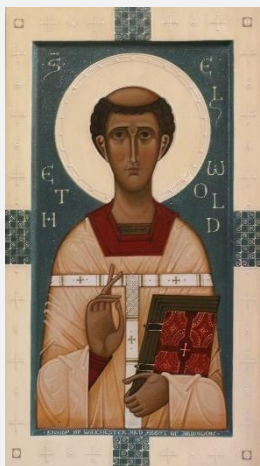


Issue 7:
September 2024



A candle in...

THE WINDOW
News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

Endings and Beginnings

Summer persists in places:
on rare days sunshine pours down
through cloudless blue, turning
all it touches to gold.

Yet there are signs of change,
something subtle in the air:
a cooler crispness in early morning,
the scent of autumn in a drift
of wood smoke rising beyond
the trees, a softening of the horizon,
shadows lengthening as days shorten.

But hidden within endings are beginnings:
fallen leaves on the forest floor will
nourish next season's growth,
seeds scattered in the earth
wait in darkness for the return
of warmth and light before rising up
with the vigour of new life.

Far off in the distance, yet slowly edging
closer, is bright hope
at the darkest point of the year.
For concealed in the secrecy of a virgin's
womb is the source of all light and life,
both promise and fulfillment,
the Alpha and the Omega.

Susan Gee

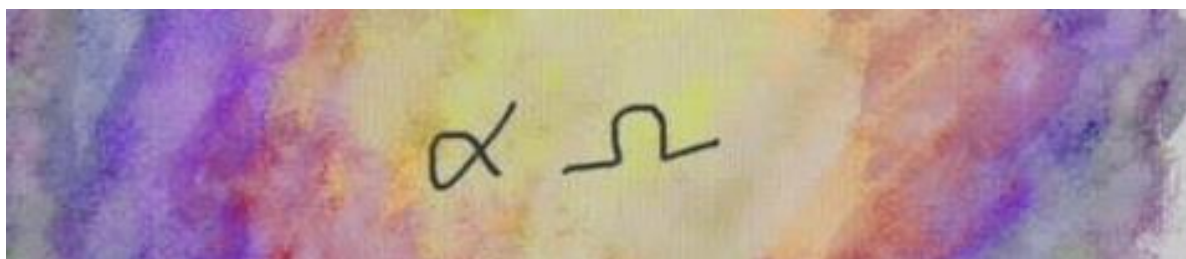
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Faith Forum: Understanding the Bible

September's Faith Forum initiated the autumn series with this crucial question. We all felt sympathy for our scheduled speaker, Professor John Barton, who was prevented by bereavement from attending. The full house of attendees from across the parish greatly appreciated both his script, kindly offered, and the effective way it was read by Dr Jen Brown.

Gwen Bevington offers this summary of the session, with apologies and regret, apart from anything else, for having had to omit much of John's humour, which leavened the whole.

John's paper began by expressing his intention of saying (essentially) just two things: the Bible is many books; the Bible is one book.

- 1) The Bible is many books. These books come from cultures and times very alien to our own, so it's worth making the effort to understand their background. As musicologists help us listen to music, and literary scholars enhance our understanding of Shakespeare, scholars of many disciplines can help with the Bible. (A pretty good help would be John's own book *What is the Bible?* first published in 1991 and still going strong.)

Therefore these points follow:

- The Bible is bound together as a single book, but in fact contains many books. It's therefore probably not a good idea to try to read it from beginning to end like a marathon challenge. (John referred to an exploit with a friend, as a teenager, to attempt to travel through all London underground stations in one day. Ticking dots on a line doesn't give much idea of London; ticking off books of the Bible, ditto.)
- The biblical books require skills from the reader, especially sensitivity to different genres or "registers" - which may be rather foreign to those used to a scientific approach. One crucial factor is whether a story is a folk tale, or intended to be factual.
- John gave us a wonderful quote from Philip Sidney: "As for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lies." We take for granted that novelists are not giving us historical fact, however true their insights; we need to be clear about this issue when reading the Bible. The stout assertion by Pusey (a leader of the Oxford Movement) that Jonah could have plausibly been swallowed by a big fish and survived, is an example of missing the genre.
- We need to be clear which biblical narratives could be called myth, which history. We also need to be aware of other kinds of writing – law, wisdom, poetry.
- The New Testament is less varied than the Old, but does have at least three different genres – gospel, letters and prophecy.

- 2) The Bible is one book.

It *is* many books – but for the Church it has always been in a sense one book. Hence the binding of it into one volume. Early Christians believed all the biblical books were compatible with the tenets of the Christian faith, and broadly compatible with each other. There were two major ways of seeing the books (plural) as one book (singular):

- a) via the view that one genre or type is key, the way to read it all. Early Christians read it all in terms of *prophecy*: the whole Old Testament points to Jesus' life and death (and life). In Judaism, it's *law* that's foregrounded: the whole thing, including prophecy, teaches how life is to be lived. (In Eastern Orthodox theology, *wisdom* is very important.) It's striking that

Catholics have often put most weight on the Gospels, Protestants on the letters of Paul. Most of us do have an *effective* canon within a canon, however much some people disapprove of that idea. Luther, for example, explicitly gave primary importance to John's Gospel and first letter, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and 1 Peter. These, to him, teach people all that is necessary, even if they never read any other book.

- b) by working with a short description of what we take to be the overall message, and reading the whole to unpack and deepen that fundamental message. So, again for Luther, the Bible's essential message is of guilty and lost humanity, and of the God who justifies and saves.

Final points:

- For Luther, the crucial thing is not how many days it took to create the universe, but a relationship with God via the Bible
- Musicologists may help us to understand music, but reading their wisdom is no substitute for playing and hearing music
- The Bible tells us who we are – shows us ourselves in a way we might not otherwise see

So – we can understand the Bible as not just many books but also as one Book.

Questions and Answers:

Jen wanted to emphasise that in no way is she John Barton, but did invite questions which she answered in a thoughtful and lively way.

If the bible is 'inspired by God', how do we use it? We acknowledged that some Christians have taken extreme views, aiming to do nothing without biblical authority (so presumably never cleaning their teeth). A more helpful way of looking at inspiration and its purposes could be this: the writers addressed, primarily, their own circumstances. In turn the Holy Spirit may inspire us to reflect on their writings and our circumstances. A good example is that biblical writers did not consciously condemn slavery – but we, pondering the underlying truth of their words, are led in our present time to repudiate the very idea (not that slavery doesn't still happen).

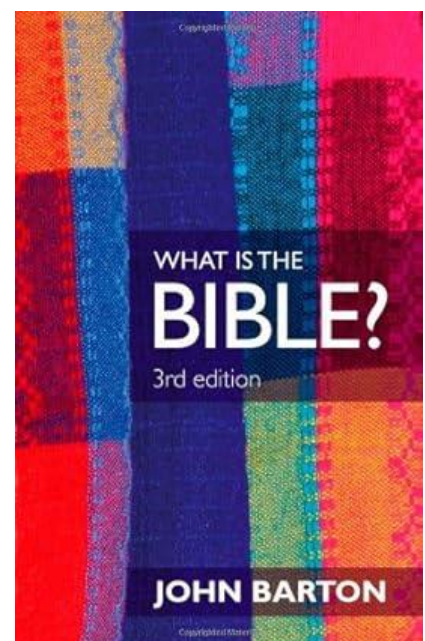
A very helpful point was that we can view the Bible as embodying Conversation. The Bible is in conversation (some might say argument) with itself; we can be in conversation with the Bible.

Questioners also considered the issue of how we communicate to children the importance of the different genres, and get across that the Bible is something to be used and enjoyed.

We were also encouraged not to disregard the Apocrypha;

The whole meeting was a great session, which got our autumn programme off to a splendid start. Again we express our thanks to both John and Jen – and also to the caterers, who enhanced the experience with a tasty lunch.

GB



What does it mean to be Church?

Rev Dr Jen Brown: A sermon preached at St Helen's on August 11th 2024

The letter to the Ephesians is full of instructions for Christian living – not just how to live as an individual Christian, but how Christians should behave together, as a community. And what those instructions boil down to seems to be this: Live Differently.

These past couple of weeks have been turbulent ones for this country. Riots, looting, violence, destruction. Why? Because false information spread following a terrible tragedy. Because people stoked others' fears and played on their insecurities. Sadly, this is often the way of the social media world, where things are said, not because they are true, but because they'll get viewed and re-posted, and go viral, and because they'll get a reaction. In that climate, fear becomes anger, and anger explodes into violence. We've also seen protests against hate, and that is heartening, but in some cases, even those have seemed to be tainted with an air of superiority, of "We're better than..."

We are called to live differently, to show the world another way of being: a way of being that rejects lies and embraces truth, and when that truth is difficult, expresses it gently and with love. We are called to speak truth, not for point scoring, not for power, not for superiority, but for building up others, because we, as Ephesians puts it, "are members of one another." In other words, we have a common existence and we all have a stake in each other's wellbeing. That is especially true within the Church, where we are all members of the one body of Christ, but I believe it also applies – at least in some degree – in wider society, as well. We are all part of a bigger whole, and we all have a stake in each other's wellbeing. And so we are called to avoid speaking evil but instead to use our words to "give grace to those who hear."

We are called to live differently, and that includes how we react when something makes us angry. Of course we'll sometimes be angry. There are plenty of things in the world to be angry about. But we should not let our anger cause us to sin, to behave in ways contrary to the commandment to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Our anger should motivate us to make positive changes, not to seek retribution or to disparage or harm others.

We are called to live differently, to be imitators, not of the world but of God. God who acts in love and who is love. God who, yes, corrects us when we get things wrong, but does so for our good. God who gives to those in need, the way God provided sustenance to Elijah when he became a refugee, fleeing persecution. God who gives Godself in the person of Christ, to nourish and sustain us, and to save us, and the whole world, from sin and death. God who, in Christ, continues to feed us with the bread of heaven here at the Lord's table.

We are called to live differently, as individuals and together as a Church. We are called to speak truth together, to work together for good, to be a community that provides for those in need. Together, we are called to model the love of God so that the world can see and be drawn to a different way of being.

Jesus said, "those who believe have eternal life." This belief isn't just a matter of the head but of the heart. It's having faith, trusting in God; trusting in Christ.

That trust frees us from the ways of the world driven by fear. It's a trust that enables us to live generously, to live kindly, to live peacefully – in other words, to live differently, and in living differently, to enter into eternal life, the life of God's Kingdom. And again, this act of faith isn't something we do just as individuals, but as a community, as the living body of Christ. Then we become the conduit through which Christ continues to give himself for the life of the world.

35 Ock Street

Simon Tonks



Many members of our congregations will have visited, or at least be aware of, the Café at 35 Oct Street in Abingdon. Established in c. 1996 the café has been faithfully serving the people of Abingdon ever since. Since opening it has always been staffed by volunteers from both Abingdon Baptist Church and from the wider Church and community of Abingdon. The volunteers are divided into teams consisting of catering assistants, welcomers (who also act as pastoral listeners) and administration staff.



The original concept of the café was the inspiration of the late Rev. Michael Hambleton. He was a minister of Abingdon Baptist Church during the 1990s. After training, in Birmingham, he travelled to Sri Lanka on missionary work with his wife Stella. On their journey they sought shelter and were welcomed into a religious place with a warm fire and where they were offered food and hospitality.

Rev. Hambleton was so inspired by the welcome and hospitality he and his wife Stella received in that place and on returning to Abingdon he set about the task of renovating the Grade 2 listed building at 35 Ock Street with the intention of it being a similar type of warm and welcoming place.

It was enormous task to renovate the building at 35 Ock Street and required courage and commitment but eventually he succeeded with his plan and the café opened. The building at 35 Ock Street is not simply the café. It also operates as a community hub and in rooms upstairs above the café charitable organisations rent rooms at a low cost and operate. Currently these groups include, for example, the volunteer hospital drivers who arrange travel to and from the hospitals of Oxford and “Turning Point”, a national charity assisting those on the road to recovery after difficult life events, such as family break-down and issues with addiction.

It is beyond question that since it opened, nearly thirty years ago, all that goes on at 35 Ock Street, including the café, has made a massively positive difference to the lives of many. Not just to those visiting but also to the volunteers who work there and benefit from the sense of community it encourages. I would happily include myself in this category.

Many years ago, while working a shift as a welcomer in the café, I noticed a gentleman who I did not recognise sitting sipping his coffee at one of the tables. He was alone and so doing my duty I ventured forth to the table to introduce myself to him. After, a brief exchange of courtesies, he informed me that his name was “Charles” and that he was “the new vicar”!

Charles says he cannot recall this moment as clearly as I can but it is poignant for me to remember it now as Charles’ ministry at St Helens begins to draw to a close. Thank you Charles for your ministry at St Helens - do pop back into the café at 35 before you leave! Coffee and a piece of cake await you – on the house!

During the last twenty years Abingdon has changed. There are many more coffee shops in the town centre and “places to go” than there used to be. And, during the past year, several long-standing volunteers have retired. Both these issues mean that operating the café at 35 is constantly challenging – nevertheless we are looking to the future with confidence and optimism. The Rev Rachel Hughes became Minister of Abingdon Baptist Church in November 2022. Rev. Rachel has brought fresh enthusiasm to Abingdon Baptist Church and under her leadership and with her support we are not only keeping the café at 35 “up to scratch” but also beginning to look at new opportunities that might exist for the building at 35 to act as a community hub.



The aim of the building and café has never been to make a big profit but to make a difference to the lives of all those visiting. The café at 35 is always looking for new volunteers for the various roles so please do not hesitate to contact the café directly or speak to me in church if you feel you can offer even a few hours. But, of course, the café also needs good customers too!

Look forward to seeing you at 35 again soon and thank you to Rev. Charles and all in the Parish for your continued support.

Best wishes,
Simon Tonks
Cafe@35 Manager



MAF – “Flying for Life”

Julie Mellows

This is the name of the quarterly magazine of Mission Aviation Fellowship, a humanitarian Christian organisation founded at the end of the second world war by wartime pilots with a vision for how aviation could be used to spread the Christian faith. MAF now works in over 55 countries worldwide and has headquarters in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the USA, The Netherlands, Finland and several other countries.

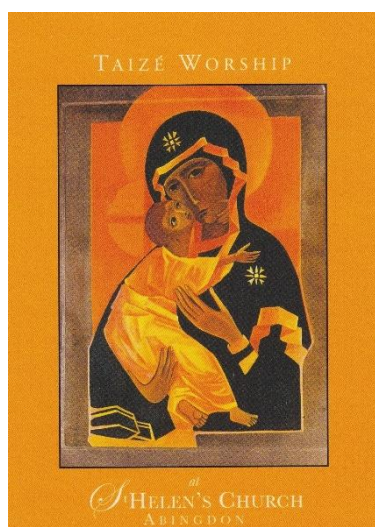
A fleet of over 130 aircraft provide communications, transport, supplies and medical evacuation to thousands of other Christian and humanitarian organisations and indigenous people in the most remote areas of the world. The mostly small aircraft used include Cessnas, Gippsland, Pilatus and Kodiak planes, often landing on small airstrips or on water. While working for Tearfund at their head office in the 1990s I often had occasion to book flights with MAF for our overseas workers in East Africa. As an example of the way MAF can save passengers from long and arduous road journeys, here is a quote from a recent edition of “Flying for Life”:



“During a free, five-day clinic in Mandera, Kenya, a team of eye specialists from The Fred Hollows Foundation examined more than 2,000 people. They performed 295 successful sight-restoring cataract operations and referred 21 children with congenital and traumatic cataracts for specialised surgery. Thanks to MAF pilot Daniel Loewen-Rudgers’ swift and safe flight, the eye specialists were able to cut their travel time down from a perilous 15-hour road journey to a smooth, uneventful 3-hour flight.”

MAF UK is funded mainly by voluntary donations of which 80% goes directly to their overseas operations. They also encourage gifts in wills. Pilots are paid but they are also expected to raise funding themselves. Most passengers contribute to the cost of their flight but the level of contribution depends on the customer and the country.

Donations can be made through maf-uk.org and the “Flying for Life” magazine can also be downloaded on their website.



Join us for Taizé
Prayer at St Helen's
Church at 5.30pm on
September 8th and
October 13th

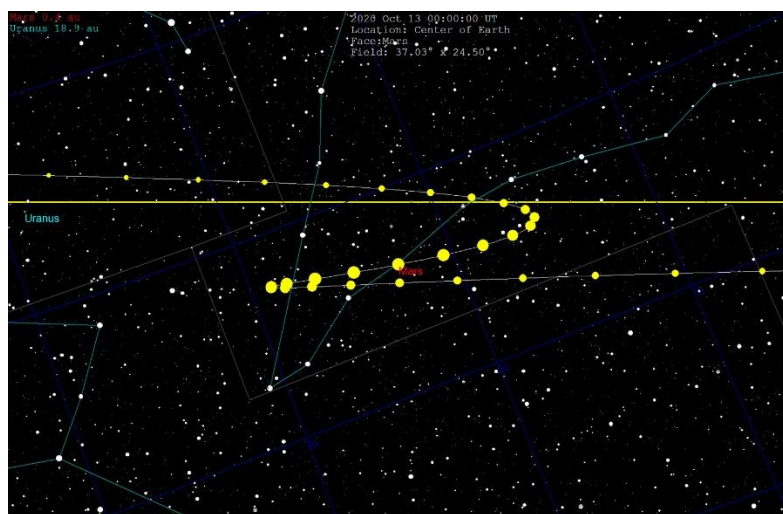
Words of the Month: Planets and Plankton

Rob Rutherford

This month, the words are familiar but perhaps the etymology isn't. It turns out that both words derive from the Greek word for 'wanderer'.

Plankton moves with ocean currents. Some types of plankton can move under their own power but not fast. The importance of plankton to ocean ecosystems and the health of the Earth is huge. To put it simply, big fish eat little fish which eat smaller fish which eat plankton. They contribute oxygen to the atmosphere through photosynthesis and if they sink to the ocean floor they lock in carbon, removing it from the atmosphere. The world is all connected – as are words.

What about planets? What is their connection with 'wandering'? We are not as aware of the night sky as our ancestors were. They spotted that certain 'star-like' objects moved or 'wandered' across the sky, changing their positions relative to the fixed stars. Of course, if you go outside for an extended period, you notice that the stars do apparently move – a camera reveals star 'trails' caused by the rotation of the Earth but the ancients assumed that the Earth was still and the rest of creation orbited around it. The planets were puzzling however – their 'wanderings' sometimes involved looping the loop. Here is a star chart that shows successive positions of Mars against the 'fixed' stars. It took some time to sort out what was going on but for a long time it was thought that planets orbited circles which went round circles which went round the Earth! Ask me if you are puzzled!



<https://www.planetary.org/space-images/mars-apparent-retrograde-motion>

included under the terms of creative commons license 3.0

Until the 18th century it was thought that there were 7 wanderers – Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. They gave us names for the days of the week. If you think that Norse Gods are responsible, think of the French words.

The transport of living things by the ocean gave Charles Darwin an idea. "As a geologist I feel a special interest on the possibility of plants being transported by sea to distant islands". He carried out experiments to see if seeds could survive a prolonged soaking in salt water. They could.

Since this article makes connections between earth and space, I'd better mention that we don't know for sure whether life originated on Earth or whether it was seeded from space. There is no evidence to support that idea – yet - but it is known that micro-organisms can survive the harsh environment of space.

Back to school Volunteer Appeal - Can you help?



As the schools go back, we are busy training volunteers for our regular volunteer projects:

The **Kingfisher Singing Group** meets weekly to sing nursery rhymes and simple action songs at Kingfisher School. The group has been running since 2018 and is really appreciated by staff and students. Volunteers need to be able to commit to regular attendance and sing with enthusiasm!

Thinking Books is TrinityLearning's volunteer mentoring project. It involves trained volunteers meeting children for ten weekly in-school sessions to discuss characters' emotions using carefully chosen books. The project requires a commitment of around an hour a week in term time. We know that Thinking Books volunteers are greatly appreciated by the schools they support from the feedback we've received.

We are in the very early stages of planning a refurbishment to the **Carswell School Sensory Garden**. The garden was originally designed by Rosemary Perrow in 2012 and has been used by many Carswell School pupils as well as being appreciated by the local community. Now however, many of the original features have become overgrown or are in need of replacement. Refurbishing the garden to reflect the schools changing needs will be a major project and will require both short term and long-term volunteer support. If you have experience in garden design or would be interested in volunteering for one off gardening sessions or regular maintenance of the completed garden please get in touch.

TrinityLearning is committed to Safeguarding. We provide full training and support volunteers through the application process and DBS checks. We will be running training for these projects throughout September and early October

Please email Nicola nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com if you would like to know more about any of these projects or any of our other volunteer opportunities.

Abingdon Heritage Weekend: 14th - 15th September

Eluned and Nick Hallas

The 2024 national Heritage Open Days festival has set the theme of 'Routes, Networks, Connections' and Abingdon will be echoing this. There will be many interesting buildings open, talks, exhibitions, an art competition and much more. So lots to do! Find out more at <https://www.abingdonheritage.org.uk/festivalprogramme>

In our Churches, St Helen's & St Michaels' will both be offering afternoon Cream Teas, and St Nicolas will be hosting a 'Landscape in a Day Challenge' – pop in after 2:30pm to see the entrants (<https://www.abingdonheritage.org.uk/landscape-in-a-day>)

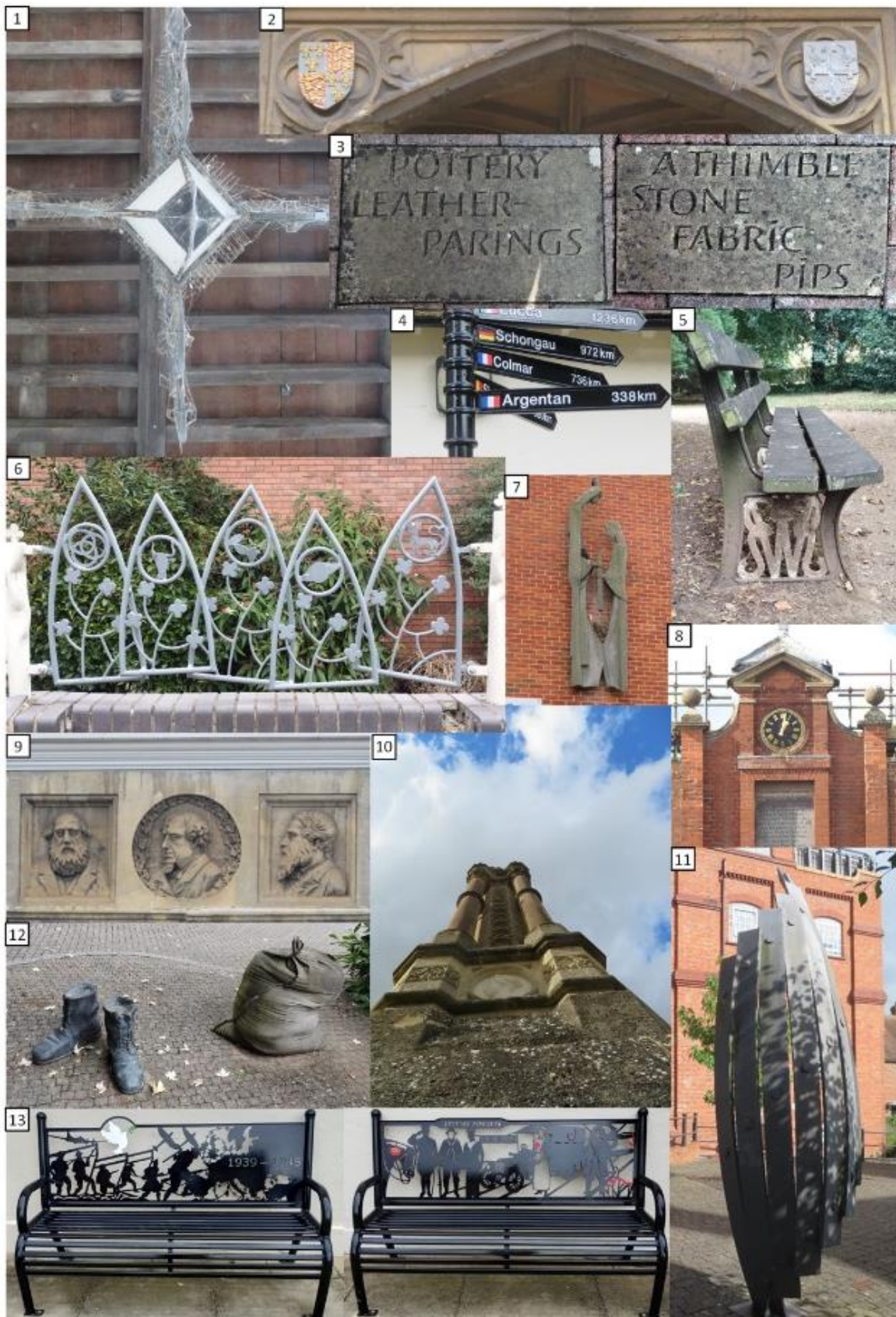
Why not get in the mood by trying this month's quiz – look up, look down, look under.

If you want to see more, Abingdon Civic Society have put together a series of walks around Abingdon taking in art, heritage or royal connections. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Quiz: Look up, Look down, Look under

Eluned and Nick Hallas

Can you spot these heritage gems? Answers on page 13



Seeking the "Perfect" Priest

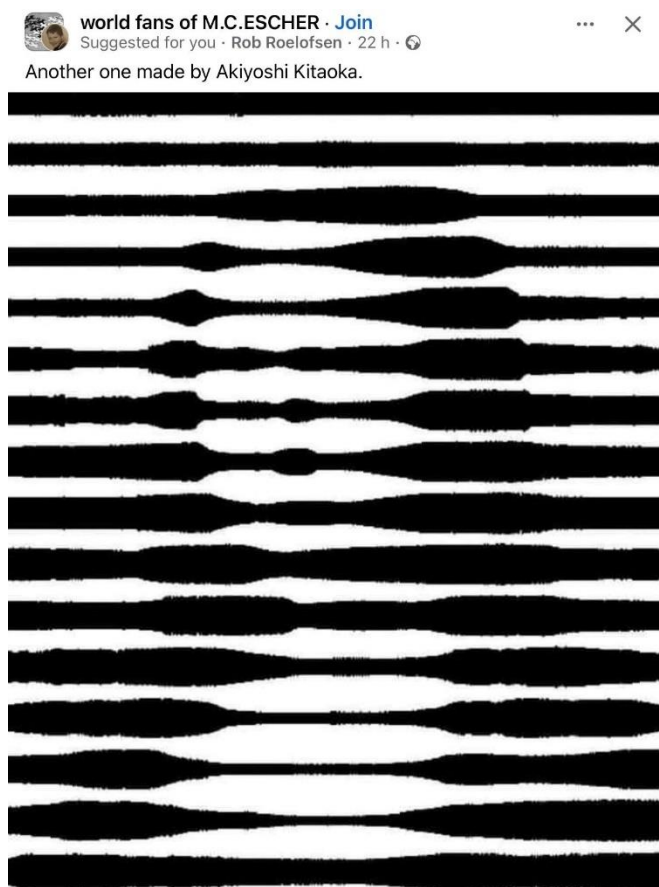
The results of a computerized study indicate the perfect priest preaches exactly fifteen minutes. He condemns sin but never upsets anyone. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight and is also a janitor. He makes \$70.00 per week, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car and gives \$70.00 per week to the poor. He is 28 years of age and has been preaching 30 years. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all his time with senior citizens. The perfect priest smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humour that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. He makes 15 calls daily on parish families, shut-ins and hospitalized; he visits the schools every day; he spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched and is always in his office when needed. If your priest does not measure up, simply send this letter to six other parishes that are tired of their priests too. Then bundle up your priest and send him to the church at the top of the list. In one week you will receive 1,643 priests and one of them should be perfect. Have faith in this matter – one church broke this chain and got its old priest back in less than three months!

Reprinted from 'Fragments', a newsletter of the Toronto Pastoral Centre for Liturgy at the suggestion of Charles Miller!

Pictures of the Month

Courtesy of Rob's Facebook feed

Are you seeing what I am seeing?



September Events

Compiled by Louise Heffernan




*Music at St Helen's Church
Abingdon*

**Saturday 5th Oct
at 7.30 pm**

"Sounding the Sacred Space"

A concert of choral music from the different eras of the church building

By the Helenstowe Consort
Director: Peter Foster

Tickets £12 (under 16s free) at the door or from Ticketsource

Refreshments available in the interval
Proceeds to Helen and Douglas House and St. Helen's Church




Piano Recital

Huw Rhys James

6th October at 3pm
St Michael and All Angels Church

Playing a selection of music
by Chopin, Brahms, Haydn




Cream Teas

St Michael & All Angels' Church,
Park Road



**Saturday 14th September
2.30 – 4.30 pm**

Tea/coffee with scone/cake £5
Proceeds to church funds
All welcome

Also a cream tea at St Helen's Church on the afternoon of 14th September




St HELEN'S CHURCH

AGNOSTICS ANONYMOUS

Meeting for Open Discussion

Do Christians believe in 3 gods?

Led by Keith Ward with John Barton & John Kerr, who have all lectured for Oxford University.

Tuesday 15th October 2024
6 pm to 7.30 pm

In **Parish Centre** (opposite main door of St Helen's Church, Abingdon)

FREE **Everyone Welcome**

Contact for more Information: Jill Gant 01235 528929

Friends of St Helen's Church

A talk: Trouble in Paradise

The Caribbean is known universally for its 'Sun, sea and sand' and tropical life-style - yet it is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world. Alex Titcombe shares his experiences of having lived and worked there for over 20 years.

St Helen's Church

Tuesday October 1st 7.30pm Free to members.

Others welcome.

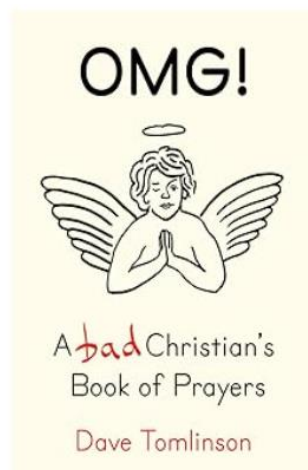


Talk: OMG! A Bad Christian's Book of Prayers.
Rev Dave Tomlinson

All Saints Methodist Church.

Tuesday October 8th 7.30pm

Organised by the local PCN Network

**And restarting in September:**

in
**St Michael and All Angels
Church, Park Road, Abingdon**

**The 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the
month 11am - noon**

*Please join us in this wonderful place for some gentle
dancing to beautiful music from around the world.*

This is an informal group and new dancers are always
welcome; no experience or partner needed. All dances
are demonstrated and walked through first.

£3 a session

For further information contact Elizabeth Mitchell at
emwym@hotmail.co.uk or Sue Sheppy on 07786736226

Faith Forum

On the first Sunday of each month in
the Parish Centre at 12.30 for a
buffet lunch followed by talk and
discussion at 12.45.

Focus this series:

Different ways of understanding
Scripture

Circle Dancing to Taizé
music: 1st Thursday of each
month
9.45 – 10.45 before regular
circle dancing session



A Kind Word

Eileen Duckett

A kind word can brighten up your day
And bring joy where before there was dismay
A kind word from a loved one dear
Warms our heart and brings us so much cheer.

But a kind word from a stranger is more precious by far
Because they really don't know who we are
And they have taken time to show us that they care
Which is lovely and so very rare.

If we can be that stranger on life's way
Who brings joy to those we meet with something that we say
Then their day will seem brighter
Our heart will be lighter
And we will both enjoy a better day.

Quiz Answers!

September Quiz
Answers:
Don't peek!

1. Lamp under County Hall
2. Old abbey gateway
3. Neave Mews
4. Signpost outside Royse Rooms
5. GWR bench, Albert Park
6. Railings on north side of Waitrose
7. Market square
8. Tomkins' almshouses
9. Clock House, Ock Street
10. Albert Memorial, Albert Park
11. Barrel outside old brewery
12. Boots and sack, Penlon Place
13. War benches outside Royse Rooms



From Rob's Facebook feed

Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the Parish Website:

<https://abingdonparish.org.uk>

for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. The foodbank also operates from Preston Road Community Centre. Donations are welcome there too between 12.00 and 2.30pm on Wednesdays. You can also donate money by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank' or via the Foodbank website <https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office has details if you want to donate via online banking.

Finally, from Dave Walker:

PREVIOUS INCUMBENTS



BUILT THE
TOWER



INSTALLED
GAS LIGHTING



MAGNIFICENT
BEARD



FOUNDED THE
SCHOOL



DID WONDERS
FOR THE ROSES



NAME ON
A PLAQUE



LARGELY
ABSENT



INTRODUCED
INNOVATIONS



ABOLISHED
INNOVATIONS



LEFT UNDER
A CLOUD



WROTE
A BOOK



BUILT CHURCH
ON NEW ESTATE



DAY OFF:
FRIDAY



UPSET THE
FLOWER ARRANGERS



PUB OUTREACH
MINISTRY



BEFRIENDED
THE METHODISTS



STARTED THE
FOOD BANK



KEPT THE
PLACE GOING

CartoonChurch.com

Thanks to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will probably be published on October 6th - ideas and contributions on the theme of 'Abundance' (or not) to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk