

Here I am, back from my sabbatical: my 'holy trek' in Scotland and the north of England. What a wonderful and rewarding time it was, full of amazing experiences. Things have been safe whilst I've been away thanks to the churchwardens and service cover provided by our ministry team of Revd Ylva, Revd Rosemary, David Harmsworth, Lyn Hayes and Vicki Young; plus other local clergy, including Revd Jack Bateson at the girls' school - whom I bumped into on Holy Island! - and our archdeacon, Ven Andrew Sewell. Other colleagues helped with some of the weddings over the summer. Thank you to everyone for help; this meant that most things ran uninterrupted whilst I was away. (Except that part of the ceiling at St George's fell in the day after I left!)

My 'holy trek' involved about 350 miles of walking in beautiful scenery, a retreat at the abbey on Iona, and another on Lindisfarne. It also involved time spent in the beauty of nature on the Orkneys and in the Outer Hebrides. I visited some amazing and beautiful churches; went to some 'interesting' church services; visited some medieval and also 10th century chapels, ancient graveyards, and 5,000-year-old stone circles and dwellings.

I have seen the respect with which people of the past treated their dead. I have met some lovely people, from all over the world; I have met many Christians and also people of no faith; and have had some wonderful conversations. There have been many 'coincidences' with the people that I have met. Through the people, the worship, the walking, through nature and simply just slowing down, I have drawn closer to God. I am so grateful that I have been allowed to do this and experience this. Thank you. And I can honestly say it is good to be back; and I have enjoyed leading worship again in the parish. So, for better or for worse for you, and feeling refreshed, I am here to stay for a little longer.

Coming up in the next few days and weeks we have some special services. Wednesday 2 November is All Souls' Day and we have a service in the evening at St George's, where we can name, remember and light candles for loved ones. This starts at 7:30pm, with refreshments in church from 7pm. If you would like a name to be read out, please email Cathy at [benendenchurch@gmail.com](mailto:benendenchurch@gmail.com).

On Saturday 5 November, at 4pm, we have 'Connect Four', a family service with refreshments, Bible stories and activities for all the family. This is at the Mission Church in Sandhurst. We are aware that Sunday mornings are not great for families to come to church, so please come along and give this a try. And, of course, the following weekend we mark Remembrance on Sunday 13 November.

At the end of the month, we move into Advent, and have a carol service on Advent Sunday in St George's at 5pm on 28 November. It's good to be back and busy.

**Revd David Commander, Rector**