

GRAPEVINE

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'He shall direct your paths'

"5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."
Proverbs 3v5&6 NKJV

Dear Friends,
 God does not want us to wander round the desert as the Israelites did after crossing the Red Sea, before they arrived in the promised land. He wants us to listen to Him, like Joshua and Caleb did (Numbers 13) not like the other 10 spies sent in to find out what the opposition looked like. Joshua and Caleb looked in faith, saw exactly what the others saw, but saw it through the lens of trust-

ing God. When we face struggles and fears we can see them as huge like giants, or we can trust God, that he will see us through.



This is not to trivialise our fears but to make us expand our trust in God. (*Deuteronomy 31:6 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,*

for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.")

Which brings us back to the verses from Proverbs. The way of finding a path through the wilderness is to START by leaning into God, rather than trusting purely in our own ways.

"God, you are the Lord of all the earth, the Lord of my situation now, show me the right way."
 When we look back afterwards we will see God's hand on our lives, God's footprints in the sand.

And remember, it is better to walk with others who trust God as they can help when the sandstorms fog our minds. That is why God placed us in the family of the Church.

God bless you,

Adam
Vicar, St John's Welling

St John's News

As it always does, with fun and brilliant fund raising, the Lamplighter Christmas Fayre heralded the start of Advent and Christmas at St John's. It was lovely to have visitors from the Leprosy Mission joining us this year.

From then on the calendar was busy with Advent and Christmas events, the first being the Toffs Carol service. The church was comfortably full with regulars and visitors for The Life Service's Contemporary Carol Service, with many special touches so appreciated by those who came. An extra, even the amazing team could not have managed unaided, was the gently falling snow which greeted us as we left the church!

Playgroup and Lamplighters both presented the Nativity but in very different ways. Playgroup shared the story simply and beautifully with several unforgettable moments.. the Star Bearer marched con-

fidently forward, thrusting her arms up to hold the star above the manger scene.. But she had forgotten the star!

The Lamplighters did an excellent Stick Nativity... puzzled? We hope they may do it again next year to a larger audience.

Toddler Club families made their own Nativity scene, welcoming Father Christmas and the gifts he brought later!

I know The Traditional Carol service was wonderful - I had to join in from home courtesy of a nasty cold.

The Christmas Eve CRIB service with its unique way of assembling the Nativity scene was the usual delightful mixture of wonder, excitement and chaos, maybe not unlike that first Christmas?

The Midnight Communion and Christmas Day services provided the opportunity to ensure that Jesus really was the focus of our Celebrations.

Thank you EVERYBODY who gave of their creativity—musically and organizationally—their love and time, to make the church and the atmosphere so special

and beautiful.

And so, an elderly 2022 came to an end and young 2023 took the floor.

What new to report so far?

☐ Our children are worshipping with us before going out to Jesuskidz enabling them to be a more visible part of the church family.

☐ We have three new Sermon Series (Morning, Life and Evening Services) which will increase our understanding of and learning from The Old Testament.

☐ Much to think about, pray about and reflect on following a talk given at The Life Service by Adam Curtis, who shared his testimony of living as a same sex attracted Christian.

☐ And sadness. We continue to pray for those coping with the loss of a loved one, most recently Peter Knight and family on the death of his Dad, and Kay, Richard and Liz Andrewartha and families, on the death of Kay's husband David.

Keep warm and safe .. Spring WILL come.

Estelle Woodcock

Evangelist's Conference January 2023

The Evangelist Conference is a yearly gathering of evangelists to come together to retreat, to learn, and to be encouraged by those around them. Amy Orr-Ewing's teachings on trauma and how we live in a world full of identity politics, anxiety and physical idiocracy connected evangelism with how the modern world works. As a young adult, it was encouraging to hear someone explaining the world how my peers and I may see it and the struggles we may face day-to-day. I had some amazing conversations with different people. To learn more then click the link below:

<https://evangelistsconference.com/>

Charlotte O'Leary

The Conference

Each January, over 200 evangelists gather for an opportunity to network and leave recommissioned for the year.

Take time to stop, reposition and reflect.

Hosted by J. John, Killy John and Andy Economides, the next conference starts on Tuesday 9th January and concludes on Thursday 11th January 2024.

JOBS: Jon Stedman

Jon was born in Bermondsey, East London, the fifth child in a family poorly affected by the mental health of his mum who suffered from schizophrenia and had to stop medication during pregnancy, so Jon was born in a psychiatric unit. His ability to make normal relationships was severely affected by a really difficult relationship with his mum growing up, though his dad managed to provide for and hold the family together, with input from grandparents.

In 1975, as soon as he could leave school, at 16 and 4 months, he enlisted for the army and 'ran away from home', forging his mum's signature on the form. Because of his mechanical aptitude, he was recommended for the Mechanical Engineers, but wanted infantry so was sent to Northern Ireland, where he did 3 tours of 6 months on, 6 months off, surviving Belfast in the midst of gun battles, Bogside in Londonderry with riots and bombs, and South Armagh. He ended as a Junior Leader in the Military, and was requested to stay on, but after being flown by helicopter to Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital in Woolwich following an arm injury (where removal of his arm was discussed), he had a conversation with the union rep 'Uncle Nobby', who offered him a 5 year adult apprenticeship with British Gas as a boiler engineer. He accepted it and worked with British Gas until he retired from there at aged 55.



On a personal level, his life had been like a relationship warzone all his adult life. He thinks because of his mum's illness, he couldn't give or receive love in a healthy way. He had two 5 year relationships which produced three children. Jon's dad died when Jon was 22, he had a heart attack in the park leaving his mum with 6 children in a 3 bed flat. She died in a fire much later. His dad had never displayed any emotion, and Jon had a problem trying to deal with emotion. He and his five siblings are all emotionally challenged, all have been divorced. Jon was functionally not

right and poured everything into his work.

It wasn't until a few years after his second ex-partner moved to Welling with Jon's son that God started to nudge him towards Himself and to St John's. Gradually since then, God has been healing the emotional car crash, but that's a story for another time (listen to [The Life Service 15th January 2023](#) 11 minutes in).

Shortly after leaving British Gas, he saw an advert for a boiler engineer with K&T Heating, has now worked for them for 9 years and is in his last year before retirement at 65. Initially he worked locally in some of the John Newton Court flats and in other London & Quadrant housing premises, but then the company had 2 very experienced engineers retire who worked in Tower Hamlets, and for 2 weeks Jon was asked to take their place. Reluctantly he did so, and for a second stint of 6 weeks, then 2 months, by which time he had a sense that the Holy Spirit was leading in this. He is working mainly among the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets who typically have a strong sense of there being a God and a spiritual awareness, but are mostly not Christians. Jon seeks to live the Gospel as he works, and it sparks frequent conversations about faith and belief where Jon is not backward in speaking of his faith in Jesus when asked. In his own words: "In my own strength I fall flat on my face. I've learnt to listen to the Holy Spirit."

Kate Foot

Creation Matters



The new house group study material is entitled Creation Matters.

I like the look of the title of session one, which is "Why should Christians care?" It looks at what the bible has to say about Creation, what God thinks about it and what we should think about it.

I have read that before the Industrial Revolution (early 1800's when things changed from being largely hand-produced to machine mass production and consumption) most people would have understood the Bible a little differently to how we tend to since then. Because it was before such a time of looking at the world as a store of resources to take, process and sell, they would have understood so many references in the bible which you might call "green" that we don't spot so easily today.

For example, it follows that they would probably have read the words God spoke to the first humans in Genesis chapter 1 verse 28 more like it is in the Message version than the New International Version. Compare them and see what I mean-

The Message- God blessed them: "Prosper! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be **responsible** for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of the earth".

NIV- God blessed them and said to them "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and **subdue** it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

The NIV is a more literal translational but to my mind, The Message has got the meaning better when we remember that in verse 31, God "saw all that he had made and it was very good" (NIV).

Hopefully, the house group sessions will be an interesting and enjoyable opportunity to consider afresh what God wants.

Bob Morris

My Faith Journey: Christine Belsham

I was born in Brockley and moved with my parents, Marie and George, to Bexley when I was two. Younger brother David came along soon afterwards. Marie and George were committed Christians and very involved in their local churches, St John's, Bexley and St James', Blendon. I came to faith at a young age and remember my childhood churches with affection. I attended Sunday School, Pathfinders and CYFA. We enjoyed Christian weekends away to Mabledon and Caroty Wood. After leaving Pathfinders, I became involved in children's work as a young leader.

I loved school and then went to Bristol University to study law. There were many opportunities to grow in faith, such as Hall Fellowship and the Anglican Chap-



laincy. I enjoyed spending time with Christians from different denominations. I remember one snowy morning setting out from my hall of residence with a friend for the two mile walk into the city centre for Taizé prayer and breakfast at the Anglican Chaplaincy. We were kindly offered a lift across the Downs by the milkman in his milk float. I also became involved in work to support overseas students, including hosting a weekly coffee evening.

After my studies, I met Mark in Bexley village and we married in St John's, Bexley in 1990. It was a windy day, and my veil blew onto the church roof. Our first house was in Welling, and we began to worship at St John's, Welling. We have been blessed with two children, Rachel and James. I retrained as a librarian and became a school librarian, a job I love. I trained as a Reader but am presently taking a break. Throughout my life, my faith has been a great support to me.



Lamplighters:

to light the lamp of love for those with Leprosy

The last year has been very busy with fun and fundraising at Lamplighters. After a very successful Jubilee Celebration when we raised money for Purulia hospital through a Fun event involving stalls, games, and football and dance displays, we then started planning for the Autumn Term.

Our main focus as always was the Lamplighter Fayre in November. Our fantastic team went into overdrive as we all worked on sorting out the games, made up the hampers and left Miriam Storey to price up everything for the gift stall which in itself raised over £900. Thank you to all who generously donated or made up items for this stall including Kerstin and the wonderful Bedford Mums who support us each year.

From the group photo you can see our fantastic volunteers and group leaders including Wendy our TLM Rep in the centre between her daughter Libby and me. Two hours of fun and spending resulted in over £3,000 being raised on the night, a magnificent total!



Our next planned event was the Lamplighter Nativity in December and this year we approached it differently by having a stick puppet nativity with all the children involved. The photo of some of the puppets gives a glimpse of how terrific they looked, all made by our Lamplighter group leaders and helpers. What a talented bunch they are! The parents and friends who attended said that it gave them a moment to stop and think of the real meaning of Christmas in the midst of all the busyness.

So now a new year has started and our next special event is World Leprosy Sunday on January 29th, celebrated at the 10.30am Service.

This year Wendy (our TLM Rep) and family will be visiting us and we will find out the focus for fundraising this year.

An advanced glimpse shows us that the Tea Gardens of Bangladesh will be featuring, with a focus on a lady called Aloka who works there, revealing the devastating effect that leprosy is having on a large proportion of the families living and working in the Tea Gardens. Wendy will also be giving us updates on Purulia hospital which we have supported over a number of years.

From our last year's fund raising we hope to give to Wendy during her visit with us £2,000 for the Bangladesh project and £3,000 for Purulia hospital. It will be so good to hear from Wendy how this money will be spent.

It will be a very interesting and informative service led by the Lamplighters. If you miss it on the day do watch it online when you can.

A huge thank you to our loyal and dedicated group leaders and helpers and to Sylvia for counting all the money we raise (a huge job) also to friends and supporters in St John's—your love, support and prayers mean so much to us!

Our Lamplighters group is for Primary age children from 6.10-7.30pm on Fridays, if your child would like a free trial visit please message 07796 264 309, we would love them to join us. Secondary age young people will also be welcomed to help and join in the fun too. God bless you.

Jackie and Keith Mackley

