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What is the purpose of the church?

This month we enter the season of Lent that leads up to Easter. The 40 fasting days of Lent represent the 40 days we are told in the Gospels that Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness; days that were really a time for him to explore his experience at his baptism and the direction he would take in life.

At the end of that time he went home to Nazareth and on the Sabbath went to the synagogue where he was asked to read the scripture and speak. You can read the story in Luke chapter 4. I preached on this story in January and was asked to summarize my sermon for Look-In, so here goes.

At the heart of the story are the verses Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the

captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19)

Then he said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Most scholars agree that the way Luke tells the story suggests this is a pivotal moment in Jesus' life; that the words he read in the synagogue are fundamental to his understanding of his mission, of God's mission. But to say this passage describes God's mission still begs many questions.

Who are the poor and what is good news for them? A report published by Oxfam in January this year highlights the global inequality of wealth. According to the report, the richest 62 people in the world have more wealth than the poorest 50% (3.6 billion people) put together, and the richest 1% have more wealth than the remaining 99% (incidentally, anyone whose total assets are worth more than £533,000



is part of that 1%). But is being poor just about not having money? What about those who have lost everything, lost hope, lost home, lost family, lost their future, the outsider and the refugee?

In purely financial terms it might be that some kind of redistribution of wealth from the absurdly rich to the abject poor is part of God's day of favour (or salvation as some versions put it). But good news for the poor is not just about having more money, it is about having hope and home and future restored. So, should showing and sharing hospitality to those who have no place to call home be part of that good news?

Who are the captives and what is release for them? People in Wormwood Scrubs or Broadmoor? Do we want them to be released before their time? But what about those held captive in Belmarsh and Harmondsworth detention centres? Could God's will be that these people find release? Then there are those imprisoned by grief, regret, anger, bitterness, etc. What might release from captivity mean for them? Surely part of it must be to know they are loved and

valued. Is Jesus saying that to show love is the mission of God and, when love is shown God's day of salvation is fulfilled?

Who are the blind and what does it mean for them to recover sight? Does this just refer to those who have some form of visual impairment? Or does it include those who choose not to see, those whose hearts and minds are closed, those of fixed opinions, and those who have lost the ability to see the humanity of other people? In which case, what does recovery of sight mean? Maybe the day of the Lord is a day of challenge and shock to our preconceptions and prejudices, a day that moves us from our mental comfort zones and forces us to see the limitlessness of God's love.

Who are the oppressed and what does it mean to be set free? Did Jesus have in mind just those living under a foreign occupying power, as the Jewish people were at that time under Roman rule? Perhaps we should also include those who live under oppressive ideologies, like that of the so-called Islamic State. But then there are some pretty oppressive Christian ideologies that scare me, and

some oppressive attitudes in wider society that lead some people to think it is acceptable to throw stones and eggs at the homes of asylum seekers, or do worse. Is the freedom Jesus had in mind a freedom to practice one's own faith and culture without fear of attack? I believe God's day of favour is a day when people live together showing acceptance and tolerance.

The passage Jesus read in the Synagogue challenges us about our understanding of God's mission and what 'the day of favour (or salvation)' means; it reminds us that God's salvation is not about having a place in heaven, but about having a place for God's attitude in our minds and in our actions here on earth?

The root of this vision of God's kingdom lies in the Old Testament laws. In the book of Leviticus, in a passage headed 'Laws of Holiness and Justice', we find the command:

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love

them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34)

A simple instruction to treat strangers in our land as if they are our own people.

The Old Testament book of Ruth tells the story of a family who twice experienced being refugees. I highly recommend reading this beautiful short book in one go. In it we are told how a man called Boaz put the instruction in Leviticus into practice. Then at the end of the story, when the descendants of Ruth are listed we discover the great King David was her grandson. From this foreigner, this asylum seeker, came the man most Jews look to as the greatest leader in their history, the man who really made them a great nation. The point being that by keeping the law to welcome the stranger the nation became stronger.

What is the purpose of the church? Surely it is to continue the mission of Jesus. To work for freedom for the oppressed and to bring good news to the poor is to continue the mission of

Jesus. The problems of the world sometimes seem too large for us to do much about. But global issues always have a local aspect to them. We cannot solve the crisis in Syria or do much about the reasons people leave their homes to make a new life in a new country. But perhaps we can help in some small way by showing and sharing love and acceptance and hospitality and support to the strangers in our midst.

Nick

Good Grief - Bald Statements

**An exhibition of sculptures by
Jean Parker
12th to 27th March at Christ
Church**

The sculptures in this exhibition were born as a reflection of Jean Parker's own experience of cancer. The eight terracotta heads emerged during the course of a seven-day silent retreat, and present a powerful and unique visual exploration of the grief process. These relate not only to loss of health,

but also to significant loss of any kind. The hope is that the exhibition will help stimulate discussion and the understanding of powerful emotions, which can feel overwhelming.

To see these images as transitional stages and part of a natural process experienced by many may prove helpful and reassuring, offering glimpses of hope when all seems lost. The emotions expressed in the sculptures – Denial, Disbelief, Questioning, Anger, Depression, Acceptance, Healing and Peace – are all part of this natural process.

Grief is a journey everyone makes at some time. It is the aim of this exhibition to enable that to be a journey towards Peace.

The sculptures will be located in the church and can be seen whenever the building is open. Official opening times are:

Tuesdays, 10am-3pm

Wednesdays, 5-8pm

Thursdays, 10am-3pm

Saturdays, 10am-12noon

Special events include:

Saturday 12th March, 11.00am, official opening, with talk by Jean Parker

Sunday 13th March, 11.00am morning worship, with Jean Parker

Good Friday, 25th March, 10.00am-12.00noon, time for reflection

Saturday 26th March, 1.00pm, 'Thanks for the Memory' a service for all who have someone they want to remember

Easter Sunday, 27th March, 11.00am morning worship

Volunteers wanted to be available during the official opening times. If you can help please contact Nick Skelding.

40acts - changing the world, one generous act at a time

Most people give up something for Lent but what would happen if you choose to give out instead of giving up? To use Lent as a focus for giving to others, one small step at a time? 40acts is a Lent challenge that encourages you to do just that. 40

small acts of generosity – one for each day of Lent. Each day, a different challenge – a different way of showing kindness and being generous to those around us.

This will be the third year I've taken part in the 40acts challenge and already I'm looking forward to that daily email arriving, bringing with the reflection for the day and a challenge to complete.

This year, once again, there is also a traffic light system for the acts – allowing several different options for completing the challenge depending on just how generous or challenged you would like to be!

Last year's challenges included the following:

- Picking up litter somewhere in your local area.
- Taking time to thank someone for something they've done.
- Making the effort to arrive somewhere on time.
- Switching the phone off and going offline for a whole day.
- Spending quality time with someone.

- Trying to widen your social circle.
- Being the first to volunteer to meet a need.
- Putting someone else's schedule first and doing what they wanted to do for a day.
- Sharing your story.
- A big anonymous act of generosity.

Some were fairly easy, some very hard and some took me outside of my comfort zone but the traffic light system helped take make the more challenging ones easier to complete. Somehow I managed to complete all of the challenges. It made me more mindful of the small things I could do every day to make a difference to those around me and helped me to become aware too of some bad habits that I needed to break.

You can find more about the 40acts challenge on their website (<http://40acts.org.uk/>) where you can also sign up to receive their daily emails. This year is the 6th year that 40 acts has been running – last year over 74,000 people signed up and contributed to

2.9 million small acts of generosity. Hope you can join me and help change the world, one small act of generosity at a time!

Louise George

Boys and Girls Come Out to Play

There has been much press coverage lately about those who wish to be recorded as 'gender neutral'. There are those with female bodies who believe they should have been given a male body. There are males who, though in a male body, feel female. There are those who feel they are both male and female. There have been two suicides by men who felt they were female and who dressed and behaved as women who were sent to male prisons where they were verbally and physically abused. There are some who want to write 'neutral' on forms asking for their gender. (Some experts of course claim that none of us are exclusively male or female or exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. Shades of David Bowie perhaps?

Brighton College (an independent day and boarding fee-paying school) has recently changed its uniform rule to allow both sexes to wear either the male or female uniform. There was a press report to say that one boy had opted to wear the female uniform. Apparently the students took the change in their stride and some other school have said they are considering following suit.

All of this is challenge to the churches. How are we going to react if a 'gender neutral' person comes to worship with us? What if someone with facial stubble and a broken voice arrives dressed as a woman? Are they going to be frozen out by embarrassed stares and made to feel unwelcome? What if a boy asks to join the Girls' Brigade or a girl wants to join the Boys' Brigade and play football?

Now of course we can bury our heads in the sand and tell ourselves that 'it wouldn't happen here'. That would hardly be compatible with our Mission Statement though would it?

Or we can include these issues in our thinking about how we offer welcome and how we make our Mission Statement more sharply focussed. Thinking is always painful. It means surrendering long held complacencies and setting out into uncharted territory. We sing "Lead, kindly Light" and yet often we mean "Lead us to where we are already".

You may or may not want to think through this (or any other) issue. However, we could always have another debate about chairs instead!!

The floor is yours. But before you take it, read Micah 6 v 8!

Howard Cooper

Lenten Film Night

Come and start Lent with the film THE WAY followed by a discussion.

Wednesday 10th February (7.00pm) in the Chapel. Film.

Wednesday 17th February (7.30pm) in the vestibule. Discussion.

'THE WAY' is a powerful and inspirational story about family, friends and the challenges we face while navigating this ever-changing and complicated world. Martin Sheen plays Tom, an irascible American doctor who comes to France to deal with the tragic loss of his son. Rather than return home, Tom decides to embark on the historical pilgrimage "The Way of St. James" to honour his son's desire to finish the journey. What Tom doesn't plan on is the profound impact this trip will have on him. Through unexpected and oftentimes amusing experiences along "The Way," Tom discovers the difference between "the life we live and the life we choose."

Church family news

- Congratulations to Susan Edwards on her recent engagement.
- Congratulations to Christian Hinton on passing his driving test.

From the archives

The following article appeared in the February 1980 issue of Look. This article was written 26 years ago and yet could have just as easily been written today, albeit with different places mentioned.

War and the Refugee

"The most flagrant violation of the rights of man occurs when a people is deprived of the rights of the land on which it has lived and has to move elsewhere."

Albert Schweitzer (Nobel Peace Prize Address)

That "most flagrant violation" of human rights has become worse with the passage of time. Between 1500 and 1600 there were 87 wars; in the next 100 years there were 239 wars; the number in this century will surely number more than 1000 for by 1965 there had been 892.*

Where there are wars there are inevitably refugees. The News Reader last night reported "Refugees from

Afghanistan are crossing the border into Pakistan”.

The grim truth of the refugee problem was brought home to me when I was sitting in the front pew of a Congregational Church in Southport in 1950. The speaker representing the World Council of Churches had told of the work being done to rehabilitate the European refugees of World War II. I asked him how long it would take to resolve the problem and was told that it would not be solved in our lifetime; it was part and parcel of the life of modern nations.

Generally, it happens that refugees move from a country at war to a country already struggling to provide for its population, and the welcome is often far from friendly. At a recent World Council of Churches consultation on Indonesian refugees, a pastor from Malaysia challenged the churches to charter a Boeing 747 and start landing Indo-Chinese refugees uninvited at the biggest airport in the USA. They were considering the 370,000 waiting,

crowded in the transit camps of South Asia, herded like animals, threatened by disease and demoralisation.

The Co-ordinator of refugee services commenting on the pastor's suggestion said “Here is a new phenomenon when countries absolutely reject accepting more refugees. It puts tremendous pressure on the world as a whole.”

But Indonesia and Afghanistan are simply two of the more obvious areas. “Churches Fight for Forgotten Refugees” it says in a headline of the December issue of the ‘New Internationalist’. The reference is to the refugees from torture and arbitrary imprisonment in Brazil, and to refugees from Chile and Uruguay, seeking life in Argentina, only to experience a coup d’etat there, so that their hosts joined them in their stateless misery, along with those of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru. Africa has also had its share of wars – the problem is there in every continent.

Britain, on the other hand has not had these misfortunes, for it has not had an internal war for 300 years – even America was fighting on her own soil less than 100 years ago. Those who flee from Britain do it voluntarily, often for the privilege of holding on to their wealth and with promises of return when the taxing of incomes favours their greed. So we are shielded from the plight of the contemporary refugee.

Compassion is inspired by pictures of Biafra at one time and Kampuchea at another, but the problem is a continuous one.

The church must not cease to speak to the world of the responsibility of those who live in stable societies, and are nourished, clothed, housed, working and medically supervised, for the homeless refugee, bearing in mind with William Blake that "It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted... To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer. While our olive and vine sing and laugh round our door, and our children bring fruit and

flowers... It is an easy thing to rejoice in the tents of prosperity..."

Derek Strange

*(*Editors note: I have not been able to find a figure for total wars in the 20th century although it is estimated that 187 million people died as a result of war during the 20th century, which was the most murderous in recorded history)*

Churches Prayer Diary

w/c 7th February - North Hillingdon Methodist.

w/c 14th February - Northwood Methodist.

w/c 21st February - Pinner Methodist.

w/c 28th February - Ruislip Methodist.

Look-In

Please help us to produce an interesting newsletter by handing in news items or articles to the office, or sending them by email to Louise George (publicity@christchurchuxbridge.org.uk). The next issue of Look-In will be the March issue and the deadline for articles for this is Friday 26th February 2016.

Church Calendar

All events are at Christ Church unless indicated by an X in the final column

Day/ Date	Event	Group	Leader	
February				
Tue 9	Tuesday Club	Church		
Wed 10	Introduction to Lent – Film Night	Church	Nick Skelding	
Thu 11	Craft Group	Church	Doreen Smith	
Sat 13	Saturday Morning Coffee	Boys Brigade		
Sa 13/ Su 14	Senior/Brigader Sleepover	GB	Stephanie Marr	
Sun 14	Sunday lunch			
Tue 16	Tuesday Club	Church		
Wed 17	Introduction to Lent – Discussion of film seen on Feb 10	Church	Nick Skelding	
Thu 18	Pop-in	Church		
Sat 20	Saturday Morning Coffee			
Tue 23	Tuesday Club	Church		
	Worship Planning Group	Church		
Thu 25	Craft Group	Church	Doreen Smith	
Sat 27	Saturday Morning Coffee			
March				
Tue 1	Tuesday Club	Church		
Thu 3	Pop-in	Church		
Sat 5	Saturday Morning Coffee			
	Jack Petchey Awards Presentation Event (Old Kensington Town Hall)	BB	Paul Edgeworth	X

WHO'S

Christ Church
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01895 258956

Registered charity
no. 1139255

Ministry team:
Rev'd Nicholas
Skelding
Deacon Jackie
Fowler

Administrator
Martin Vowles
01895 258956

Contacts via office for:

Brigades:
Girls' -
Stephanie Marr
Boys' -
Paul Edgeworth

Junior Church
Club -
Jenny Peet

Tuesday Club -
Wendy Pollard

Prayer Tree -
Val Bailey
Rosemary Moere

WHO!

February Services

(All services are 11am unless stated otherwise)

- 7th Rev'd Nick Skelding (Holy Communion)
14th Rev'd Nick Skelding (All Age Worship)
21st Rev'd Dr Michael Jagessar (URC Secretary for Racial Justice
and Multicultural Ministry)
28th Christ Church Worship Group

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SIRI ... SAY GRACE

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