

GRAPEVINE

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Easter thoughts

'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'

Psalm 51:10 NIV

Hello there,
I love this time of year with the bright spring flowers, the freshly cut grass and new life springing up everywhere. For Christians, spring has the added benefit of reminding us that God's all about new stuff. In fact, Jesus promised to make everything new one day (Revelation 21:5). In the meantime, he gives us glimpses of the new, through spring.

Spring is a time for growth. In nature, that comes from the right combination of sunlight and water. For our spiritual lives, it comes from the right combination of time

with God, reading his word in the Bible, through prayer and through spending time with other Christians.

This Lent the Welling churches decided to come together and offer a wide range of different Lenten activities. This has given Christians from different denominations the chance to grow together in their faith and relationship with Christ.

You're never too young or old to learn a little more about God and his goodness. Just like the sun and rain provide nourishment to the plants and shoots, God's word reaches into our hearts and shows us things that we never would have imagined. God is in the renovation business. He takes what's old and broken down and transforms it into something amazing. Through Christ's life, death and resurrection we are given new life. If there

is an area of your life that needs some renewal, God wants more than anything to come and meet with you. Take look at the flowers and plants coming to life around you; they are not worrying about their way to awesomeness and you can't either. God cares about you, so let him carry your needs, worries and fears.

My prayer for you this springtime is, whether you take a long walk on a sunny day, splash through puddles during an unexpected shower or enjoy the view of your garden through your kitchen window, that you take time to soak up the blessings of spring. Let all the sights, sounds and smells of this new season bring something new to life in you.

Love in Christ,
Danielle Pearson-Smith

St John's News

We were constantly reminded over the Autumn that evangelism is sharing, both in word and action, the amazing news of God's love and His longing to have a relationship with **everyone**. It is exciting and not a surprise that evangelism must be at the forefront of who we are at St John'. A number of us have been able to share in action at the Winter Night Shelter and have come to appreciate a tough world we previously knew little about.

Some of us were able to attend the **JustOne** training event led by Andrew Hawkins, a revision course on evangelism, as he used J. John's Natural Evangelism which we followed in the Autumn! As we look towards 8th July and the JustOne event at the Emirates Stadium, we are all being encouraged to pray that at least one friend will be open to coming with us to that event, although the important thing is simply that he/she comes to know Jesus.

Others have been growing in their faith as they have given time to look in more depth at what the Christian faith is really about. I refer of course to those on the current

Alpha Course! Housegroups have been challenged as they have followed either the morning or evening sermon series on the Creed or Ephesians respectively. Messy Church is continuing, with Linzi Golding's amazing help and expertise, to use current films as hooks for understanding Christian truth.

It was great to welcome the **Tester family** to a morning service. Sarah, Sophia and Emily came and helped our children learn more about what it is like for them living in Peru. Several of our church family have just started the Growing Leaders Course. Opportunities for fun and friendship have included a Quiz and Auctions of Promises Evening (my roses are so appreciating a proper prune, and as for that amazing Biryani!).

It was early in February when around a hundred ladies had a great night at St John's enjoying a variety of pleasurable activities from a session enjoying the foot spa to enhancing their wardrobes via a clothes swap. The men, of course, continue to enjoy their monthly curry nights! A number of couples are

Ladies' night

I came to the ladies' evening last month. It was a great evening with lots of things to do: jewellery making, drinks, cake and a chocolate fountain (yum!), manicures, henna painting, a clothes swap and even foot spas. The atmosphere was lovely!
Anne Hill

£50 was raised for The Leprosy Mission and £265.51 for SPARK. Thank you to all who came, and to all who helped make the evening such a success. **Nicola Foot**



appreciating the current Marriage Course being held at Bishop Ridley. As I write Holiday Club and Holy Week are approaching fast... more opportunities for sharing Jesus in word and action!

'Til June, **Estelle Woodcock**

Eastergram

Calvery is a rubbish tip close by, not a green hill far away.

That is the stench of rotting dogs, not the waft of holy oil.

The cross is stubbed and splintered, not elegant and planed as if in a Forentine fresco.



Imagine that helmet a mask.
Imagine that sandal a boot.
Imagine that spear a gun.

Imagine this crowd
not contorting itself in grief
but holding up its phones
to share Easter with the world;
proving it was there
by watching it on screen.

What happens next
Will amaze you.

By Steve Turner

Afternoon tea



As some of you know, as well as being part of the St John's staff team I also work for Erith Deanery Youth Trust seeking to support and promote the children's and youth work in all thirteen churches (in the north of the borough). One way I have done this is by saying THANK YOU.

On the 11th February all those who work with children and young people in any capacity were invited to St Paul's Northumberland Heath for afternoon tea. It was a great afternoon with representatives from many of our churches who support toddler groups, Brownie packs, Sunday clubs and youth groups. Cheryl, the Diocesan Children's and Youth Work Advisor came down to thank everyone for their hard work week in, week out.

It was a fantastic time. We spent time swapping good stories about the great things God has been doing in the lives of the children and young people in our churches and shared ideas with one another. We are blessed with children of all ages in our churches and many wonderful people who give their time, energy and love to share Jesus with them.

THANK YOU.

Laura Webster

St J's Danson

It has been a slow start to 2017 for St John's Danson with games cancelled left, right and centre due to frozen or waterlogged pitches (and even once due to the groundsman's wife going into labour!). However, as winter slinked away and pitches thawed in the looming spring sunshine, we've finally begun to hit our stride. The hard earned point claimed against Selhurst United after fighting back to finish 4-4 from a 4-1 down position, and a comfortable 6-2 away win over XLP for a further three points has situated us in the relative safety of 5th spit in the league.

But with six games still to play and weeks left to play them quickly running out, we find ourselves playing our next two fixtures back to back on what I'm sure will be a gruelling Saturday afternoon of football. I'm certain the following Sunday morning's trip from bed to pew will be a difficult one and any offers of a piggy back down the aisle will be gratefully received!



As always, we'd appreciate any support at our home games, played at Hall Place. Talk to Rob Still or me for details. We'd love to see you. However, with the inevitable loss of players to injury towards the end of the season, I can't guarantee you won't find yourself standing in the middle of the pitch in a stinky bright orange shirt and shin pads, wondering how Rob managed to talk you into it...

Dave Still



Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

Christians of my generation will know of Brother Andrew and may well have read his book 'God's Smuggler' in which he tells the story of both how he came to faith and the beginnings of the organisation that became Open Doors.

After World War II, Brother Andrew became aware of the persecution suffered by Christians inside the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, and particularly how many restrictions they faced worshipping and, more particularly, obtaining Bibles. At tremendous risk to himself he began smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain, and he was soon joined by others who shared his concern and were prepared to take the same risks. There were many occasions when the 'smugglers' were in real danger and God's protection was very real to them.

Today the focus has shifted from the former communist countries to other parts of the world and Open Doors, as the

organisation became known, supports our persecuted brothers and sisters in at least fifty countries. The level of persecution ranges from rejection by family and friends all the way up to risking death for converting to Christianity. This is especially the case in countries where the state religion is Islam. We are all aware of the plight of Christians in Syria, Iraq, Iran and other countries in the Middle and Far East, but it is also sobering to note that Columbia and Mexico appear in the World Watch list. These are countries where drug cartels have enormous power and Christians, with their heart for justice and opposition to the drug trade, put themselves in great danger by speaking out against it.



If you would like know more about how you might support Open Doors have a word with me.

Lesley South

Open Doors publishes a monthly prayer diary and I would encourage you to start to use one. It will open your eyes, as it has mine, to the suffering of the body of Christ in these parts of the world, but you will also be very humbled by the courage of Christians and Open Doors' partners as they make their stand for Christ, sometimes even to the point of being prepared to die for their faith. Open Doors also publishes an annual World Watch List of countries where it is difficult or dangerous to be a Christian. North Korea has been number one on this list since 2002!

Winter Night Shelter Reflections

“...but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” **Matthew 8:20**

Jenny and I volunteered to person the Night Shelter at the Salvation Army Hall in Welling on Tuesday evenings from 18:30 to 22:00. The capacity of the shelter is twelve guests, but on our nights the number of users has been between five and nine. Prior to their arrival, we pray as a group of volunteers, for our guests, their lives and futures, and that the evening will be productive for the Lord.

The guests are logged in at 19:30 through a side door, confirming that they have no alcohol or drugs on them and that they understand the rules of the night shelter. Mostly they then go through to the sleeping area, and find a spot to call their own, where they can put their belongings. They then might go into the main area for a hot drink and a chat amongst themselves, and possibly a chat with the volunteers, before a hot meal is served at approximately 20:00. On Tuesday nights the meal has always been prepared lovingly by our minister Adam and is unfailingly wonderful, and quite the highlight of the whole evening. Thank you Adam, and all the cooks.

After the evening meal the guests might watch a film or chat, and some of them spend time smoking outside the back door. They usually settle down well before 22:00 which is when the three overnight shift volunteers arrive. They are briefed on any developments by the team leader, in our case Jack, who has been a wonderful and thorough person to work alongside.

One's interactions with the guests can vary

in quality and quantity but I was always impressed, in varying degrees, by their dignity, social skills, intellect, and life knowledge. The problem areas can be challenging mental health and the prolonged use of illegal drugs and/or alcohol but this is not always true; some are simply estranged from partners or simply unlucky.

As our guests have been interviewed at Cornerstone prior to coming to us, they are very much the best of our local homeless folk and, last I heard, four of them had been rehoused but one expelled from the project for disobeying the rules. Another has apparently had a minor dispute with the local police and is on bail. There are hopes that all of those who remain on board the scheme will have some accommodation to go to before the Bexley Night Shelter closes in late March.

There were thirteen volunteers who were rostered in for Tuesday evenings, so we have only been called upon to turn up on about four occasions whilst being reserves on two evenings in case of emergencies or volunteer shortages.

Working alongside homeless young people makes you realise just how blessed you are personally to have the love of a family and friends, a roof over your head, three meals a day, a warm place to live in and



some personal privacy to shower, wash, and use the loo, etc. These lovely guests with whom we have had the privilege of meeting and interacting have none of these blessings and one is so grateful that they are gracious enough to tolerate us who barely know how lucky we are. There but for fortune go any of us.

Thank you Lord that You give us the love to give to others. Please help us always to be generous with it.

Please pray that this cohort of homeless men will get fixed up with accommodation before the end of the project. Also, for them in mind, body and spirit, that they will all experience Jesus' love in their lives. That it will be possible to have a Bexley Night Shelter in 2017/18 and that this year's 130 volunteers will come back for more next year (with more churches involved next time). Thank you.

Mike Cosser

Studying Psychology!

Hello, I am Bethany Webster and I am currently in my first year of studying Psychology at the University of Birmingham.

So far, university has been the best experience of my life; the friends I have made here are brilliant and I cannot wait to be able to live with my closest friends next year. Studying Psychology is fantastic; I get to learn how our minds work and how we treat neurological conditions, all in the hope of improving people's lives. I cannot wait to go into the depths of Psychology over the next two years.

I have found being a Christian at university surprisingly easy. I have been very fortunate to have a close friend here, who is also a Christian, supporting me in my faith and accompanying me to church. I am also very fortunate because my friends at university are all very supportive of my

faith. Due to the vast diversity of faiths in Birmingham, everyone that I have met (whilst they may not be religious themselves) have no issue with my own faith and have asked me questions about it. On top of these variety of faiths there is also a great variety of churches including those very similar to St John's, which are lovely and welcoming places. Before I came, my father researched different churches in Birmingham, particularly Gas Street led by Tim Hughes. Gas Street is aimed directly at students so there are so many people there to whom



you can relate and who understand the struggle between church and university.

The biggest challenge I face is finding the time to attend church when there is lots of work to be done, as church takes a great amount of time out of my day by being a 30-

minute walk away. Hopefully, next year the route to church will be easier so I can go to church more frequently and grow in my faith.

Bethany Webster

Welcome!

The welcome someone receives in church

Do you ever get the feeling that you know everyone you meet (even when you meet them for the first time)? A sense of familiarity? Do you ever sense that we are all one family here...moving through life together despite our differences? We experience different things, we love and fear in different ways, we express in different ways, we enjoy different things, yet at the end of the day there is something that connects each and everyone one of us. It is the heart that connects us all (Romans 12:5). For when we sit back in the peacefulness of our own heart we can see another and know, whether that they too are as wonderful as life itself.



So many elderly people have no one to care for them, no one to look after them, no one to love them. We are all responsible to change that. The older generations deserve a special kind of respect from younger generations, and should be valued for the wisdom and life experience that no one of a different age can offer. The most precious gift we can give to anyone, especially our elders, is our love, respect, care, and appreciation.

I enjoy socializing because I like to hear people's interesting stories. I like to be confident and express myself, it gives me energy. It feels like a skill, an art, something to improve and something that takes courage, a fun challenge. Sometimes another person can change your mood. By offering some words of encouragement we can help discouraged people face their

present and future with courage. It's unbelievable how you can affect someone else so deeply and never know.

If you asked me to talk about any drawback in being as welcome team, I would say nothing. It might be said by others that you may feel sleepy and you really love to hug your bed on Sunday mornings, especially in freezing weather, but I believe something better is waiting for me in church. So, I prefer to get there earlier, say hello to everyone and fuel up my mood for the coming week.

To make it short, we need to recognize that welcoming is not simply about growing our church. Visitors and newcomers all deserve special attention, even if we never see them again. On the other hand, it should be our desire to reach out to the lost. If an outsider has made the effort to walk into our strange building, shouldn't we make the effort to welcome them kindly? Every member of the congregation has a responsibility to engage with visitors and create a welcoming church. It's not just the job of a welcoming team.

I would like to encourage you to join your church's welcome team. It is like you never get enough of it and undoubtedly you will enjoy having a short chat with lovely, kind and respectful people from different generations.

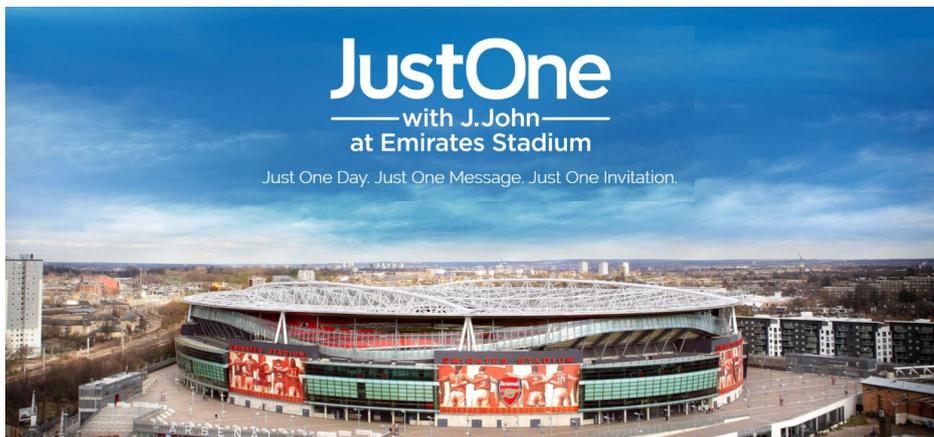
'Greet one another in Christian love.' (1 Peter 5:14)

Rasoul Naderi

has a huge impact on whether they stay. Many of us are part of St John's because of the acceptance we've felt when we entered and that we continue to feel. Welcome is also a deeply Biblical theme, finding its roots in the compassion of God for the outsider and illustrated clearly in Jesus' own commitment to share a dinner table with people from all walks of life (Mark 2:16). The welcome that Jesus offers reflects the welcome that the Father offers to the world. The Spirit draws us into the welcoming life of God, shaping us to be like Jesus.

We are called to welcome others as we have been welcomed. Greeting is an act of communication in which human beings intentionally make their presence known to each other. It is when we show attention to, and suggest a type of relationship between, individuals or groups of people. Visitors and guests must feel accepted, recognized, informed and, most of all, that their visit is appreciated. These feelings are naturally expected when visiting our church.

Our motivation for hospitality should not be to receive something in return. Having a great hospitality team helps members be confident in bringing their friends to church, knowing that their guests will receive a good welcome. Also, leaving visitors with a positive first welcome is a way of sharing the generous welcome of God with those who cross the threshold of our churches.



Who could you invite? Saturday 8th July 2017

JustOne, with J. John, at the Emirates Stadium is a one-day event, bringing people together from all walks of life to celebrate the Christian faith and to give them an opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus. Who will you invite?



A great time was had on the 4th March as people from around Bexley thought about how they could share their faith well with friends, family, colleagues, strangers...

Congratulations!



Congratulations to Jo (née Ball) and Mike Jones who got married on 18th February!