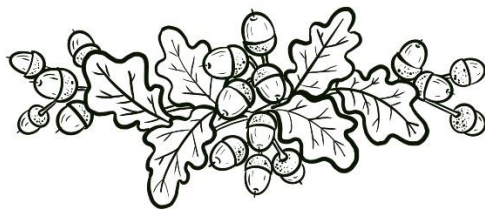




St Mark's Parish Magazine
October 2023



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LETTER FROM THE VICAR

Dear Friends,

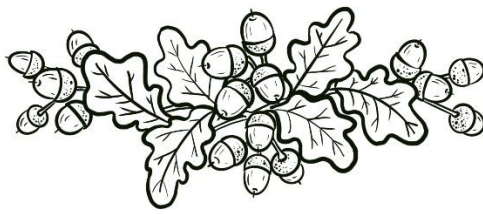
The end of October sees us enter the days of Hallowmas or Hallowtide. Contrary to popular belief, All Hallows' Eve, and All Hallows' Day are rooted deep in Christian practice. A Hallow is a saint, but the word is now archaic, and little used. We hear it more commonly in its verb form, for example, in the Lord's Prayer; "hallowed be thy name", where it means "honoured" or "sanctified". It is a rather beautiful word, as it seeks to set apart that which would otherwise be ordinary.

What does it mean to be a saint? Well, there are broadly two different uses of the word "saint". The first refers to "all of the baptised". Each of the baptised is entitled to be called a saint, regardless of their virtue or actions. We see this, for example, in St Paul's letter to the Philippians in chapter one which he writes "to all the Saints who are in Christ Jesus at Philippi". We are saints, simply because we are members of Jesus' mystical body, and reflect His glory. But the second use of the word saint is for those people who are recognised as having an exceptional degree of virtue or holiness. It doesn't mean that they are perfect, but that they are worthy of emulation because they reflect to us something of God's immeasurable beauty and power. It is a mistake to consider that the church "makes" saints. Instead, the church recognises that some Christians have lived earthly lives of such holiness that they are deserving of the title.

On the day before All Saints' Day (All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween), Christians would originally have enacted a fast, to prepare to feast with the saints the following day. The early church simply ran out of feast days to remember all of the baptised who'd been received into God's eternity through martyrdom, and so they set aside a day, known as All Saints' Day. On All Saints' Day, we tend to remember the "named" saints whom the church has given the title "saint", and we give thanks for their lives, and ask them to pray for ours. The following day, All Souls' Day, we tend to remember the ordinary saints whom we've known, who have passed through our lives, and we pray for them, that they would rest peacefully until the final coming of Jesus.

As we prepare to enter the three days of Hallowmas, let us fast, and feast, and pray, as we remember with thanksgiving the saints who shone on earth, and shine even more brightly before God's throne.

Every blessing



Church Notices

Garden Tidy Sessions

Please join us on Saturday 4 November so we can get the church gardens looking tidy for Remembrance Sunday. We meet from 10.00am and if you can spare some time, it would be appreciated. We will also be in the gardens on Saturday 11 November (especially if the weather is bad on the 4th) and as that is Armistice Day we will pause at the war memorial at 11.00am. Do join us tea, coffee and cake provided.

Patricia Bird and Elizabeth Davis

Wanted! New Editor

Thank you to Alexia Hartman for editing the Parish Magazine for the last three months, after my laptop broke beyond repair. I now have a new one and I will be continuing to edit the magazine until the end of the year. We are still looking for a volunteer, if you are able to spare the time to take over the role of Editor, please contact the Parish Office or myself.

Helen Starmer

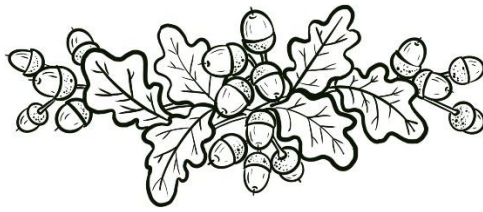
Home Group, All Welcome Aboard



On the afternoon of Sunday 27 August, the St Mark's Home Group had their annual tea party. A cream tea with a little extra tippie was enjoyed by all, plus optional train rides!

We meet every two or three weeks on a Thursday evening, to study the Bible together and to pray. Anyone is welcome to join. Please contact Susannah at susannahshuck@hotmail.com if you are interested.

Susannah Dyde



News from the Church of England

Renowned composer 'thrilled' to write Christmas carol for Church of England's 2023 theme

The Church of England theme encourages all to 'join the song' this Christmas with a brand-new carol by Bob Chilcott.

This Christmas, the Church of England is inviting choirs across churches, schools, and communities to 'join the song' alongside one of the country's leading choral composers in a new interpretation of the beloved carol 'The First Nowell' with a brand new melody.

The new carol has been written by acclaimed composer Bob Chilcott, and is the centrepiece of this year's Church of England Christmas focus: Follow The Star: Join The Song.

The theme for 2023 highlights how singing can help draw people closer to God and one another through the journey from Advent to Epiphany, with a wealth of free resources available for churches, schools and any context.

Choirs keen to be involved will have access to a suite of learning tracks, sheet music and other resources to help them prepare and learn the new carol alongside other resources to help churches engage in this year's theme.

Bob Chilcott is a composer, conductor, and singer, whose career in choral music began as a chorister and choral scholar in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, after which he sang for 12 years as a member of the world-famous King's Singers ensemble. He became a full-time composer in 1997, and has produced a large catalogue of music for all types of choirs. His most often performed pieces include Can you hear me?, A Little Jazz Mass, Requiem, and the St John Passion and his music has been widely recorded by leading British choirs and groups including The King's Singers, King's College, Cambridge, The Sixteen, Tenebrae and The BBC Singers.

Speaking about the new carol, **Bob Chilcott said**: "It's been an absolute thrill for me to be able to write new music for the well-known carol, 'The First Nowell,' and to be a part of the 'Follow the Star' campaign at Christmas 2023. I have aimed to make this melody easy to pick up and I hope all will enjoy singing it, at a time of year when the joy of singing is so central to worship and to the celebration of Christmas."

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York write: "Singing is central to how many of us celebrate Christmas. Around the country – and the world – young and old will gather in churches, schools and concert halls, on high streets, hospital wards and village greens, to hear and sing carols.

"As we gather in worship this Christmas and join the song of the angels, may we all be drawn deeper into the wonder and the truth of Christmas: in the birth of Jesus, God becomes human, heaven embraces earth."

Amaris Cole, the Church of England's Head of Digital said: "We are delighted Bob has written this uplifting new carol for this year's Christmas theme. Now it's over to choirs from churches, chapels, cathedrals, schools and communities to bring it to life, and to be part of something very special!"

Full article available on the Church of England website.

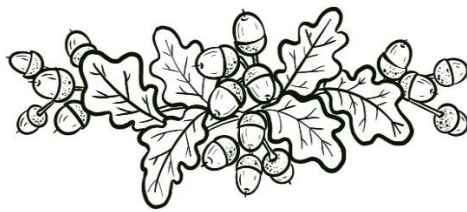
Recommendations for collaboration between dioceses

The Church of England's Dioceses Commission has shared the themes which emerged from a recent consultation looking at bishops and their ministries.

It is part of a series of 'listening exercises' exploring how the Church of England can best serve the nation in the 2020s and beyond, and also make best use of resources.

Recommendations included suggestions for new collaborations between dioceses in areas such as Net Zero, Racial Justice, Ministry Training and Education, either on a regional level or between a number of dioceses.

The consultation also considered how dioceses might cooperate to use resources better, as well as how the ministry of suffragan and area bishops can best be delivered. There will not be any centrally led structural changes to dioceses, or combinations of dioceses, as a result of the consultation.



Patriotism

I was brought up to be a true British patriot, born in Blackheath and always willing as a child to stand to attention when the National Anthem was played. On Mercator's Atlas so much of the world was red as our empire really did span the world. What a blessing that was in both world wars when so many from so far away were prepared to risk, and often lose their lives fighting for us.

I was evacuated to New Zealand in the 2nd World War and the choir mistress in my church there lived on her own as her husband and all four sons had been killed in the First World War and she had no daughters. I would not have thought we could have won those wars had there been no British Empire to fight with us.

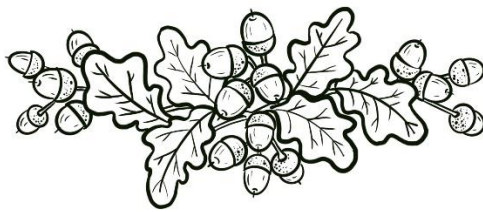
I spent my two years of National Service in the Royal Navy, happily feeling proud to be part of our great nation and empire. But as the years progressed our empire was reducing as so many wanted their independence, whatever the cost. We had been brought up to believe that our Empire had done so much good for the poorer people of the world. At least a Commonwealth still existed, but even that is diminishing these days.

This last month I found a video entitled "The British Empire in Colour." It was a series of films broadcast a few years ago about the fall of our "lovely" British Empire. This was horrifying in that in so many places we had made things worse for those no longer in our care. To list a few, such as the splitting of Pakistan from India, the management of Palestine, the Suez fiasco, the dealing with the Mao Mao in Kenya, our handling of Rhodesia and our actions in other parts of Africa. In so many parts of the Empire we probably thought we were helping the 3rd world, with missionaries and others dedicating their lives to others. Maybe no other country with an Empire could have done better but this video helped to make me wonder how wrong I might have been in being so proud of the British Empire.

Although we were part of the European Union, working closely with them in any good works for the rest of the world, we are now on our own through our decision on Brexit and even want to reject any who need our help if they attempt to travel to us in a certain way. So many of us seem to want to isolate ourselves in one group or another when I suggest we should become more part of the whole world in all its troubles. Everyone in the world are our neighbours and should be our friends.

Having said this I am still a Royalist and would stand for God Save the King. These are ramblings of an old man who maybe at last is seeing things in something of a new light, but what do the young think? If our country now went to war, would they willingly join up to fight as we had to in the past, and should they be required to do so? I think no such obligation should exist or be forced upon them.

Ian Archer



Pass The Parcel

Pass the parcel ends when the music finally stops and the holder unties the remaining covers to disclose the prize for being the last one to hold the parcel. Similarly, the expression can denote the situation where people evade a problem by passing it on, one to another. The American expression is "passing the buck"! In this sense, today there are many parcels circulating in the world.

The current one seems to be Climate Change, with the Papers vying with each other to find reasons why we should do less or even nothing instead of asking what more can we do to stem climate change now. One Paper commented; "Of course we want to move to a cleaner, greener future. But that journey has to be undertaken at a sensible affordable pace." That sounds quite reasonable (as intended). It suggests all is well and will be dealt with, in due course, at a comfortable pace. But we know that the climate has already deteriorated seriously and after 27 years of failed COPs (set up to deal with this worldwide problem), little has been done to restrict the use of carbon. Instead, carbon dioxide release is still growing. In that light, does not that comment strike you as absurd? When can it possibly be not affordable to save the world from disaster, and how can it not be the emergency most countries have formally acknowledged?

The basic snag is that Climate Change is perceived as something affecting the vague future when it is actually an urgent priority. The press and others feed on current stories, preferably which can be long running by reporting on variable aspects and keep debate running rather than deal with the full story. Accordingly, it is treated as no more significant than, say, the effects of current inflation or what some celebrity had for breakfast.

The Papers have certainly had their day this summer, informing and commenting on record temperatures, record fires throughout the world and now massive floods, especially in China (Hong Kong hit by the heaviest rainfall in 140 years). No country seems to have been spared. The concentration here has been on the Greek fires which seem most to affect our holiday makers. Now they have serious flooding! Near to home "stories" read the best: "don't look further." But in comparative terms, the fires in Canada have been far, far worse. News has centred on areas destroyed, people killed, displaced or inconvenienced. You hardly hear anything about the huge amounts of carbon released by such fires and also their reduced capacity to absorb carbon in the future, whether in Canada, Greece, China, Hawaii, Portugal, Brazil or elsewhere. That is a far more serious issue than the current problems from fires or floods, dreadful though they may be. This year so far the Canadian fires alone have released 290 megatons of carbon (compared to 138 megatons, the record in 2014).

All this carbon remains in the atmosphere and advances global warming. No wonder scientists have not kept up with the rate of change. Then again, there is the reduction in carbon conversion through the clearance of forests. Brazil hopes to stop burning the lungs of the world by 2050. By then, they need hardly bother.

The UN commented on July as the hottest recorded month in the world. Most weather authorities, as well as environmental scientists, attribute the disasters to Climate Change. The UN General Secretary was only surprised by the speed of change. It's true that scientists can get things wrong but in the sphere of Climate Change, to date their forecasts have underestimated the rate of decline. Reports generally admit this summer's weather pattern will be a model for the future, but the reality is likely to be that the changes will be worse and gathering speed as the seas warm further and rainfall rises exponentially.

But many countries are far more concerned by the effects of inflation on their populations and perhaps even more so on their economies. That is, of course, a serious matter which requires remedial action but it cannot begin to compare with the consequences of climate change.

And so at last in the Papers there has been some concentration on climate change. But instead of encouraging a positive approach to countering it, they are searching for justifications; not simply to continue with fossil fuels for the present, but to actually increase their output. This concern about climate action has been exacerbated politically in Germany by the requirement to replace failing gas boilers with expensive heat pumps. Votes have moved to the far right. This shows the need for change to be understood and managed. Similarly, the London "Ultra Low Emission Zone" (ULEZ), which both parties favoured, has proved to be very unpopular with some and so has become a political football. And ULEZ is directed to clean air and has little to do with climate change. All this emphasises the need for widespread understanding of the need for change, leadership, and sensitivity towards those affected.

President Macron says France is in front on Climate Change so that they should wait for others to catch up! Tony Blair puts 30% of the blame on China, overlooking the high carbon releases by the US and others, and advocates the UK developing new green systems, rather than facing the agreed urgent attention Climate Change requires now. Those expressing concerns that not enough is being done, are labelled innocent, unrealistic or scare mongers.

Yet currently the concern, even by what some would call the extremists, "No More OIL" are directing their complaint primarily towards preventing oil consumption from increasing. But then all this is no different to inactivity over twenty-seven years by the COPs. There, unity was expressed both in labelling climate change an emergency and unity in doing little or nothing about it.

As for China, it is certainly true that she contributes the largest share of 30% of world carbon release and still extensively relies on coal. However, she also produces more solar energy than the rest of the world put together and has over 90% of the world's

electric buses. Furthermore, her outputs of carbon dioxide are heavily influenced by responding to demand from the rest of the world for her material goods, which makes us as culpable as she certainly is. China remains culpable but we need to keep a balanced perspective. In place of the blame game, we need cooperation.

It's not just the sooner the better. Every delay means more carbon released to stay in the atmosphere and a greater acceptance that we cannot do without carbon and cannot escape the consequences. That is not an attitude any of us can afford to take. President Biden recognised this at COP26, when he made a sudden off-agenda offer for two way talks with China. But all the big players remain locked into what they see as more urgent problems and trying to persuade their populations that these must have priority.

The widespread reason given for lowering further the priority of climate change is the widespread inflation partly caused by shortness of fuel. But, in the case of the UK, increasing the output of fossil fuels is likely to be ineffectual for the following reasons. Firstly, it may well only come on stream well into the future by which time the inflation beast may have been tamed. Secondly, its effect on world prices is likely to be minimal and we shall still have to pay those prices. Thirdly, the extra oil will not be reserved for our benefit. It will accrue to oil companies which are governed by the fixing of world oil prices by the United Arab Republic. Extra oil here may be offset by reductions elsewhere and also may well flow elsewhere. The increases are most likely to be ineffectual. By contrast, more clean electricity wind farms on land and sea can be more immediate, cheaper and, if properly implemented, grow the UK economy.

The topic of Climate Change was preceded a few weeks ago by the publication of the 44 government plans to meet net zero, of which climate experts forecast that 42 of them could not meet their targets. So the general comment is, why need we change so quickly when others, notably China, are much more polluting and change here can have little effect on the world level of carbon release? Pass the parcel! But you may recall that at COP 26 it was the UK which led in insisting that all countries had not only targeted intentions but had strategies and tested plans to ensure they met new targets. Now we are to revise such policies. It's certainly a unique form of leadership. Furthermore, without excusing the use of carbon by China we need to admit that it is the demand for cars, steel, concrete and all the rest where the West still leads the world which causes the pollution. Passing the parcel is not a positive policy.

Notwithstanding some American States taking independent actions, the US is indeed the second highest polluter but currently it is devoting huge resources to ways of countering climate change and generating new green industries, much to the disapproval of some other countries who consider this unfair economic competition. But at least the States are giving a lead.

There is certainly a lack of balance and realism in our press. If it were not a very serious topic it would be laughable. The reality of course is that we cannot overnight change our consumptions but the history of twenty-seven years of recognition of emergency with low activity, when we could have effected change without hasty

response, is direct evidence that without a drive there will not be sufficient change anywhere. That must be the responsibility of governments. Effective government-led action needs to take place now.

A decline in economic activity has always been an opportunity for change. As shoots of recovery from inflation show, new products and cost-reducing ways of producing what was used before, invite real investment in those areas where demand and response recovers first, whether from a down cycle or the move away from austerity, that is where growth will take place. It will be a golden opportunity to direct growth away from fossil fuels to new forms of energy. Late comers beware.

Governments act through prohibitions (the law) subsidies and taxes. Notwithstanding political dogma we expend huge sums on "corporate welfare". Currently the excess of subsidies given to fossil fuel producers over that spent on green power is twenty billion pounds. (Shell meanwhile has made £33 billion and BP £23 billion in recent profits). Present subsidies for fossil fuel producers and notable users such as the air industry should be withdrawn in the very near future. Loss of revenues through tax fraud exceeds social services fraud by a factor of about four times. Unravelling this would help inflation as well as the economy to a more prosperous basis. Many companies know this and have written to the government asking for a stronger lead to encourage conversions. It's no more than returning to "real" costs. That outcome is more likely if we have well-constructed national plans to achieve targets and which take account of the needs of business as well as populations. You get this if you start sooner rather than later.

It is true that electricity is not as yet a good solution for vehicles and that green hydrogen is thus far too expensive. The national grid has inflexibilities which may only be changed through government intervention. At present fossil fuels still have to be used in the manufacture of steel and concrete. But there are plenty of ways such as domestic heating and industrial production where electricity has the edge on fossil fuels, sometimes a substantial edge. Such change must ensure that not all of the benefits accrue to overseas companies. The subsidies should be directed to UK production to ensure that the income benefit is received in this country instead of abroad.

We need to bear in mind that capital knows no patriotism. It flows where the returns are the highest. Currently electricity does not store or travel very well! So where the new electric power is generated is where the investment and new power-based industries will be based. Coming along late in the day will make it very difficult to even get started. So, part of the real cost of staying with fossil fuels is the further loss of future growth with a further slide down the economic snake. Such costs cannot be measured in arithmetic.

But the worst effects of choosing to invest in fossil fuels now comes in the long run. Coal, oil and gas are so expensive to set up and have such a long repayment period (without which the investment would not take place), there will be no question of switching on and off fossil fuel supply as the mood takes us. It will be there to stay

at the least till set up costs are covered with some profit. In effect we shall be going on as before, increasing the use of fossil fuels. But we shall in no way be going back to the "good old days" so often promised us. And the real costs of changing later rather than sooner are enormous.

Another current theme is the call for more adaptation (never specified) to climate change. The truth is that adaptation can never approach the growing speed of current climate change. Trying to make provision, say for holidays spoiled by forest fires, is money down the drain. Much better to save the forests. The high costs of manufacturing artificial snow in the winter to save the skiing industry would be much better spent on preserving the conditions for natural snowfall. Crying about the lost twenty-seven years of low response is unproductive but acknowledging that it is past delays which necessitate action now and that adaptation is a losing battle, is essential. In the end it's primarily about stopping the use of fossil fuels.

The latest ploy of carbon users and others is to say that since our use of carbon compared to the volume in the rest of the world is small so we can go on polluting to sustain our present economies. As I have argued that view is unsustainable. The reality here is that we remain eighth as a world polluter and if all countries used the similar argument nothing would continue to be done. This is an old playground argument, for example as used by weapon dealers: "If I don't do it, someone else will." So the innocents in repressive countries continue to suffer. It's the final "pass the parcel" argument. Everyone goes on as before and ensures the climate threat is not matched by countervailing action. It's certainly an abrogation of the lead we pretended to give at COP 26 when another round of target setting began, this time with the requirement of achievable strategies. There will never be a clearly convenient time for change.

Against the current trend and as reported in the August magazine, the Church of England's Synod has called for us to move faster on Climate Change and made a lead on its own expenditure. How refreshing that the church is prepared to challenge current heresy. What a shame this is not turned into a world movement. Populations need to be convinced of the need for change and support change which may sometimes not be congenial.

As I write (5 August) I predict that we shall soon read the next diversion. AI will be touted as our future saviour from Climate Change, but exactly how, why and when is unlikely to be spelled out. Just pass the parcel. Let us hope that governments never reach the stage when the only advice that can be given is the equivalent to "Don't Look UP!!"* The time for passing the parcel is long past.

*"Don't Look Up" is a film on a collision between a large meteorite and Earth which would wipe out mankind. The fictitious government was first in denial and then found itself too late and helpless. When finally the meteor could be seen and no longer denied, government advice was "Don't Look Up".

Harry Ingram

CALENDAR FOR OCTOBER 2023

Sunday 1st October	Harvest Festival 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church 10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online 4.00pm All-age Service – in Church 5.00pm Harvest Supper
Wednesday 4 th October	3.25pm T-Time Tales
Thursday 5 th October	12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church 2.00pm SMART
Sunday 8th October	18th Sunday after Trinity 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church 10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online with Junior Church 1.00pm Community Lunch 4.00pm Pet Service
Wednesday 11 th October	3.25pm T-Time Tales
Thursday 12 th October	12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church
Sunday 15th October	19th Sunday after Trinity 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church 10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online 4.00pm Messy Church
Wednesday 18th October	St Luke the Evangelist 3.25pm T-Time Tales
Thursday 19 th October	12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church
Sunday 22nd October	20th Sunday after Trinity 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church 10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online with Junior Church 6.00pm Taizé Prayer
Thursday 26 th October	12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church
Saturday 28th October	St Simon and St Jude, Apostles
Sunday 29th October	Bible Sunday 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church 10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online with Junior Church

Please remember that planned services are subject to change at short notice so please check the details on our website or with the Parish Office.

CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER 2023

Wednesday 1st November All Saints' Day

3.25pm T-Time Tales

Thursday 2nd November

12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church
2.00pm SMART

Sunday 5th November

All Saints' Sunday (*Green Sunday*)

8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in the Hall
10.00am Sung Eucharist – in the Hall and Online
4.00pm Family Service – in the Hall

Wednesday 8th November

3.25pm T-Time Tales

Thursday 9th November

12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church

Sunday 12th November

3rd Sunday before Advent (Remembrance Sunday)

8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church
9.45am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online
with Junior Church
1.00pm Community Lunch

Wednesday 15th November

3.25pm T-Time Tales

Thursday 16th November

12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church

Saturday 18th November

8.00pm Social Ballroom and Latin Dance

Sunday 19th November

2nd Sunday before Advent

8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church
10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online
4.00pm Messy Church

Wednesday 22nd November

3.25pm T-Time Tales

Thursday 23rd November

12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church

Sunday 26th November

Christ the King

8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) – in Church
10.00am Sung Eucharist – in Church and Online
with Junior Church
6.00pm Taizé Prayer

Wednesday 29th November

3.25pm T-Time Tales

Thursday 30th November St Andrew

12.45pm Holy Communion (Iona) in Church

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Deafness

It is very sad to lose one's hearing, as my best friend did in his early 20s and is living on his own at 89. He lost his hearing when he caught TB meningitis during his National Service. The disease was cured at the time with drugs but sadly at the same time those drugs destroyed the nerves of his ears. With great courage and persistence, he has managed to understand other people and make himself heard having become so good at lipreading. He is still asked to read lessons in his church from time to time and all can hear him well, whereas he can hear nothing at all. He was awarded the British Empire Medal for the work he has done for those deaf and those with a hearing loss.

Loss of hearing is a burden that many have to put up with, often spending much money on hearing aids. These can be helpful but sadly are just other small items which can be lost. I am lucky to still get by with the ears I have had for 90 years, although my children sometimes think I should get some such help.

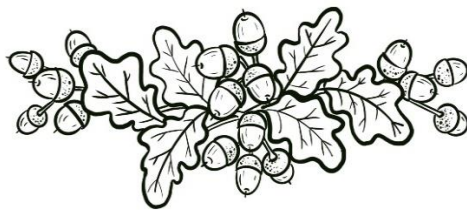
I am concerned that so often wonderful words that might have been heard in Church and elsewhere are missed, when people don't speak loud enough. I am asked to preach from time to time and I always try to ensure that I am heard with my loud voice. I also hopefully give it time and variety in the way I say what I have to say. My mother had elocution lessons as a young girl. This resulted in her having a lovely voice which was helpful to her in amateur dramatic roles and in poetry readings.

Happily, we can be helped by sub-titles in films and our world has become more understanding to those with hearing difficulties. However, it is helpful if people speak more slowly. For those who are deaf it is not easy to learn to lipread and it is so helpful if we all are able to use sign language to help them.

There are, of course, those who do not want to hear, and this can occur between husband and wife if one of them does not want to hear a particular comment by their spouse.

Jesus, when asked by John the Baptist if he was the one to come or should they wait for another, listed among other complaints he was curing he was enabling the deaf to hear. We, too, must do all we can to help our deaf and hard of hearing friends to hear and communicate with us whenever they wish to do so.

Ian Archer



Is now a good time to grow old?

"Don't grow old," a parishioner of advanced years warned me some while back. "You won't like it."

Sadly, that dear woman is no longer with us, and I'm a whole lot older than when she offered me that kind advice. But was there wisdom in her words? It's true that generally people are living longer and in better health than in generations before, but there are increasing challenges for older men and women in our society.

My friend, Maggie Dodd is an 'Anna Chaplain' for older people. She is one of around 300 such chaplains up and down the country. They spiritually support people – of strong, little or no faith – in care homes, sheltered housing or in their own homes. Maggie has told me how life is becoming harder for older people, and we've swapped notes on what we have both observed.

She told me: "Some of the basic services older people need are becoming more difficult to access. I hear about doctor's surgeries asking for patients to print out their own forms or send photos to or from smartphones. Banks are phasing out high street branches, pushing everyone towards online banking. Many older people feel very uneasy about going online, worried of being scammed out of their savings.

A trip to the shops is also becoming more complicated. Checkouts in supermarkets are increasingly self-service. Mobility can also be affected as car parks often need an app to be uploaded onto a smartphone to park. In many car parks there is no option to pay by card or cash!"

Plans to remove the ticket offices at train stations will make matters worse for many older would-be rail travellers.

Maggie told me "This gradual marginalisation of people can leave them feeling lonely and isolated. Loneliness can have a huge detrimental effect on health and wellbeing. Prolonged social isolation and loneliness are the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

It's good that many churches run special events and activities for older people, as well as groups for all ages. But is this enough? Christians are called to follow Christ's example and speak out for at risk of being marginalised in our society.

Today, that could be our older brothers and sisters.



As Halloween approaches

Have you ever wondered what a Christian is to make of the unseen world of evil and the occult? Where do evil spirits come from, anyway? The Bible takes the unseen world of evil spirits very seriously indeed. It tells us clearly that evil spirits were once part of the created angelic order (Genesis 6). They were not created as evil beings, for all of God's original creation was good (Genesis 3:1). The Bible relates how a number of angels, headed by Satan, or Lucifer, rebelled against God's authority and fell (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19).

Satan, who disguised himself as the serpent in Eden, is leader of the fallen angels, and opposes himself to God. But evil and good are not co-equal! Thus, the idea of 'dualism' (belief in the equal and permanent existence of evil alongside the good) has no place in the Bible. Unlike goodness, evil has a beginning and an end. Satan's final destruction is already assured (Revelation 12:12; 20:10).

So, what is the world of the occult, then? The word 'occult' comes from the Latin: *occultus*, 'secret', 'hidden', and is our intrusion into the forbidden territory of superstition, fortune telling, magic and spiritism. Its downfall one day is promised us through Jesus. His early ministry established a bridgehead against the evil unseen world: no wonder the hostile, and sometimes violent, reaction of the demons! (Mark 1:23-27; 32-34).

But Jesus had no fear of demons, and neither should you, if you are a Christian. Further, it is important not to become obsessed with the unseen world – don't let it intimidate or fascinate you. Occult films can have deeply disturbing after-effects on people. Avoid them. A Christian has better things to think about.

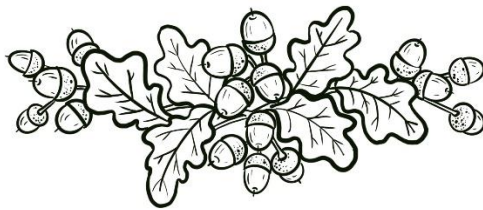
While the occult world is certainly there, we are wise not to imagine, as some do, that every sin we commit, every bad habit, illness or misfortune we meet is due directly to an attack on us by Satan himself, and that therefore we need to be 'exorcised'. Terrible damage has been done in this regard by Christians who mean well but who are uninformed.

The kingdom of spirits is real, but so too is Christ's authority. Before Christ, the spirits shrink and retreat. Magic spells and charms have no power over the true Christian (provided we do not open ourselves to their influence) for "the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

If ever you are frightened by anything occult, remember some sound biblical advice: resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7). But remember, a Christian has no business dealing in anything occult. All occultism is to be ruthlessly shunned (eg Leviticus 19:31;20:6; 1 Samuel 28; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Isaiah 8:19,20; Acts 19:18-20.)

The demonic world is very real, very powerful, but it is also already doomed and defeated. (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14,15). Why? Because the death of Jesus Christ has achieved this victory.

So – be confident in Christ, but not complacent in your everyday life. Satan’s kingdom is alive and well in this present world, and it will still not admit its defeat at the Cross. The final destruction of all things occult will not come until the return of Christ.



The Time of AI

The two figures huddled on the doorstep, stepped quickly out of the pouring rain, wet to the skin. The young girl who had opened the door looked first at their hands and gave them thick rubber gloves to go over the thin washing-up variety they already had on.

The dark waiting room had posters all round. The first said “under no circumstances are rubber gloves to be removed”. The second. “Take a Seat,” third, “Relax and breath slowly.” There were more. Lastly came the instruction to “focus on the colour green to the exclusion of all other thought.”

After some time the girl came and took one of the men to an old chipped, varnished door which had seen better days. Inside the dark room an old man with ragged beard and long but uneven hair flowing to his shoulders sat in a comfortable old armchair. He studied the long number tattooed on the man’s arm. “Now then 462 (the last 3 numbers), what have you to say to me,” came the rather cold enquiry.

The young thin man fidgeted uncomfortably on his upright chair.” It’s the headaches,” he said. “All the time it’s the headaches. And then there are the thoughts. I’ve never felt like this before. I have always done what was asked of me but now I have questions and no one gives me the answers. I’m not sure about anything.”

“How long since you lost your chip,” asked the old man. “About three days, I think. How did you know?” asked the young man.

The small "Chips" in the right index finger were central to; "The System". They controlled the recipients' working day and, by messages, fed, clothed, sheltered and entertained him and for good conduct sent him on designed holidays. Rewards were given by a contraption with earphones through which he enjoyed virtual reality. They also identified his every move, recorded and analysed it, provided transport at a touch and generally made thinking redundant. It was all done for him.

Humans had been prepared for this change for decades by learning to input information into computers and carrying out its instructions in place of using their brains, manual skills and making their own decisions. Similarly, decades of advertising had trained populations to accept values from commercial enterprises rather than form their own. They had been ripe for takeover by AI.

"You have the common withdrawal symptoms," said the old man. "They will pass with time and then you will think more clearly. But you can't stay here long. They will soon be on to you and the hunt for where you lost the chip will begin." The old man went on; "You may have had the chip since 2053, twenty years ago, so thinking is going to take some time to get used to. My daughter, who is medically trained, will replace the chip which will relay messages for our outlet and should muddy the waters for a few days. During that time you must make good use of the tickets she will give you. They will take you all the way to Alaska where you will join the "Free Village" and learn how to adjust back twenty years and help resist "The Great AI Authority." He pressed a button and the young girl took the man away, then showed in the second visitor.

The new young man was emaciated with unhealthy pale skin with deep purple shadows under the eyes, a completely bald head and lines in the young face, so that he looked strained to the point of serious illness. He shrugged aside the first questions and burst out "I want to know exactly who you are. I am risking my life. They say you are using a magic substance called a sense of humour to fight them. They cannot understand humour and most of us have forgotten what it is, so there is little raw material for them to research, absorb and copy. A smile lit up the old man's face. "Well, they are on the wrong track. I am as I am because I have never had a mobile phone and quickly destroyed my computer when the AI could be identified. I simply think for myself."

"I knew it. You had to be a free thinker to resist them. How wonderful! I hope I shall be able to help. I seem to have spent all my life serving 'The Great AI'. In fact I am a personal assistant to the 'Master of Mind Computer'. He is known as the one and only Tom Rump, and that is the secret really. He has spoiled me by giving me permission to think for short periods on my own and I have used that to secretly study the whole set up of AI. I now know its major weakness and am determined to destroy T Rump and the rest of his computers."

The old man lent forward with great interest. "And just how will you do that?" he asked. "Well, as you know there is a large army of AI Robot operatives throughout

the world carrying out 'Policy' and 'Directing Operations', but there actually is only the one master mind. He is the only one with a name; Thomas Rump, all the others have numbers like ourselves. He is always working on expanding his capabilities and that's where he went wrong. Emotions have been a bit of a closed door for them but Thomas has researched it himself and discovered, by the way, all manner of interesting thought processes. He stumbled on emotional illnesses and he's caught some of them. He is neurotic, often depressed and, above all, paranoid. There are times when he is quite unable to function and he then keeps himself to himself.

"With another week's research I am sure I can send him a message which will make him think his supremacy is threatened by a super AI more powerful than himself. I know how he will react. He will send virus-like messages out to all his AI Robots to try to destroy his competitor. That was an area I was researching. Their electricity supply will overload and they will suffer electrical shortages which will destroy them all. He protects himself by using a personal electricity supply from a generator powered by oil so I shall destroy his supply of that and he will either lose all energy or go on the electricity grid and suffer the same fate as his underlings."

"So we need to hide you for about a week and then see whether your plan succeeds!" said the old man. "I shall alert those in the Free Village who will at once send out their own viruses to destabilise the AI institutions worldwide which should muddy the waters and prepare the way for your own message. I have been distance training them to think for themselves and recapture the ability to think and to manage. They will need to spread out all over the world to teach their skills to enable the populations to manage themselves. I am hoping that my emphasis on cooperation instead of competition will enable them all to work together and care for each other, and live without AI. At last we have a possible plan. We can learn to hope once again.

Harry Ingram



Prayer

When we pray to God, do we have an idea as to what He is like? In our imagination is he a man or a woman? Does he have long hair, a beard and is he aged, as in pictures we had in Sunday Schools. Does it matter how we see Him or Her? We worship Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we had a happy relationship with our human father, maybe it is easy to visualize Him in that way, as a Father. If it seems more helpful to follow Him, as far as possible, as we find the Son in the Bible, we can perhaps see him as our role model, a younger man. Then perhaps it is helpful to see Him as the Holy Spirit, a revivifying source influencing us in this day and age, with Him being part of our very selves, and us as a part of Him.

Joyce Grenfell, although not all will remember her, said:
"God is the power of all Good, all Love, all Life and all Truth" and I found that quite interesting.

Although all don't revert to God in prayer, I suspect even those thinking themselves as having no leaning to worship, may send an arrow prayer to some being when something goes wrong, even for such things as "losing one's keys". As Christians we are told we are known by God by name, so even if we don't feel we know Him, He knows us.

I wonder what image He has of each of us on earth.... Happily we are told that by his suffering we are forgiven for our sins, so his opinion must therefore be better than we might otherwise deserve.

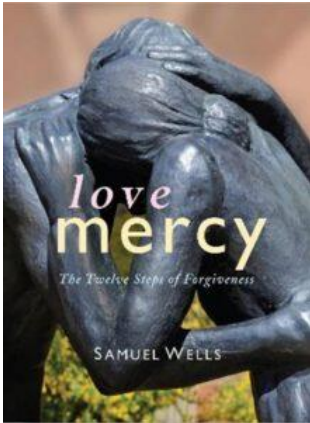
As far as prayer is concerned, if God already knows the needs of those we are praying for, why should we need to pray? By raising the troubles of ourselves to God we can later thank Him if those troubles are resolved. If in prayer we listen to God we might even come to a solution to our troubles. In praying for others, it might remind us of the part each of us may play in helping those in need.

What good otherwise does Prayer do? In times when I have been in trouble, people have said they would pray for me. I have felt the support that that gave so very real and helpful to my ultimate recovery. Indeed, thinking of each other can perhaps be half-way to praying for them.

Ian Archer

Book Review

This month we review: Love Mercy – the twelve steps of forgiveness



This is a thoughtful exploration of forgiveness and making peace. It is utterly realistic about the nature and effects of the hurt we inflict both as individuals and societies, and the conditions and work that is needed to bring healing. Sam Wells sees forgiveness as a twelve-step process, beginning with resolve and culminating in the newness of resurrection.

With deep pastoral wisdom, he reflects on the issues and challenges that touch us all, and he offers a way of living to bring us into reconciliation with ourselves, with others, with creation and with God.

Love Mercy is the sequel to 'Walk Humbly' and the second of three volumes by Samuel Wells that offer a basic introduction to Christian faith and life.

Have you recently read a good book? Tell us about it.
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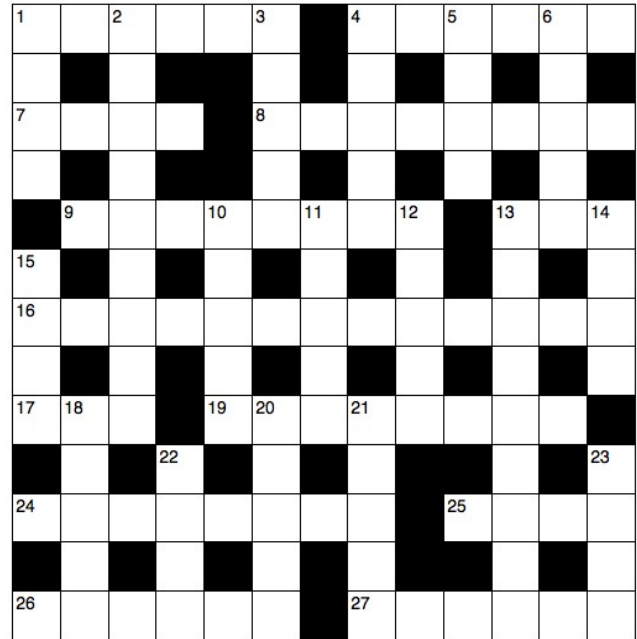
Thanks to technology, replacing the worn-out hymn books didn't cost a penny

October Crossword

Biblical references are from the New International Version

Across

- 1 He must be 'the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well' (1 Timothy 3:12) (6)
- 4 'For we must all — before the judgement seat of Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:10) (6)
- 7 'They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their — end' (Ps 107:27) (4)
- 8 See 19 Across
- 9 It concerned who among the disciples would be the greatest(Luke 9:46) (8)
- 13 Formed by the Jews in Thessalonica to root out Paul and Silas (Acts 17:5) (3)
- 16 'He has sent me to bind up the — ' (Isaiah 61:1) (6-7)
- 17 Moved rapidly on foot (Matthew 28:8) (3)
- 19 and 8 ` — a great company of the — host appeared with the angel' (Luke 2:13) (8,8)
- 24 Hindrance (Romans 14:13) (8)
- 25 Comes between Luke and Acts (4)
- 26 Empower (Acts 4:29) (6)
- 27 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a — !' (John 2:16) (6)



Down

- 1 Sunrise (Psalm 119:147) (4)
- 2 The part of the day when Cornelius the Caesarean centurion had a vision of an angel of God (Acts 10:3) (9)
- 3 He was one of those who returned with Zerubbabel from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:7) (5)
- 4 'No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born — '(John 3:3) (5)
- 5 Animal hunted or killed as food (Ezekiel 22:25) (4)
- 6 'He encouraged them — — remain true to the Lord' (Acts 11:23) (3,2)
- 10 Ruses (anag.) (5)
- 11 Jewish priestly vestment (Exodus 28:6) (5)
- 12 Visible sign of what had been there (Daniel 2:35) (5)
- 13 This was the trade of Alexander, who did Paul 'a great deal of harm' (2 Timothy 4:14) (9)
- 14 'This is my — , which is for you; do this in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:24) (4)
- 15 One of Noah's great-great-grandsons (Genesis 10:24) (4)
- 18 Traditionally the first British Christian martyr (5)
- 20 Relationship of Ner to Saul (1 Samuel 14:50) (5)
- 21 Jacob had one at a place he named Bethel while on his way to Haran, fleeing from Esau (Genesis 28:12) (5)
- 22 Bats (anag.) (4)
- 23 'You strain out a — but swallow a camel' (Matthew 23:24) (4)

September Answers

ACROSS: 8 Kiriath Jearim 9 Toe 10 Ill at ease 11 Hated 13 Miletus 16 Started 19 Micah 22 Leviticus 24 Eli 25 Mary and Joseph

DOWN: 1 Sketch 2 Priest 3 Samizdat 4 Shalom 5 Wept 6 Breast 7 Embers 12 Art 14 Limassol 15 UNA 16 Salome 17 Adverb 18 Decade 20 Clever 21 Height 23 Tear

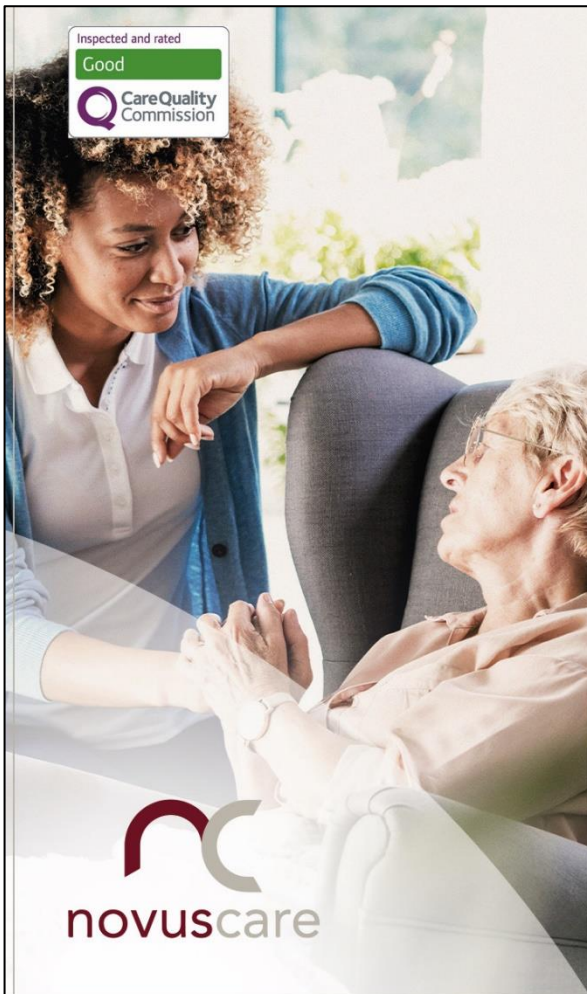
Puzzles

October Sudoku Puzzle

				2		4		
4	8		7		9	5		6
6			3			9	2	
1					2	6	9	
		5				8		
	9	6	1					2
	2	8			5			9
5		1	2		6		8	7
		3		7				

September Solution

2	5	1	6	8	9	7	4	3
8	4	7	2	1	3	6	9	5
6	9	3	4	7	5	2	1	8
7	3	8	9	2	6	4	5	1
1	2	9	5	4	8	3	6	7
5	6	4	1	3	7	8	2	9
3	1	6	7	5	2	9	8	4
4	7	2	8	9	1	5	3	6
9	8	5	3	6	4	1	7	2



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