

THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

MARCH 2021

Rector: The Rev'd Brian Lacey
St Peter's Rectory, 17 Waterloo Park South, Belfast, BT15 5HX



Dora Hanna
Coordinator of Pastoral Telephone Ministry

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

SERVICES IN MARCH

We're now into the Season of Lent, when—by tradition in my own life—I start making pancakes until I get sick of the sight of them. It does fly in the face of the idea of using up such “luxurious” food before Lent begins, but in its own way it becomes an instrument of torture. But you know, despite the association between Lent and “giving things up”, this is not simply meant to be a time of doom and gloom. We are, however, meant to be preparing ourselves spiritually for the celebration of Christ's victory over evil at Easter. This is a time, therefore, to reflect and consider the extent to which that victory is expressed through our lives today.

As you'll have heard in the news, the Northern Ireland Executive has extended the current Coronavirus lockdown until 1st April, which is Maundy Thursday. This means that it is very unlikely that a congregation will be permitted inside St Peter's during Holy Week. Regardless, David Cromie and I will broadcast services on Facebook throughout that week. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, these will be the beautiful old service of Compline, with a reflection on the Bible reading of the day.

Throughout March, we will continue our regular pattern of services at 11am on Sundays and 10.30am on Wednesdays. As St Patrick's Day falls on a Wednesday this year, we will celebrate it during our normal mid-week service on 17th March.

PASTORAL TELEPHONE MINISTRY

In late 2019, I appointed Dora Hanna (see front cover) as our Coordinator of Pastoral Visits, and we assembled a small team of

lay people who wished to visit parishioners at home for a friendly chat and prayer. Little did we know then that within a couple of months such activity would be forbidden! However, through the efforts of the Select Vestry and caring individuals, the Church has sought to maintain contact with members of our congregation via telephone during the last year.

In light of the success of this form of ministry, I have tasked Dora with coordinating a team of lay people to phone parishioners for that friendly chat and prayer. Although the members of the team have been given basic training, and will be supported going forward, this is intended to be an informal ministry, sharing the love of Jesus Christ from one home to another, through words and action.

BEWARE OF SCAMS

In view of what I've just written above, I need to remind you of the dangers of con artists! In the same way that an opportunistic pickpocket might rob you in the street, such thieves will use any means to take your money, and this could be over-the-phone, or through email.

The most recent scam affecting church members are emails purporting to be from the clergy asking for help. Usually, the email implores you to buy vouchers for some spurious reason. If recent emails to our own parishioners are to be believed, then I am desperate to buy a gift for my niece, but unable to do so without your assistance!

If you do receive regular emails from me, then you should know how I write, and how my emails look. These scammers don't know that, so they will often have noticeable differences in spelling, grammar, or style.

Just remember that neither I nor anyone else acting on behalf of the Church, will ever contact you out-of-the-blue to ask you for money. If in doubt, just pick up the phone (even if the email tells you not to!) and call me on 90777053. The best thing to do is ignore such emails, but if they do become regular, please let me know and we will inform the PSNI.

SECURITY CAMERAS

There are now security cameras around St Peter's, in order to deter and detect vandalism and theft. Ostensibly, these have been installed in order to protect the church roof, as a section of lead was ripped out two years ago. Mercifully, the location of our church—surrounded by houses and a hotel—tends to ward off thieves, but sometimes they act out of opportunism or desperation or sheer brazenness. The cameras, which issue an alert if anyone approaches the church building, will, God willing, keep our property safe.

We are very grateful to Allchurches Trust for their grant which covered half of the costs, and we heartily recommend Graham Shaw of Professional Fire & Security Ltd, who installed the cameras.

SOLACE

Many women have experienced domestic abuse, and we would like to provide a safe environment for them to meet together and share their stories. Through a range of therapeutic activities, we hope that women will heal and recover from their trauma. They will meet in the Parish Halls once a fortnight. There will be a structured format, with tea/coffee, conversation, and prayer for those who request it.

This group is open to all women who live locally, whether or not they worship in St Peter's. If you would like more information, or if you would like to offer to volunteer to support this project by making tea/coffee, etc, then please contact Sarah Coates at sarahcoates@stpeterbelfast.org and she will explain how you can join or help.

THE CHARACTER COURSE

Sarah Coates is running a course for women, which examines and explores the themes of learning, hope, love, forgiveness, gratitude, humour, persistence and curiosity. The group meets on the first Monday of each month. This is an eight week course, which has already met once. Don't worry, you don't need to attend every month to get the benefit of it. Just join whenever you can. For more information please contact Sarah at sarahcoates@stpeterbelfast.org.

TRANSFORMING LIVES FOR GOOD

All children deserve the best start in life, but some may be struggling with a lack of confidence, have few positive role models or just need an adult to talk to. Early intervention is so important for many children to reach their full potential.

We are delighted to launch an exciting new initiative in partnership with Transforming Lives for Good (TLG) and local primary schools. We will provide children with one to one coaching through our Early Intervention programme, and this can make all the difference to their wellbeing. Please contact Laura Lacey at lauralacey@stpeterbelfast.org if you would like to find out more. The training costs for this programme have been paid for by the Church of Ireland Board of Education.

WHAT WOULD YOUR REFERENCE SAY?

If you've ever been asked to give someone a reference for a new job, then you'll know that it can be quite tedious. The golden rule is that you are not allowed to write anything negative about the person. Obviously, if someone has asked you to write them a reference because you know them well and you're quite friendly, then you wouldn't want to write anything bad.

Sometimes though, former employers are asked to write a reference, and they might actually have a long list of bad things that they want to write. Now, I don't know whether it's the law, or just good manners, but most people follow the advice that if you don't have anything good to say, then say nothing.

Saying nothing, therefore, in a reference, tends to be understood as a criticism. In fact, the worst thing that a former employer could write about you is that you "worked here from this date until that date," and then say nothing more.

On the other hand, sometimes employers will write over-the-top praise in a reference. They will say how wonderful you are. What a great worker you are. How valued you are. But they won't mean a word of it. They are simply writing it, in order to subtly manipulate your new employers into taking somebody that they no longer want.

But, of course, even if you do like the person you're writing a reference for, it's hard to escape the old clichés: Excellent communication skills. Team Player. Able to work on their own initiative. And because it's always the same sort of thing being written about everybody, it tends to devalue the whole purpose of having a reference at all. And to be honest with you, I'm not sure that many employers even bother to read them. (But I could be wrong, and I'm open to hearing from anyone involved in Human Resources who wants to correct me.)

I mention this because St Paul is talking about references in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. He actually calls them "letters of recommendation". But they're the same thing. They are a letter

written from one person to whomever it may concern, to explain that the person carrying the letter is decent and trustworthy.

Now, Paul is not, of course, talking about employment. These letters, which we know he wrote for his various assistants on their missionary journeys, were intended to prove to the various congregations to which they were sent, that Paul himself had authorised their visit, and that they should be welcomed and treated just the way they would treat Paul if he could come in person.

You might question why this was necessary. Well, just like today, there were plenty of con artists in the ancient world. And it wouldn't have taken long for some scammers to realise that they could make a bit of money, or at least spend a few days being treated to the hospitality of the Church, by pretending to be a travelling missionary.

So Paul needed to write letters of recommendation in order to prove the legitimacy of the people he sent out to the churches.

What's interesting in verse 1 of chapter 3 is that Paul is talking about whether he himself needs a reference. He wrote: "Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?"

The reason he wrote that, is because in the section of 2 Corinthians, leading up to Chapter 3, Paul was trying to make amends with the Church in Corinth, after having fallen out with some of them. Just to give you a flavour of that, in chapter 2, verse 4, we read "I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears."

So there's a little bit of a sense in Chapter 3 that he is asking them whether or not they accept him as genuine, and trustworthy, and indeed—as truly an Apostle, sent by God.

His own answer to that, is to say "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all." What does he mean by that?

Well, even though there were clearly tensions between Paul and

the Corinthians, it's also clear from the rest of 2 Corinthians that Paul had a lot of affection for them. Indeed, the full sentence that I quoted a moment ago, reads, "I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you."

As far as Paul is concerned, therefore, the fact that the Church in Corinth was established by him, and is thriving, and that its members are growing in faith and in numbers – that's the evidence that Paul was genuine. Their faith was a product, if you like, of his work amongst them.

So they are his letter of recommendation, "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God."

You know, each of us has an impact upon the world around us. I remember hearing someone years ago saying, "How you feel after you've spoken with someone, can tell you a lot about that person's character." Now, I think that's very simplistic, but there is a ring of truth. By interacting with other people, as we do every day, we can have a positive or a negative impact upon them, and by extension, upon the world.

The challenge for us is to consider what our impact is. Is the mark that we have made on the world a good one, in which the people around us, throughout our lives, have been built up and nourished by their encounter with us? If they are our letter of recommendation would it be a good one? Or would it simply say, "You lived in this world from the day you were born, to the day you died, but there was nothing else good worth mentioning.

HOW CAN WE GROW THE CHURCH?

St Mark's Gospel, chapter 9 records an event—during the earthly life of our Lord Jesus—known as the Transfiguration. If something is transfigured then that means that its shape or its form has been changed. And we refer to the event in this Gospel passage as the Transfiguration because we read about

how the appearance of Jesus changed, as witnessed by Peter, James, and John.

Mark, whose Gospel this passage is written in, does not give us the details of how Jesus' body and face were changed, but he does record how the clothes of Jesus were changed. They became, he wrote, "dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them."

You might not think it, but that sentence is very important, because not only is it telling us that Jesus's clothes became so white that they were vibrant, but also the specific mention that "no one on *earth* could bleach them that way", is intended to suggest that what was happening to Jesus was not some trick of the light on some bright sunny day, nor was Jesus just very clean. Instead, we are being told that this is a supernatural, extraordinary, divine event.

Oddly enough, despite this happening to Jesus, the focus of the passage is actually on the three disciples who are with him. Specifically we are told that Peter was confused, albeit delightfully so, by what he was witnessing. And then the three of them receive a message from God the Father, who appears as a cloud which passes over them. And from this cloud comes a voice, proclaiming, "This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him." A similar message was heard at the River Jordan when Jesus was baptised; the difference here is that at the Transfiguration, the voice instructs the three disciples to *listen* to Jesus.

Now, we can't tell from the words alone, what tone that instruction was given in. Perhaps God was exasperated by the disciples, and he was saying, "Look, just stop talking, focus yourselves, and listen." Or maybe it was simply a statement. "This is my son, listen to him." Either way, the point is that God the Father was affirming to the disciples that Jesus is his Son. And this was in addition to what they could see with their own eyes; that in his transfigured, dazzling appearance, Jesus would have looked like a heavenly being, rather than the travelling preacher and healer, the eldest son of a carpenter, from the

backwater town of Nazareth: which is how most people at the time would have seen him.

Why, we might wonder, did Jesus let Peter, James, and John, witness this event? These three men were, from what we can tell from the Gospels, Jesus' closest followers. Perhaps even his closest friends. Did he simply want to share that experience with them, because of their closeness? Or did he think that the three of them needed to see it; that they needed to hear the voice of God the Father affirming who he is? Did they need that assurance that Jesus was not simply an ordinary man – particularly in light of the fact that his death in Jerusalem was imminent? Was this Jesus' way of strengthening their faith and their hope, for the difficult days ahead?

I wonder, if they had not witnessed the Transfiguration, would these disciples' faith have been crushed, when they later saw Jesus being arrested, put on trial, and then executed? Would they have begun to question whether or not Jesus was who he claimed to be? Would they have abandoned the fellowship of the Church, and returned to their ordinary lives – angry at themselves for having given up everything to follow him: this man who had been crucified?

If you think about it, Christianity does seem very odd. And you don't have to look very far on social media to find critics of Christianity (and religion in general) making fun of the central beliefs of our faith: Virgin birth, miracles, resurrection, heaven, eternal life. Everyday, these things are questioned, criticised, and mocked. And to some extent it's understandable that many people in our community, will reject the Good News because atheism and secularism have been so successful in ridiculing and undermining the Truth that the Church proclaims. For some people it is not cool to believe in God. They fear that having anything to do with religion, or spirituality, or the Church, or with God, will somehow make them look stupid. For other people, they simply have a problem with accepting as historical fact, the sort of thing that you don't see in everyday life (such as

miracles), and it's easier to dismiss them as made-up, than it is to believe that there are forces and beings in this world which are not constrained by the laws of physics. For many and various reasons, people are blinded from seeing the Truth.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 4, St Paul talks about this. He wrote "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." You can, of course, interpret "The god of this world" as "the devil" but it's probably more helpful to understand it more generally as anything in this world which prevents someone from recognising who Jesus is. And that can certainly include the powers of darkness, but more broadly we can also include things like atheism and secularism. It can also include traumatic events, such as bereavement, that we face, that cause us to question even the existence of God when life gets rough.

I wonder would Peter, James, and John, have experienced such doubts about Jesus, if they had not witnessed for themselves, the divine radiance of Christ on the mountain?

Now, you and I cannot have the reassuring experience that those three men did. We cannot travel with Jesus to the mountain top and witness his dazzling appearance. But what God can do, is to shine that same vibrant light of his glory, into our hearts. We might not see it with our eyes, but we will feel it. As Paul wrote, "the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That's a fancy way of saying that we can see who Jesus really is, if we let God show us. Our biggest prayer, therefore, when we think about how to grow the Church, and to win more souls for Christ, is not that God will bless us and what we do, but rather that he would open the hearts of unbelievers to receive the message that we proclaim in his name. May he open their hearts, so that his light would shine in their darkness. May he open their eyes, so that they may truly see Jesus for who he is.

Pause for Thought and a Prayer

Rosemary Johnston

Every day we hear about the effects of lockdown on us all. However, for many students it is having a severe effect on their mental well-being as they feel trapped and isolated and worry that their future is being taken away from them. We also hear of younger children self-harming. Many students with special needs, eg, autism, are not receiving the vital support they need, causing depression and suicidal thoughts. May we pray for all students, from little children in primary school right through to university and college students, and also for their families, many of whom are sick with worry about a son or daughter who is not coping, that they get the help they so desperately need.

May we also remember the beleaguered people of Yemen, sadly seldom out of the news who, as well as suffering years of conflict, are now enduring famine. May we ask for God's guidance for those involved in this tragic and complex situation.

WHAT SUITS YOU BEST?

Please don't forget to let us know how you would like to receive your Parish Notes in future:

- ♦ *by email, or*
- ♦ *by collecting a copy from church, or*
- ♦ *by having a copy delivered to your home.*

Please communicate your preference to Anne in the Parish Office:
email: annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org
or tel: 90 776 706

Thank you!

The British Red Cross

by Peter Gray

The British Red Cross has its origin in the British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War. It was founded at a public meeting in 1870 on the basis of the rules laid down by the Geneva Convention of 1864. It was granted its first Royal Charter in 1908 by HM King Edward VII. Queen Alexandra became its president. The seven fundamental principles were created in Vienna in 1965. These are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, universality. They bind together the National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. This makes the British Red Cross part of a worldwide movement.

The British Red Cross has delivered health and social care services since the NHS was established. It works with commissioners to provide valuable time-limited support to vulnerable people across the UK.

Services available from the British Red Cross include:

- providing support and care at home when you return from a stay in hospital or helping you live independently;
- providing help to refugees and asylum seekers;
- helping with loneliness by connecting you with your local community and finding new friends and activities;
- helping those who struggle with money problems and providing advice for those going through a period of financial difficulty;
- helping to find missing relatives abroad through its international family tracing service;
- providing tips, advice and free apps to prepare for extreme weather and terrorist alerts;
- providing immediate financial help if you have been seriously injured or bereaved by terrorist incidents overseas.

If you would like to support the British Red Cross, then you may give cash, or write a cheque payable to “The Parish of St Peter and St James, Belfast”, and post it to the Parish Office, marking clearly that your donation is intended for the British Red Cross.

Our beautiful church is normally cleaned weekly by volunteer parishioners. Needless to say, during this pandemic none of our volunteers has been able to come into the church to do this. However,



CHURCH CLEANING

WE COULD USE
YOUR HELP ...

we're now looking ahead to a time when we will be able to go about our normal duties and so I've unearthed the list of cleaning groups that was in place before. It would be great to have all our cleaners organised and ready as soon as we get the go ahead. Each group will be assigned a specific area of the church to concentrate on so if any of the existing groups already have a favourite area please let me know.

Group 1

Annette Beattie, Rosemary Johnston, Joan Walker

Group 2

Marie Burrowes, Dora Hanna, Kathryn Hennessy,
Joan Lawther, Daphne McClements

Group 3

Thelma Cross, Hilary Shields

Group 4

Olivia Dornan, Sandra Hutchman, Meta O'Neill

Group 5

Margi Crawford, Heather Swan

Group 6

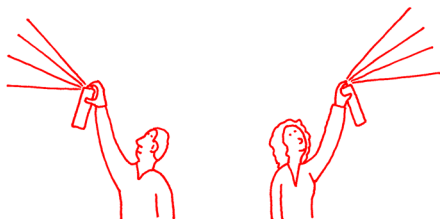
Noel Beattie, Jill Bradley

With these existing groups in place, each group needs to clean for about 1-1½ hours every six weeks. It would be fantastic to have more cleaning groups and then obviously the rota frequency for each group would be reduced. Having eight groups, for example, would be really great. If you would like to form a new group, or join an existing group (especially one of the smaller ones, ie, groups 3, 5 or 6) please let me know by ringing the Parish Office—tel 90 776 706 (do please leave a message if there is no reply) or by emailing me at annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org. All help is, and will be, greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Anne Cromie 😊

CHURCH CLEANING

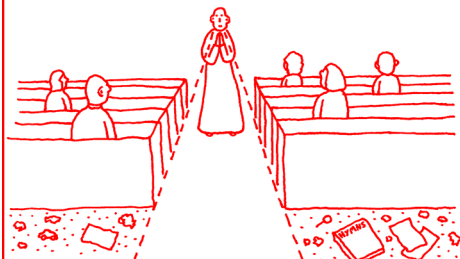
HOW TO MAKE IT SEEM AS IF YOU HAVE DONE A GOOD JOB



SPRAY SOME POLISH IN THE AIR TO
GIVE THE REQUIRED AROMA



MAKE FULL USE OF LOOSE CARPETS



DO THE BITS THE VICAR CAN SEE



IF IN DOUBT: PUT IT IN THE VESTRY

PARISHIONER CONTACT DETAILS

For speed of communication and to keep our records up to date please send your email address to the Parish Office at:

annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org

Also please don't forget to let us know if you move house, change any of your telephone numbers or your email address. Thank you.

Parish Notes On-line

There are full colour versions of Parish Notes on our website.
Visit www.stpeters.connor.anglican.org and click on "News".

Please send material for the April issue of Parish Notes to:

*Anne Cromie, Parish Administrator, St Peter's Church,
Fortwilliam Drive, Belfast BT15 4EB*

or email: annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org

by Monday 22nd March. Thank you.