

Open Space

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AUGUST 2021

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

AUGUST 2021

AUGUST or SABBATH...

AUGUST IS OFTEN a month of rest and holiday, a kind of Sabbath.

SABBATH is a beautiful creation from a concerned God wanting to take care of his children and encouraging them to rest and renewal.

It's very easy in our demanding lifestyles to never stop and take time out and many people have misunderstood Sabbath to be a legalistic requirement of religion, focusing on the 'can't' instead of its true purpose.

I've heard it described many times as the day 'you are not allowed to work,' or the day, 'you have to go to church.'

But the way we view Sabbath will affect the benefits we get from it.

If we see it as a negative, we will experience it as a negative. However, if we turn it around and see it as a positive, we will experience it as a positive.

We really do reap what we sow in this case. Our attitude really can dictate how we experience life and whether we really find fulfilment in it.

The religious leaders in Jesus' time often fell into the legalistic category, placing all sorts of demands on people and it was Jesus who corrected them when he pointed out, *'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'* (MARK 2:27).

The Sabbath was given as a gift for mankind's own good, not created as something to be a burden.

While reflecting on this, I felt drawn to write it down and this poem was the result, which I will leave you with and I hope it blesses you in some way.

Enjoy your August and I hope it is a time of refreshment and renewal.

God bless you. Lisa x

Sabbath

OH HOLY DAY on which we rest,
from all our strains and daily tests.
We touch a place we cannot see,
but feel within ... eternity.

WE come to the well which richly feeds,
our souls and minds with all their needs.

And joins us all in divine love,
a Holy Communion sent from above.



IN bread and wine and songs of joy, all that oppressed our souls destroyed.
We lift our hearts to heaven in praise,
as we find hope in him once raised.

OH Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
help us to love you the most.
Above our earthly commitments be,
the One who reigns eternally.

AND lead us home to eternal rest,
the fulfilment of that Sabbath, blest.
When pain and striving no more will be,
but eternal peace and harmony.

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St Stephens
SOUNDWELL

“I’m going fishing…”



NO, I’m not quoting Saint Peter as he and the other disciples set out on their fruitless fishing expedition shortly after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

NO, I AM quoting a gentleman from Soundwell who is currently living with a life-threatening condition and having to endure some rather aggressive treatments with pretty awful side effects. I shall call him Fred, although that is not his real name.

Fred is understandably prone to bouts of depression, even despair, but at other times he battles bravely and defiantly with his condition.

He doesn’t attend our St Stephens Church, or any Church for that matter, but he tells me he does believe in God.

We speak on the phone and from time to time I visit him, and he seems to enjoy it when I pray before I leave. When Fred announced recently that he was going fishing, it was to let me know that he would not be in touch for a while.

Clearly Fred finds the peace and solitude of sitting on the riverbank somehow therapeutic, and I certainly don’t begrudge him that for a second.

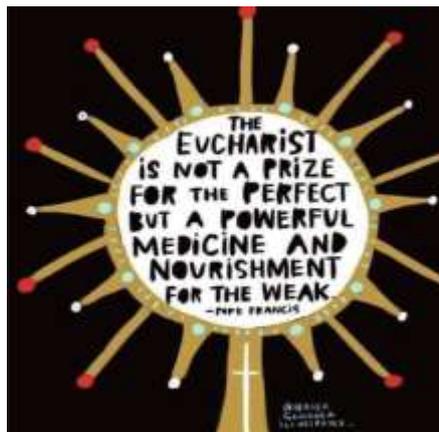
Indeed, it’s not only fishing that helps Fred, but also watching the occasional rugby match and going on holiday.

Life is a gift to be celebrated and lived to the full, and there’s nothing like a scary diagnosis and an uncertain prognosis to bring into sharp relief the wisdom of that very sound advice ‘Carpe Diem’.

I believe Fred is absolutely right to prioritise the activities that he finds relaxing and from which he derives most pleasure. So far as I can see, however –and I accept that my perspective may well be flawed, he doesn’t find any great strength and comfort in his faith and neither does he seem to want to come to Church, except on an extremely ad-hoc basis.

Indeed, he has candidly told me on more than one occasion that he simply can’t face Church.

One might expect him to perhaps be angry with God, but I see no evidence for that. Rather it seems that God simply doesn’t feature much in his thinking about his situation.



Now I will be the first to say that people should never confuse God and the Church. The former, after all, is wonderful, glorious and perfect, whilst the latter is flawed, imperfect and often ineffectual.

I do find myself wondering, however, whether I as a priest, and the church as a whole, are somehow failing Fred as he walks through the valley of the shadow of death.

After all, I believe firmly that God’s grace works in many ways, but that one of those ways for sure, is through the sacraments... and I believe that the Holy Spirit makes up what is lacking in the humanity of which the Body of Christ is comprised.

There have been moments when I have prayed with Fred and he has been visibly moved and grateful.

I know that he values my ‘friendship’... and that is the word he uses. But, Fred is resistant to coming to Church or being put on the parish prayer list, and I have more than a sneaking suspicion that beyond the practicalities of friendship, his faith is doing rather less to sustain him than the peaceful riverbank.

Of course I regularly do that thing that priests do, and I internalise the issue and ask myself where I’m failing; but in my more objective moments, I recognise that Fred is far from alone in reacting in this way, and that whatever my own failures, there is also a failure at the heart of the church.

It is the failure to convince people of the breathtakingly transformative nature of a relationship with the living, loving God.

Fred seems to think Church is a social club and in some ways, Covid apart, he is very right.

We are a friendly bunch who care for and look out for one another. But for Fred, we aren’t his sort of ‘club’.

So, it’s got me thinking, if this is Fred’s opinion and understanding, how many of us regular worshippers, seem to find nothing exhilarating or life-giving about our belief in God? But as I write this, I need to remember that as a priest I occupy a strange land.

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Readings & Collects

FOR AUGUST 2021

FOR THOSE OF US who are not able to attend services or who wish to use the Sunday readings and Collect Prayer to worship at home, here they are:

SUNDAY 01 AUGUST 2021

9th Sunday after Trinity

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

GRACIOUS FATHER, revive your Church in our day, and make her holy, strong and faithful, for your glory's sake in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 08 AUGUST 2021

10th Sunday after Trinity

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

LORD OF HEAVEN and earth, as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer, give us patience and courage never to lose hope, but always to bring our prayers before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 15 AUGUST 2021

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Isaiah 61:10-end; Psalm 45:10-end; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 1:46-55

ALMIGHTY GOD, who looked upon the lowliness of the Blessed Virgin Mary and chose her to be the mother of your only Son: grant that we who are redeemed by his blood may share with her in the glory of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

SUNDAY 22 AUGUST 2021

12th Sunday after Trinity

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Psalm 34:15-end; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

GOD OF constant mercy, who sent your Son to save us: remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our thankfulness may grow, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 29 AUGUST 2021

13th Sunday after Trinity

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15; James 1:17-end;

Mark 7:1-8, 14 & 15:21-23

ALMIGHTY GOD, you search us and know us: may we rely on you in strength and rest on you in weakness, now and in all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

FOR 01 AUGUST

CHRIST who ascended to heaven above, is the same Jesus whose nature is love. Who, once descended, to bring to this earth, new birth. Gifts have been given well suited to each, some to be prophets, to pastor or preach. Some, through the Gospel, to challenge, convert and teach.

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling each of us to serve your Kingdom through this, our church. You have blessed each and every one of us with so many gifts, graces and talents. Lord, help us to recognise and know the path that you wish us to take, so that we fulfil your dreams for us as individuals, enabling us to lead an enriched and full life in service to you. We are all unique. Lord, teach us to use our gifts and graces, working alongside others, so that we may grow together and keep step with each other as a body of Christ. A united body of Christ, living and working to your praise and glory.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, you created a world of wonder and splendour for everyone to share. Sometimes we are greedy, selfish and wasteful, while others live in poverty, are hungry, displaced, homeless or living in a country that is torn apart by war.

Lord we ask that you bless all the organisations that work with unending strength and passion, to help those in need throughout the world.

We pray that leaders of all nations strive to make wise decisions to end the injustice, agony and suffering of their people. As the country begins to open up once again after the pandemic, we continue to pray for all those that have continued to work tirelessly, and at risk to their own health, throughout this time of illness and uncertainty.

As we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world, we recognise that some face persecution and hardship for proclaiming their faith in you. We give thanks that we can worship here at St Stephens in safety.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In our Cycle of Prayer this week we pray for our Churchwarden Gill Mayo. We give thanks for her diligence and dedication to this time consuming role within the church. We also pray for Sandy and Lin Cooper, Teresa, Robert, Benjy & Jacob Cooper, Josie Creedy and Marlene Crew. In our parish we pray for the residents of Chestnut Road, Chestnut Way and Chiphouse Road.

We continue to remember and pray for all those named on the prayer board.

Lord we ask that your comforting presence is felt by all who mourn and are in sorrow at the loss of a loved one.

In our times of trouble Lord, we know

that every human being is known and loved by you. Let's take a moment to say a silent prayer for those on our hearts and in our minds today that are struggling and in need of our prayers.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious Lord, we thank you for your love and forgiveness. Lead us to follow your path, to not do the things that are displeasing to you, but pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love and gentleness. May the people that we meet witness these things in us and see us as a united body of Christ, true followers of you, our loving Lord.

Dear Lord, you are the bread of life that sustains us. Sometimes we fail to feel your presence and hear your voice in our busy lives. Open our eyes, ears and hearts so that we may see you, hear you and know you when we are most in need, and give us your peace. Nourished by the bread of heaven may we have the strength and courage to share our faith with others that do not know you.

Let us talents and tongues employ, reaching out with a shout of joy. Bread is broken, the wine is poured, Christ is spoken, seen and heard. Christ is able to make us one, at his table he sets the tone. Teaching people to live, to bless, love in words and deeds express. Jesus calls us in and sends us out, bearing fruit in a world of doubt. Gives us love to tell, bread to share, God Immanuel, everywhere.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen. **Julia Merrifield**

FOR 08 AUGUST

HEAVENLY Father, we rejoice and give you thanks that we are once again able to meet together in worship and praise in the name of Jesus. As we raise our voices in song and partake of His 'Bread of Life' we ask that you will meet with us and fill us with the love and the energy of your Holy Spirit, binding us as one body to be a beacon of light and hope to all around us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray thanks for the many blessings we share here in this church community. Especially we thank you for your servant Lisa and all those who with her have led us through so many times of uncertainty. In our regular cycle of prayer this week Lord, we ask your special blessings for Ruth Crosby, Leigh Davey, Iris Davis, Pam Davis, Ros Davis, and for Bernard Denyer. We pray for those of our neighbours who live in Church Road, Cogan Road and in Colston Close, and we give you thanks also Lord for the team who support and assist our Church Warden.

Continued overleaf >

Prayers of Intercession *continued*

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Father, we know there are many among us for whom life is difficult. Some who are physically unable to worship with us in Church but who are still with us in Spirit, those who are struggling generally with health problems, physical or mental and who sometimes find the stresses of life to be overpowering. And so Lord we ask that we may in just a few moments of quiet individual prayer, bring to you any who are on our hearts at this time and that even as we pray, they may know the comfort of your loving and healing presence with them.

So, in just a few moments let us bring to Him those we know who are in such need. Jesus said 'Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted' and here Lord we thank you for the lives of those we know who have recently passed into your loving and eternal care, and we ask that you will uphold and strengthen all those close to them in the deep sadness of their loss

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And now let us rejoice for Grace Margaret Johnson and for her mum Katie Smith who are both to be baptised later today. Lord we pray for your blessings for Grace and Katie and ask that today will be the beginning of a new life both for them, and for all those who witness and take part in this very special sacrament of entry into the family of your Church.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And now let us pray for our Nation and for peace and well-being throughout our troubled world. Lord we thank you for this land in which we live. We thank you for our homes, our families and friends, and for all those with whom we come into contact during our daily round. Especially we give you thanks for your servant Elizabeth our Queen, and for all those who under her authority, govern, administer and safeguard our way of life.

Lord, as we begin to enjoy gradual return to more social interaction, we pray that you will continue to grant wisdom and guidance to our Prime Minister and others in Parliament, as they strive to lead us safely through the continuing threat of viral infection.

In the wider world Lord, we pray that the leaders of all nations will work together, in peace and determination, in one accord with each other, to bring about a safer and healthier world for all mankind.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, our hearts go out to all those affected by the recent flood disaster in Germany and Belgium and in the

Netherlands. We pray for those who mourn the loss of their loved ones, those whose homes have been completely destroyed and we ask that you will be in the midst of this tragedy, as those affected try to recover from the shock of this horrendous event and rebuild their broken lives.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Jesus has commanded us to 'Love one another as He has loved us' and so Lord we ask that you will enable each one of us, according to our abilities, to be witnesses to the world around us, of His abiding love and saving grace.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen. **Brian Brown**

FOR 15 AUGUST

DEAR Heavenly Father in whom we put our faith, hope and trust. We have waited so long to be able to once again join together in worship and praise. We have longed for the time when we may sit by a friend, hold or shake hands, embrace or hug when sharing the peace, and to be able to raise our hearts and voices to you in hymns of praise. Hopefully we are at that stage now, but please give us patience, toleration and understanding when things do not go as we would wish. As we move forward and restrictions are eased and lifted, help us to respect the wishes of others, as we would wish them to respect our wishes, as not everyone will feel able to move forward at the same pace.

Lord of all hopefulness, in Your Mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for the young people of our parish who are taking a well-earned break from their studies at school, college and university, and we pray that they will use this time to recharge and be ready to return to their studies in September.

We think of those who will be returning to a new school or moving on to college, university or taking up an apprenticeship. Lord be with them and give them courage and confidence as they adjust to a new and challenging environment. We also think of those who have now completed their education and are moving on to a place of work. Let us take a moment to remember anyone known to us and in our thoughts.

Lord of all eagerness, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for the whole world where there is so much unrest and uncertainty. We pray for the leaders of all countries that they will seek your help and guidance when making difficult and important decisions which will affect the peace and harmony of the world, making

it a better place for all. We pray that you will help us to respect the world you have given us and help us to protect and improve the environment around us.

Lord of all peacefulness in Your Mercy, Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father we pray for all those who are sick and suffering in mind, body or soul. We pray for those who take care of them at home or in hospital. Give them the strength and patience they need each day.

We remember those on our prayer board who need our prayers and for anyone known to us personally. We pray for those who have recently been bereaved and are feeling the pain of loss and grief. Please be their light and hope in their darkest moments.

Lord of all gentleness, in Your Mercy, hear our prayer.

In our cycle of prayer this week we pray for those who read your word and lead us in prayer, and pray that you will guide them as they read your word and pray on behalf of the congregation.

From our church family we pray for Margaret Dodge, Stella Duffty, Bob and Nancy Emery, Ken Fox, Lynn, Bernard and Brett Francis & Louise.

In our wider community we pray for all living in Colston Street, Cotswold View and Cranham Close.

We pray that they will know that our prayers and thoughts are with them, and that You love each and every one of them.

Lord of all kindness, in Your Mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy; **We put our trust in You.**

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith; **We put our trust in You.**

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace; **We put our trust in You.**

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm; **We put our trust in You.**

We pray that your love and peace will be in our hearts at the beginning and the end of each new day.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. **Gill Ogborne**

FOR 22 AUGUST

GOOD morning, Lord. Thank You for assuring us of victory today if we follow your battle plan. So by faith we can claim victory over all that we face today and in the coming weeks.

Help us Lord to prepare ourselves for the battle ahead, by faith we must put on the belt of truth. The truth about You, Lord, that you are a sovereign God who knows everything about us, both our strengths and weaknesses.

Lord, you know our breaking point and have promised not to allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.

The truth about us, Lord is that we are all new creatures daily in Christ and have been set free from the power of sin. We are your children, and nothing can separate us from your love. The truth is that you have a purpose for us this day—someone to encourage, someone to share with, someone to love.

Lord help us, by faith, to put on the breastplate of righteousness. Through this we guard our hearts and emotions. Help us not to allow our hearts to attach itself to anything that is impure. Help us not to allow our emotions to rule our decisions, set them on what is right and good and just and that we will live today by what is true, not by what we feel.

Lord, this morning help us to put on the sandals of the gospel of peace. We are available to You, Lord. Send us where you will. Guide us to those who need encouragement or physical help of some kind. Use us to solve conflicts whenever they may arise. Make us a calming presence in every circumstance in which you place us. Help us not be hurried or rushed, for our schedule is in your hands. Help us not to leave a trail of tension and apprehension and that we will leave tracks of peace and stability everywhere we go.

Lord help us to take up the shield of faith. Our faith is in you and you alone. Apart from you, we can do nothing. With you, we can do all things.

No temptation that comes our way can penetrate your protecting hand. Help us not to be afraid, for you are with us throughout this day.

Lord, by faith help us to put on the helmet of salvation. You know how our minds can be filled with doubt, and fear. Help us to dwell on nothing but what is good and right and pleasing to you. Lastly, help us to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is Your Word.

Thank You for the precious gift of Your Word. It is strong and powerful and able to defeat anything. Your Word says that we are free from the power of sin. Your Word says that He that is in us is greater than He that is in the world. So by faith help us to take up the strong and powerful sword of the Spirit, which is able to defend us in time of attack, comfort us in time of sorrow, teach us in time of quiet and prayer, and prevail against the power of the enemy on behalf of others who need the truth to set them free.

So, Lord, help us now to rejoice in that you have chosen us to represent you to this lost, hurt, and grieving. May others see Jesus in us, and want us to share the

Good News with them, that they may also be set free by your power and glory.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those on the prayer board and in our congregation: Rowan Francis, Sarah Fry, Julie, Shaun, Josh & Hollie Fudge, Matt, Jenny & Lauren Gait and all those living on Crispin Way, Crossfield Road and Crown Road.

We pray for our Deanery Synod Representatives, that they may have wisdom and insight in all the decisions and discussions they have in representing your people in Soundwell Parish. Thank you Lord that they serve You quietly and lovingly.

Heavenly Father, we pray for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them. Help them know Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light which no darkness can quench.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

May the consuming fire of your presence Lord remove every obstacle and crooked place from our heart today and always, replacing it with a passionate holy life befitting you our great King. At any cost may we walk in the Light!

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Nicola Read

FOR 29 AUGUST

LORD of our time, as we come to this turning-point in our year, be with us and uphold us as we move forward in our lives and in our journey of faith.

At this time of holiday and recreation we remember before you all those who are taking time to rest and refresh themselves. We remember families who are spending time together at home or away.

At this time when family life has been so disrupted, help them to repair any difficulties or tensions that remain, so your spirit of wholeness and harmony might prevail. Put them in right minds and right relationships for a fresh start in the coming weeks.

We know that you, Jesus, sometimes needed to draw aside and take time to be with your heavenly father.

Help those on holiday at the moment to re-connect with you and benefit from your comforting presence as they enjoy their time away from everyday pressures.

So a few moments of quiet to hold before the Lord any families we know who need his blessing at this time.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We remember those whose work is hard and tiring: doctors and nurses, all kinds of medical workers and any engaged in your work of healing, especially during these difficult times of the pandemic.

Help those who are exhausted and drained by their work to find rest and refreshment in you.

So a few moments of quiet to hold before the Lord anyone known to us whose work has been burdensome at this time.

Lord you told us:

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' MATT 11:30.

Help those struggling to cope with the pressures of their lives and work. Help them to put their trust in your promises, cast their burdens onto you and find your peace

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We remember those who at this time are taking a break from education. Whether they be teachers or learners or those who support the work of schools, colleges and universities.

Lord help them to know your presence as they prepare themselves for the new term which lies ahead, with all its uncertainties. So a moment of quiet for us to remember any known to us engaged in education, in whatever capacity. We hold them before the Lord for his blessing.

Lord you taught us not to worry about tomorrow. That is so hard for us to do, Lord, yet we know we can always trust your word. Help all those whose worry about tomorrow casts a shadow over the joys of today.

Help us to trust you, Lord, help us to be with you fully, help us know your peace in this and every moment.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In our Cycle of Prayer for this week we bring before the Lord: The Sacristan and Servers, Sheila Galsworthy, Pat Garner, Brian Grant, Janice Harland, Geoff and Joyce Harris, Ivor Harris, and our neighbours in Crownleaze, Deerhurst and Deerswood.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And finally, at this time of preparing for new beginnings, a prayer of St Ignatius of Loyola:

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen. Peter Robbins

“I’m going fishing..”

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MY relationship with God is, after all, inescapable. My vocation locks me into this relationship with the divine. This is of course, a very privileged position.

Unlike the priest, most people do not automatically have a structure to their day that constantly reminds them of God, nor a fixed framework on which to build their prayer life.

Of course, some choose to create such structures and frameworks, but it is for them a conscious decision and a matter of personal discipline.

Others struggle, I suspect, to discern where God actually ‘fits’ into the complexity of their lives, and the temptation is to compartmentalise God, confining him to that regular (or perhaps not so regular) activity known as ‘Church’ whilst struggling to balance the many pressing demands of life as worker, partner/spouse, parent, grandparent, neighbour etc.

Faith, is about following Jesus in the here and now, but it is also very much about the eternal destiny of our immortal soul.

IT is, therefore, quite literally, a matter of life and death, and is the most significant aspect of the believer’s life. Belief in the love of God and the salvation we are offered through Jesus Christ should, therefore, be a cause of insurmountable joy, and, when the difficult times come, hopefully a source of solace and strength.

I have no wish to sound judgmental, but I am genuinely perplexed when this is clearly not the case for Fred.

Paradoxically, of course, some people who seldom think about God and have little or no church involvement do often turn to prayer *in extremis*. Ironically, for them – perhaps at a subconscious level – there’s a realisation that God is extraordinary and is therefore to be turned to at extraordinary times even if ignored in – and perceived as irrelevant to – the ordinary.



Perhaps for ‘habitual’ worshippers there is a danger that God becomes too ordinary.

WHEN, in St John’s Gospel, that Peter announces he is going fishing, I suspect that it is an attempt to rediscover the ordinary and to re-experience the mundane.

He and the other disciples have, after all, been through a rather amazing experience – and maybe they need to step off the emotional and spiritual rollercoaster for a while.

But the resurrected Jesus once again transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary as he comments on their empty nets and then tells them to cast them again, resulting in an enormous haul.

Spiritual renewal is about rediscovering the extraordinary nature of God and realising afresh its implications for both life and death.

Interestingly, my dictionary’s generic definition of the term ‘renewal’, is *‘the replacement or repair of something’*.

Spiritual renewal is the repair of a faith that has become reduced to the ordinary or the habitual.

None of this, I hasten to add, is intended as a criticism of Fred.

I have great affection for him and enormous respect for the courage

and patience with which he’s facing his current challenges, even if, as I suspect, his faith isn’t the main springboard for this courage and patience.

ONE of the most well-known and much-loved modern worship songs by Matt Redman includes these words which I can seldom sing without a lump in my throat:

**AND on that day
when my strength is failing
the end draws near
and my time has come
Still my soul will sing your
praise unending
Ten thousand years and then
forevermore.**

I LONG for the day when we can sing those words again together in Church. But I also long for a day when Fred and the many others like him in our parish can sing them... and really mean them.

In the meantime, the challenge to those of us who know Jesus, is to present him afresh to all those we care about, and help them know of the extraordinary nature of our awesome God... and indeed, to be fishers of people.

I pray your catch is huge!

Amen.

Lisa xx

Charism, Covenant, Contract

TRANSFORMING CHURCH,
an address by the Bishop of Bristol,
the Rt Revd Vivienne Faull.

IN recent weeks as the lectionary has encouraged us to reflect on the story of the early church told in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, I have found myself intrigued by its glimpses of their life, and particularly by the encounter between Cornelius (not just a centurion, but a centurion of the Italian cohort, used to being at the heart of empire) and Peter (a fisherman from Galilee lodging in Joppa with Simon the tanner, whose occupations put them on the margins of Jewish life).

Cornelius and Peter have gender in common, but little else, until the spirit intervened and, driven by an angel and a vision, Peter unlocked the barrier of faith and culture and welcomed Gentiles to be baptised asserting, in words which would become fundamental to Christian theology in the thinking of Paul 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality'. And so a community's assumptions were disrupted and Peter had to explain himself and there had then to be a meeting (of rather more import, and probably less certainty of outcome, it has to be said, than any G7 assembly). After the meeting there had to be years of theological reflection, resulting in the creeds which offer us pillars for the church's faith in God, father, son and Holy Spirit.

So from a profound, and disruptive experience of God in the power of the Holy Spirit came a new covenant between God and followers of Christ, and then came new definitions of and boundaries to faith, definitions repeated in worship and passed from one generation to another. And at its core the affirmation that in Christ God shows no partiality.

Bishop's staff Simon Taylor alerted us to a paper by Sam Wells, written for the national church: *A future that's bigger than the past: renewal and reform in the church of England*'.

It's not exactly poolside reading, but it is important as this diocese reflects on the last nearly 7 years of Renewal & Reform under the banner of 'Creating Connections', and, as in the next weeks, we continue to reflect

on what we have learnt from the Engagement part of Transforming Church Together, and what we discern to be emerging as our vision and purpose for the coming years.

Sam's paper concludes by thinking about three important tasks (or concepts and even languages) for the life of the church. Each of these is there in the story of Cornelius and Peter. There is **Charism**, the gifts of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, gifts which so often come at a time when the church discovers its need of God.

For Peter that meant an openness to visions which transformed reality.

For Cornelius that meant baptism as a culmination of a journey of faith.

For us it might mean that, in place of a sense of scarcity we perceive and receive abundant life.

For both of them and for all of us, it means that the future can be so much bigger than the past.

Alongside Charism was **Covenant** as Cornelius, his relatives and friends join the great company of saints, with the mutuality of that extraordinary early Christian community whose funding activity was to sell their possessions and giving to those in need. The outcome was an interdependence which propelled the community outwards and which turned the world upside down. And it still can.

Our churches have dug deep into that covenantal life during Covid by setting up support networks, wrapped and delivered food parcels, sourced computers for schools, struggled to find ways to support those in care homes, attended to churchyards as places of refreshment, made the best of the constraints around weddings and funerals so they could be moments of blessing and so strengthened the bonds of faith and trust within our communities where we can be present and receptive and an ongoing source of blessing.

Alongside Charism and Covenant was **Contract**, as early Christian communities had to get their heads around their theological and ontological relationship with their Jewish forbears and neighbours and to establish Christian distinctiveness.

From that claim to distinctiveness emerged not just expectations but

agreements. Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their giving (pretending generosity whilst withholding wealth) discovered that they were subject to contract and were penalised with death. You and I are probably glad that Parish Share assumes covenant not contract relationship. Though there are moments...

And over the recent years this diocese has learnt the need for each of Charism and Contract and Covenant. Some brief examples.

Very recently we have learnt, belatedly, how the covenant between parts of the Anglican Communion was put to the test by the arrival of the Windrush generation, invited to our islands to enable our nation to recover from war. Holy, gifted Anglicans, with a discipline of faith and a charism which our church so needed, arrived at our church doors and were turned away because they were black. Our churches failed the test. The covenant was broken.

The church said the right things. But did not do them. So the recently published national policy drafted under the title from Lament to Action has set out actions against which this diocese will have to report so that, pray God, there will once again be Angels and Visions in our land as Charism is revealed again.

Another story surrounds our safeguarding failures where the gift of vulnerability offered by our sisters and brothers in the community of the church has been horribly abused, often, though not always, by leaders who seem to have great charism.

We thought for several decades that abuse could be prevented by making covenant relationships stronger, by emphasising the need for mutual respect and re-emphasising the need for honesty and penitence. But there was little change. So the church had to move from covenant to contract, to enforcing change through the law and its rigorous application. And it is the law which may, in the end, having established new norms, allow for covenant to be re-established and grace be restored.

And there are also joyful examples.

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01	Churchwarden: Gill	Sandy and Lin Cooper Teresa, Robert, Benjy & Jacob Cooper Josie Creedy, Marlene Crew	Chestnut Road Chestnut Way Chiphouse Road
08	Teams who assist the Churchwardens	Ruth Crosby, Leigh Davey Iris Davis, Pam Davis Ros Davis, Bernard Denyer	Church Road Cogan Road Colston Close
15	All who read or lead prayers in our services	Margaret Dodge, Stella Duffy Bob and Nancy Emery, Ken Fox Lynn, Bernard & Brett Francis & Louisa	Colston Street Cotswold View Cranham Close
22	Deanery Synod Representatives	Rowan Francis, Sarah Fry Julie, Shaun, Josh & Hollie Fudge Matt, Jenny & Lauren Gait	Crispin Way Crossfield Road Crown Road
29	Sacristan and Servers	Sheila Galsworthy, Pat Garner Brian Grant, Janice Harland Geoff and Joyce Harris, Ivor Harris	Crownleaze Deerhurst Deerswood

SUNDAY Community Worship Service at 10am
WEDNESDAY Service of Holy Communion at 10am.
Sunday 8am BCP Holy Communion resumes in September on 1st and 3rd Sundays.

DIARY

AUGUST		
15 Sunday	06.30pm	Memorial Service in Church
SEPTEMBER		
04 Saturday	09.30pm	Baptism Preparation in Church
09 Thursday	07.30pm	Bishop Viv licensing Lisa as Vicar in Church
26 Sunday	10.00am	Celebration of Harvest in Church

We will be requesting plants for our: PLANT SALE SPRING 2022
 It's a long way ahead I know, but now is the time to take cuttings, sow biennials, save and dry seeds and later, split perennials. (I have spare pots if required).
 Please help us make this a successful event. *Gill Mayo*

< *Continued from page 7*

The creation of St Nicholas and the Pattern Churches have been works of the Holy Spirit and one of my abiding memories of this Synod was the film of their life, and their transformative power.

They are works of Charism, and they breached the contract established by parish boundaries. As I arrived, there was still great anxiety around this breach. Yet by the grace of God, and the grace of Toby and Joel as leaders of these resourcing churches, new covenantal relationships have been established, and what might have been destructive competition has, mostly emerged as fruitful collaboration and a recognition of deep charism.

So back to today. The tasks of Diocesan Synod include the oversight, at governance level, of contract and covenant and charism. Our meetings allow us to:

- See the new things that the Spirit is doing in our midst, and rejoice.
- Strengthen the bonds of peace and of our common life even when constrained by meeting online.

• Debate the commitments expressed in annual budgets, to make policy commitments (most recently to our response to the Climate Emergency and our commitment to paying the Living Wage) and to establish diocesan wide plans and actions.

Each of these depends on the covenantal relationships between the networks formed by our parishes, our communities and our chaplaincies.

Our meetings enable us to ratify and publicise (to promulge, as the legal language puts it) the laws passed by the General Synod, most recently the Cathedrals Measure which will create the framework to enable our cathedral to flourish greatly in the coming era.

At the heart of that work has, for the last 7 years, been Oliver Home, holding the tension between contract and covenant and charism on our behalf with huge commitment, intelligence, skill, humour, agility and humility. What Oliver has done now enables the Diocese of Bristol to dare to imagine a future that is bigger than the past and to trust God for that.

From across the diocese of Bristol, we offer you our deep gratitude and our ongoing prayers.

Rt Revd Vivienne Faull
 Bishop of Bristol 22 June 2021

SINCE JUNE
Funerals

• July 05: **Freda Lillian Randall** (84).
 The celebration of Freda's life was held at St Stephens Church, Soundwell, followed by a Burial at Mangotsfield Cemetery.

Please hold her children; Denise, Terry and Mike; her 12 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren, as well as the wider family in your prayers.

Serving at the Altar

WOULD YOU like to serve at the Altar during Holy Communion and support Lisa and Sandy, our Priests, in preparing for Holy Communion? As you ponder and pray about this, if you want more information then please have a word with Trish or Tony or me and we will let you know more. *Thank you. Lisa*



Dial-a-SERMON

Listen to this week's Sermon on your phone:
0117 456 2090
(Cost is the same as a local call)

OR



Click-a-SERMON

Visit our website and use the audio link to listen on-line
<http://saintstephensoundwell.org>

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

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Priest in Charge, 52 Gladstone Street Soundwell, Bristol BS16 4RF Telephone 0117 957 4297
-  • **Revd Sandy Cooper**
Associate Minister, 1 Deerhurst Soundwell, Bristol BS15 1XH Telephone 0117 967 2621
-  • **Peter Robbins**
Lay Minister, 13 Wood Road Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DT Telephone 0117 967 9576
-  • **Gill Mayo**
Church Warden Telephone 0117 956 9796

