vast wealth and spent money of our own on tickets, a meal, bed and breakfast etc. As we walked through the city streets there were a number of homeless folks sitting quietly with hat for change. We stopped to chat to a couple of them and put change into their collections. Their stories involved broken relationships and lost opportunities, children they did not see and lost dogs - a stark, stark contrast to the beginning of the day. They seemed more grateful for the chat than for the cash. "Most people think I'm invisible!" said John. Maybe we should challenge ourselves to find out the name of the next homeless person we come across - at least they might not feel invisible to us.

Our response to Christ though art.

If anyone had told me that I would ever feel quite such an emotional response to embroidery I think I would probably have laughed, but in denial I would also have been wrong. Rev'd Margaret Saville (with whom I did Reader Training a quarter of a century ago) had recommended a visit to Bath Abbey to see the embroidery work and Lez and I wandered in as much to get away from the milling tourists as anything else. The tourists were milling inside too many of them flowing in the 'wrong direction' – the atmosphere being hardly spiritual and contemplative. Down the north aisle, however, were 35 diptychs telling the story of 'One Man's Journey to Heaven' from the Annunciation to Ascension.

As I looked at each of these fabulous creations and their accompanying text, music, hand drawn lettering I was also taken on the journey of the artist Sue Symons, her wrestling with concept, theology and interpretation. As I studied the picture of the birth taking in her representation of Christ as a bright sphere of light I found my eyes filled with tears, such was the impact. More so later with the image of the cross with the sphere light extinguished and the mere trail of stars representing Christ's body being taken down.

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Now I don't expect everyone to react in the same way by any means and I suppose as I grow older I find my emotions sparked more and more by great music, art and literature but what is it that kindles that spark within you? How do we provide opportunities for others to explore on their own journeys? Do we provide enough breadth of experience to allow the spirit to work in people's lives?

Answer on the back of a postage stamp.....



The American museum and the EU referendum.

As I read through the illustrated timeline of American History I was much taken by the notion that the American quest for independence was because they did not want to be governed from afar by a parliament who were imposing taxes they considered unfair. It seemed an interesting parallel with the feelings of those who voted to leave the EU. It at least I felt it gave me some understanding.

So much argument, recrimination and "I told you so!" what we need now is to rebuild, mend the wounds and heal the broken hearted as well as standing up to be counted over the increase in racial abuse. Just because our fate in the EU is decided the church i.e. us, must be at the forefront of making sure that those who are affected adversely are not the ones who bear the brunt of the immediate consequences. Likewise whatever our position we should be celebrating the good that comes from the decision as and when and.... if... it happens.



A Saturday visit to two churches to decide where to worship on Sunday Morning.



The interior of St Mike's (The Church of St Michael & St Paul in Bath). Note the mezzanine and the cafe which is open all week in the background.

(The lone pew-dweller is Lez taking a few minutes of contemplation)



This was St Mary's. The name of which I forgot and referred to it is "£7 a day." The charge for the church car park on the sign outside. I wonder what impression visitors get of our churches?

A Family Service

We chose St Mike's (their own pet name for St Michael and St Paul) for Sunday morning because I wanted to experience their family service as I am always looking to pinch other people's good ideas! They have done wonders inside the church getting rid of all the pews and putting in modern comfortable chairs arranged almost like an auditorium. A lift to give wheelchair access had been installed, a glass mezzanine with meeting spaces built and a cafe installed at the back which is open every day. I was probably a shade of pale green! The cafe, by the way, gives its proceeds to projects for the homeless.

The service contained a baptism and also a separate section commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. They were really working at providing for all age groups. Some of the younger children were waving flags in the Worship sections which made us smile. The worship sections of the service were led by a very competent group of musicians but we started to feel our age as our hips began to ache as we sang through the songs with numerous repetitions. Being a child of the 50s & 60s I never thought I would hear myself saying a band were too loud, but the volume was pitched just too high to be able to hear anyone around you and to be able to add any harmony which would have helped Lez and me! All in all though, it was delightful and they were wonderfully welcoming but in our family services I will be thinking about volume, variety and the theological content of anything we sing.

We did not stay too long after the service and headed to the little clothes shop where I persuaded Lez to buy two new tops as she does not spend much on herself! As they only took cash it meant a trip to the Cash point round the corner. John, the rough sleeper was positioned some twenty paces away peering into space as people detoured around him. He was only visible as an obstacle to be avoided. We said nothing and hurried back to the shop with the cash for the clothes and I felt a tinge of guilt- but consoled myself that at least I was not spending on me! Oh the hypocrisy!

Evening Prayer in St Catherine's Montecute- a stark contrast

We headed out of town for Montecute House and dinner in the nearby Kings Arms. Between the two we visited the little church of St Catherine's obviously built to house some of the notable deceased of the stately residence. In sharp contrast to St Michaels this was a congregation battling with little to keep things going as many of us are in Cornwall. There was a note on the steps to the organ loft forbidding entry after an assessment from the Ecclesiastical Insurers. The west chapel contained the book sale to raise cash for

the building and we duly obliged! But the whole church felt prayed in and I sat quietly in a stall at the front, took out my iPhone and read the evening office. Some places are real invitations to prayer and thankfully open.

Following our long weekend it was back to earth with a heavy landing. SATs results had been declared following the Government's latest shenanigans with moving goal posts- just what beleaguered teachers needed to round off a stressful year- no wonder some were on strike on Tuesday.

Sea Sunday - Back in the Saddle at Church Worship for All at St Andrews.

You might like this little illustration which comes from a book called "Pastoral Care for Lay People"- Frank Wright 1982.

A modern parable recalls us sharply to a proper sense of priorities in the church.

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went Out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little lifesaving Station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped: They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as a sort of club.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held. About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of ship wreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a

number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown

Advice for Twitter Users: Never use the word 'atheist' in a post.

I don't know how many of us have tried to publicly talk about our faith in posts of 140 characters or less; it is a challenge to put it mildly but I learned a lot about the folks who call themselves atheists and also some things about the resilience of my own faith.

They (the challenging atheists) seemed to range from the damaged and wounded by 'church' experiences to those who had developed a construct for Christian belief under which they place all Christians so they could have a target to shoot at. There are others who are not just atheist but anti religion because they consider that religion bolsters up morally indefensible structures such as slavery, i.e. the Bible accepts slavery, slavery is wrong therefore the whole Bible is immoral and wrong, therefore there is no God.

In this year in which Bishop Tim challenged us to share our faith stories we must also be prepared to talk to those who are antagonistic because just maybe, they are the ones who need to hear it most.

@Trewirgies

I asked Jane Osborne, one of our Readers in Training to pen a few lines about her first day as a Cathedral Chaplain, it would be lovely to hear of anything new in your ministry.

Cathedral Chaplaincy Day One!

"Don't worry Jane, Tuesdays are always quiet!"

Well within 10 minutes a camera crew appeared, 2 coach loads of visitors arrived some to see the Art installation and some to see the Cathedral. Then there was the school choir who arrived 2 hours early for their concert and I was asked many, many questions. But amongst all the chaos at 10 am I stood up to the sound of a single bell and at that moment there was silence, people stopped and bowed their heads. There amongst the beautiful architecture a group of people drawn from all around the world joined in simple prayer, just 2 or 3 minutes focussed on our Lord, I looked up at the end, a man smiled and then the hustle and bustle returned, it was the same every hour.

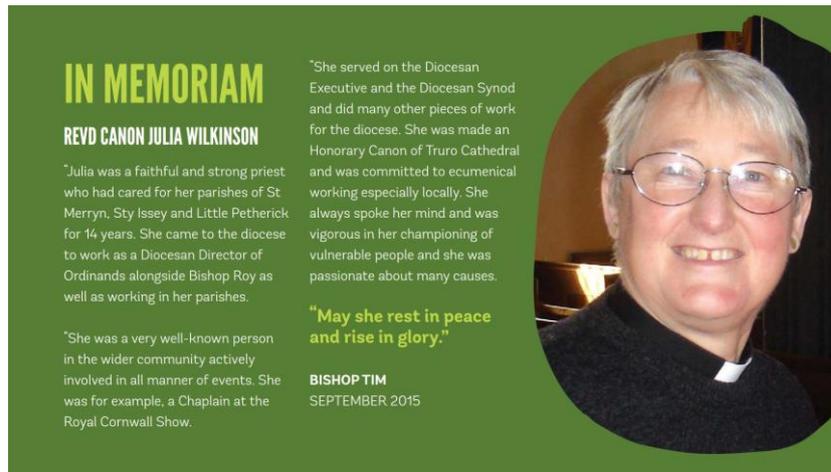
In between I met some extraordinary people some of which asked for private prayer, some of whom wanted to share their candid thoughts about the at installation and some with their own questions – and the question of the day "Please could you tell me why you have a kinky altar?"

It was a wonderful time of service and I look forward to my next 'quiet' day!

Books of the Month – Library of the Month

Although I am reading "The Wounded Healer" by Henri Nouwen ... oh and C.J.Samson's "Lamentations" the book paragraph is more about a library. The Rev'd Canon Julia Wilkinson, who died last year, left all her books to the diocese and these had been delivered in boxes and filled the small meeting room in Church House! I was asked to go and see if there was anything suitable for Readers in Training, so with Canon Jane Kneebone's help we sorted and sifted and gathered some material for the trainees as well as for Rev Hilary Spong's Spiritual Accompaniment course in the autumn. The majority of the books are going to be at Falmouth University housed by the Multi-faith Chaplaincy. Sorting through the books was both thought

provoking and poignant, Julia's book choices giving a glimpse into her life and tremendous commitment. I felt very privileged to undertake the task and certainly inspired to keep reading!



Prayers

In my prayers this month I have been holding those of you who are ill or battling medical issues but also those who are caring for others, often trapped by circumstance and those readers who are worried for family members. People expect much from us as Readers and sometimes don't realise that we need prayer too. Do remember Joy Gunter joy.lowenna@talktalk.net who compiles the prayer list and sends it out and drop her a line. My contact details are pretty much everywhere if you need me- it is lovely to hear from Readers and their successes as well as in times of trouble.

With every blessing

Jim

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