

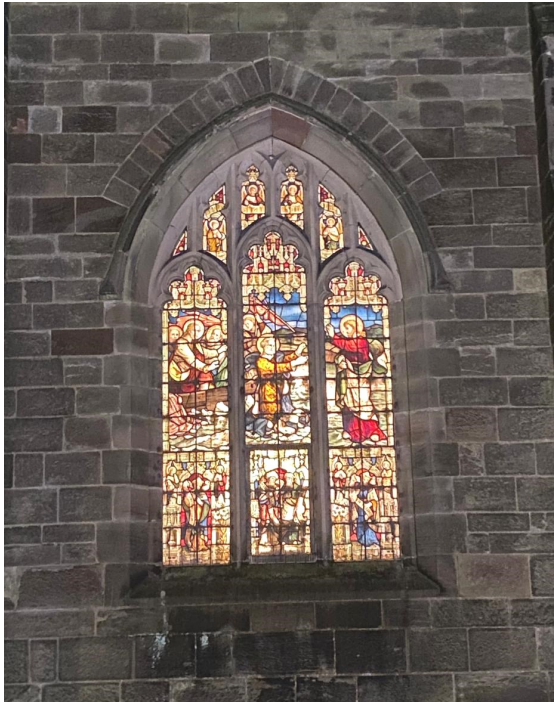


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St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Loving God, Loving Others, Loving the World



Parish Magazine

February 2025

PARISH DIRECTORY

General inquiries: in the first instance, please contact the parish office.

Parish office: sthelensashby@gmail.com // 01530 411607

Community Heritage Building, 4 Church Yard, South St, LE65 1AA

Opening times: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday 10am - 1pm

Website: www.sthelensashby.net

Team Rector	Rev. Sue Field	flagstaffrector@gmail.com
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Heritage Centre Lettings	Elaine Shaw	sthelenslettings@gmail.com
Magazine	Emily Darlington	sthelensmag@gmail.com

Ashby Youth For Christ	Centre Director: Helen Davis	Helen.davis@yfc.co.uk
Street Pastors contact	Chris Lewis	07828 463368

St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

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Ashby Methodist Church	01530 412298
Holy Trinity	01530 412339
Our Lady of Lourdes	01530 412237

Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.



FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Hello everyone,

It's lovely to write to you again. As I write, across the UK many thousands of households are still suffering the effects of Storm Éowyn. For most of us, the weather's impact is less severe impact, but it has been a very wet, very cold start to 2025. Spring, let alone Summer, feels a long way away.



And when does Spring start? The answer, it seems is ... it depends!

The Met. Office says that Spring always begins on the 1st March while stargazers state Astronomical Spring begins with the Spring Equinox - Monday 20th March this year.

But in the Celtic Year it is February that heralds the start of Spring. And I look outside our door and see snowdrops nodding cheerfully, while elsewhere in the garden, the daffodil stems are well up – and in most of the UK, lambing begins in February – so, February works for me!

Spring is the time for new life. The ground begins to soften and warm. Like our snowdrops, life springs from seemingly dead ground. But the ground hasn't been dead, and the life has been there all along – just waiting. Life simply waits for the right time, the right season to spring forth. And I think that applies to our spiritual life too

So, if for now, you feel you are in a cold and hard season - be encouraged. Just as in our gardens, parks and countryside, life is there, just waiting for the right time.

The days – and particularly nights - of February can seem long and dark. But be patient and trust in the Lord.

When life feels particularly stony and grey, perhaps the opening verses of Psalm 40 can offer comfort until the winds drop, the rain eases and the temperatures rise.

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.
Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.

For us gardeners, it can be hard not to rush out and start work on the borders or get the seeds going far too early. For all of us, the grace of patience does not come easily, but it is a priceless gift from God. A God who does not measure time as we do.

Happy February
In Christ

Andy Smith



A team of 13 street pastors were commissioned again in an encouraging service last month. Please do pray for them, and the people they meet, as they take to the streets each week.



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ELECTORAL ROLL

It's soon time to renew St Helen's Electoral Roll! It might not sound very exciting, but it's an important thing we need to do as a church. To ensure the contents remain substantially correct, every sixth year, a new ER is created from scratch, and all potential members need to re-apply to have their name added to the new roll.

The Electoral Roll is literally a register of people who are able to elect other people in the church. Being on the church ER means that you can vote on many relevant issues at the annual parochial church meeting (APCM) and stand for election to the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

If you are already coming regularly to St Helen's and participating in the life of the church, that would be a very good reason to be on the ER. The ER also gives us an idea of the size of our congregation which is important in this time of change to become part of a Minster Community.

To be on the ER, you must be 16 years old or over, be baptised, and either live in the parish or have attended St Helen's regularly for at least 6 months. Joining the ER can be a way of confirming your commitment to the St Helen's community and to our vision and generally supporting the Flagstaff Family of Churches. It also allows you to take part in the life of the wider Church of England, at, Deanery, Diocese, and even at National levels, if you are interested. Of course, we will keep your information secure in line with UKGDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) regulations.

2025 is the year when a new ER will be created. Please give this issue serious thought when applications start at the beginning of February and make sure you have a say in things that matter to you, to the church and to our life together.

Paper applications for enrolment on the St Helen's Electoral Roll can be obtained from the church office or at the Welcome Desk and completed forms returned to the office letter box. An electronic version will also be available with completed forms to be sent to sthelensashby@gmail.com. The link/document will be shared when the office reopens in February.

Eileen Coombs (ER Officer)

GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY

February is a time when Winter starts to fade and Spring becomes closer, therefore, there are many gardening jobs to be started. It can still be a very cold, Wintery month but you can see definite signs of life in the garden as the days become warmer, lighter and longer. The sunny days will bring Narcissus, Cyclamen and Crocus into flower to join the Snowdrops.

If you grow perennial, ornamental grasses you have probably left them with their stems and other growth through the Winter. Providing it's not too cold, this is the time to cut them down to the ground to ensure healthy new growth. Also, prune hardy hedges such as Laurels and Leylandii before the bird-nesting season. Finish off the dead-heading and light pruning for the year.

Don't forget to feed your birds! Put out feeders and nest boxes ready for Spring and keep plenty of fresh water available. Remember to remove any old nests from bird-boxes as our birds prefer to build new nests.

When you can't get out into the garden, why not try growing some vegetable and flower plants (from seed) on the window sill, in a conservatory or porch, and even in a heated greenhouse. Good vegetable seeds to try are Tomatoes, Chillies, Lettuce, Broad beans, Onions and Herbs such as Garlic, Dill, Basil and Coriander. Potatoes should be chitted now before planting out in March. Leave more tender vegetable plants such as Courgette and Cucumber until later.

Most fruit trees are very hardy but, once they start to grow, the buds are especially vulnerable to frost and will need protection. Popular garden plants, such as, Antirrhinum, Calendula, Cornflower, French Marigolds, Nigella, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Scabious, Sweet Peas and Zinnia can also be started early.

Winter digging of new plots and empty beds needs to be completed from your list of jobs. However, this is very much weather dependent. February is a good month to remove algae from paths and patios, especially if they start to become slippery. Also, garden contractors are likely to be less busy before March and may therefore be available for other jobs such as paving, fence building and pond digging.

Order flower bulbs for Summer colour such as Lily-of-the-Valley and Gladioli in preparation for Spring planting. There is still time to prune your Rhododendron whilst they are in their dormant stage. Also Group 2

Clematis may need pruning before the end of the month.

Now is a good time to start a garden journal to keep tabs on how your garden is performing each season. Write down everything you can think of, both positive and negative. Take photographs if you can as this is great way to monitor your garden's progress throughout the year.

Remember to wrap up well and keep warm when out in your garden.

Wear suitable footwear at all times.

Be Safe!

Alan and Alison Cross

WILLESLEY, A THANKFUL VILLAGE

You may have noticed that three new road signs went up recently marking the village of Willesley. Until then, you may not even have thought of Willesley as a village in its own right and anyway, why is it so thankful? All will be revealed later but first let us look at the history of Willesley which has existed since before the Norman Conquest.

The manor or estate was granted by Wulfric Spott, an Anglo Saxon nobleman, to the Abbey of Burton in his will of 1000-1006. After the Norman Conquest it was divided between the de Ferrers Earls of Derby (later the Duchy of Lancaster) and the Abbey. The manor was initially tenanted by the Willesley family, but eventually passed to the Abney family who became the Abney-Hastings family in the early 18th century.

The village appears in Domesday Book as the property of Henry de Ferrers and was valued at twenty shillings TRE (TRE in Latin is Tempore Regis Edwardi. This means in the time of King Edward before the Battle of Hastings.) and sixteen shillings. Since the earliest times, it has consisted of a handful of scattered farms, a church and a hall. The church is thought to possibly date from the 14th century. The tower was built in 1845 and new seats, pulpit and reading desk were installed in 1883, but have since been removed. The church was declared redundant in the twentieth century and became derelict. It was re-roofed in 1989 but is no longer used for worship.

It is thought that the hall may have been built in the first half of the 17th century. It is likely that it stood on the site of a much older manor house,

about which little if anything is known. The later hall was a grand building and stood until 1953 when it was demolished. The estate had been sold in 1919 to Major. J. Ashworth, a Nottingham attorney who sold the park two years later to the local golf club, and turned the house into an hotel. By 1929, it had fallen into decline and closed in 1936. After that the house was never lived in again.

Throughout the period 1841 to 1911, the family were only in residence once on Census night. In 1841, 1851 and 1861 the house was left in the charge of three or four servants. In 1871 it was occupied by William La Zouche Hatton, a retired colonel aged 46, his wife, two teenage daughters and a full household of servants:



Willesley Church by Philip Jeffrey, Creative Commons

a governess, a butler, two footmen, two lady's maids, a cook, a scullery maid, three housemaids, a coachman, and a stable hand. The coachman had his wife living with him together with a baby and son aged 2.

In 1881, the young Earl Loudoun himself, Charles Edward Rawdon-Hastings, aged 26, was in residence with the Countess, Alice Fitzalan-Howard. This time there was, of course, a full household of servants:

a lady's maid, a laundry maid, two house maids, a scullery maid, a stillroom maid, a butler, a footman, three male servants whose occupations are not specified, and a coachman aged 28 with his wife.

In 1891 and 1901 the family were not in the house on Census night but there were still quite a lot of servants:

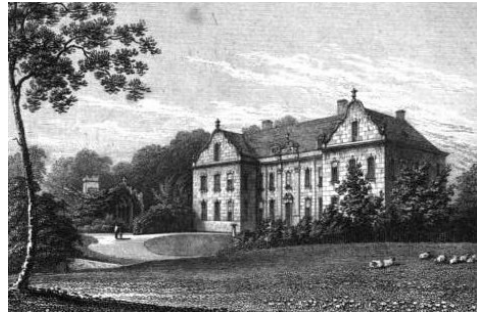
1891: a laundry maid, two housemaids, a stillroom maid, a cook, a chamber maid, a footman, a groom, an usher and three visitors, presumably visiting the servants. In four rooms over the coach house lived a coachman with his three children and a servant and in Home Farm Cottage lived the butler with his wife and a servant.

1901: the housekeeper, a governess, a lady's maid, a cook, two housemaids,

a scullery maid, a stillroom maid, a nursemaid, the butler with his wife, a footman, an usher, a garden boy, a hall boy, a groom and a stable helper. There was still a coachman living over the stables with his wife and four children. It seems odd that there was a governess and a nursemaid because Charles Abney-Hastings and his wife had no children. And where had the lady of the house gone without her lady's maid?

By 1911 the house was probably looking a little desolate. Nobody was in residence except Abel Claridge, the caretaker and his wife. There was still a gardener living in the south lodge and a gamekeeper in the game keeper's cottage.

But what of the village itself? Throughout the 19th century it consisted of the hall, the church, four farms: Hill farm, Wood farm, Valley farm, Park farm (also known as Home farm at times), two lodges, a game keeper's cottage, and 2 and eventually 3 other cottages. All four farms are still in existence although at least one has been converted into several residential units. There are houses on the site of the two lodges, but they are not the original lodges. Some internet sources state that the population remained stable throughout the 19th century at around 60, but by counting the number of people listed in each Census year, I have found that it fell slightly from 53 in 1841 to 45 in 1861. It then rose steadily to 70 in 1901 before declining to 40 in 1911.



Willesley Hall, by unknown, Public Domain

So why is the village thankful? It is a title given to villages which suffered no military deaths during the First World War. Villages that suffered no military losses in either world war are designated Doubly Thankful Village. Of course, Willesley, being such a tiny village, probably didn't have many men of military service age to send to the First world War. From the 1911 Census, I calculated that there were probably about 9 men who became eligible during the period of the war, but they may not all have enlisted. Willesley is one of five Leicestershire villages designated as "Thankful".

Wendy Freer



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A LIGHT IN THE WORLD

Many thanks to all those who have supported us at Loughborough Town of Sanctuary with recent donations of Moses baskets and 'baby grows' for new-borns.

Midwives in Loughborough are usually helped in their support role for new mums by a Christian charity called 'Baby basics' (worth googling them!) but supplies were running low and our young contacts locally, including those from the Flagstaff family, have kindly stepped into the breach.



This is indicative of a wider issue which the charity 'Shelter' has been highlighting: that there just isn't enough decent housing available for vulnerable families. There are two groups whom we, at LTos, try to support:

- Asylum seeker families - those waiting for a Home Office decision - are housed by them in pretty cramped conditions but they do have a roof over their heads and basic food provided. However, only a very small amount of money is provided to cover all other day-to-day needs.
- Later, when given refugee status, councils do try to find basic housing accommodation - (only for those considered 'vulnerable' though, which excludes single women as well as men, who frequently end up sleeping rough). This sometimes results in refugee families being moved into Loughborough from other areas where housing is more expensive. (A family recently joined us from Harrow, with that council paying Charnwood for the accommodation.)

So various Loughborough organisations, including LToS, are trying to support both these groups.

Attempting to do so for those with new babies has shown us that even

with some 'bargains' from charity shops, many of those basics are way beyond the financial reach of these families. This is where your donations of Moses baskets and cots have been SO much appreciated!

THANK YOU!

If you would like to know more about what we do, you can also follow our Facebook page.

Pat Stafford

MESSY CHURCH

There was a real buzz around the activities at this month's Messy Church as we explored a story from Jesus' childhood, about getting lost in Jerusalem.

He was found in the temple asking surprisingly deep questions of the religious leaders of the time. We heard some heartfelt stories from the children's own experience and the story provoked some interesting discussions amongst the adults too. Was the young Jesus 'learning



his trade'? Surely not? Was he challenging the religious hierarchy of the time? Now there's a thought! He certainly did that later when he turned over the money lenders' tables in that same building.

Join us at the next Messy Church at **St Helen's Heritage Centre: 3:30pm, 23rd February**. Fun for the youngsters, a cuppa for the adults and food for thought - what's not to like?

Pat Stafford

OUR WORSHIP IN FEBRUARY

	am	pm	Wednesday
1st Sunday 2nd February		3.30pm All age service 6pm Evensong with Leicester Cathedral choir	1st Wednesday– 5th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
2nd Sunday 9th February	10.30am Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday-12th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
3rd Sunday 16th February	10.30 am Morning Worship		3rd Wednesday– 19th Morning prayer 10.30am In church
4th Sunday 23rd February	10.30 am Holy Communion with guest speaker	3.30pm Messy Church Heritage centre	4th Wednesday– 26th Holy Communion 10.30am St Helen's In church

Regular activities:

- Monday mornings - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
- Mondays - Pilgrim group
- 1st Wednesday - We're in stitches – 2 till 4pm
- Thursdays - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
- Fridays - Heart- warming Space 2-4pm
- Saturdays - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel
- 1st Saturday - Pause for Paws– 10.15-12.15 at the tower door.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY// FEBRUARY

SUNDAY 2ND FEBRUARY– 6PM– EVENSONG FOR CANDLEMAS

This Sunday our choir will also be joined by Leicester Cathedral choir for a service of choral evensong, to include as the anthem Wood's 'O thou the central orb' and Walmisley's setting of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis. The preacher will be the Dean of Leicester, Very Rev'd Karen Rooms.

SUNDAY 23RD FEBRUARY– 10.30AM– HOVERAID TALK + LUNCH

Join us as we hear from the CEO of Hoveraid, John Greaves, in our communion service, to be followed by a bring and share lunch in the heritage centre. This will include some videos of their work in Madagascar and chance to ask questions about the charity.

If you would like to learn more about the work of Hoveraid, head to their website: <https://search.app/66RnKSVqvqatzLJa7>

TUESDAY 25TH FEBRUARY– 7.30PM– HERITAGE TALK

This month's instalment of our talk series sees Peter Liddle discussing 'Roman Villas and Peasant Farms'. Tickets are £4 on the door and include light refreshments.



Last month, the community heritage centre was packed out for the annual haggis supper in celebration of Burns night.

ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVqrj> or email helen.davis@yfc.co.uk. Alternatively you can scan the QR code.



Thank you for all your prayers and support.

Sk8ers

Thank you for your prayers. Recently we were blessed with an increase in numbers of young people attending. Two young men were returning after a long absence and it was enjoyable to both hear their news and be reunited without embarrassment. They were forthcoming in an encouraging way. They had previously struggled not only with education itself but with talking about why they found it so difficult. They were now willing and able to talk about their trials and identify some positives— areas of developing talent. They also spoke with insight and some compassion about other strugglers.

Thank you Lord for your words of encouragement— of us your servants and of these young people. As you are calling and blessing them please also equip them to extend your call to others. Make them not just your followers but followers who direct others to you through their words and faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rock Solid

Its quite common for Rock Solid lads to keep their coats on during our indoor meetings. This has been something of a mystery to me for some time. Its nothing to do with insulation. I'd assumed it was in pursuit of the Roadman look and we haven't bothered them about it. This week, fresh insight. A young man who had received some money and turned it into clothing told me he would now not have to wear his coat at Rock Solid. He had been ashamed of his clothing. Another person's shame— especially the shame of someone of a different age to ourselves— is hard to appreciate for what it is. It often presents as something else and is usually classed as antisocial behaviour of one form or another.

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THE MEMORIAL TO CANON JOHN. E. BOWERS

On Saturday January 25th, in the presence of many members of the Bowers family and people from the St Helen's congregation and the wider town, a new memorial was unveiled in the north aisle. Canon Bowers was vicar of St Helen's from 1963 to 1988, and was a familiar figure around the town, wearing his cassock and visiting the local schools.

History will probably see him as one of a very few who had a significant impact on the church building. Before him, Baron William Hastings, Lord Chancellor to Edward IV, built it in 1474; four centuries later, in the late 19th century, Canon John Denton organised its extension – the north and south aisles - and refurbishment, including the complete set of stained glass windows we see today.

When John Bowers arrived with his wife and young family at St Helen's in 1963 he was faced with the discovery of a serious infestation of Death Watch Beetle in the roof timbers of the church during routine electrical work. Together with the local Council, he launched a successful appeal for funds in May of that year, and the roof was fixed.



By the early 1970s, it was obvious that the original Parish Hall at the top of North Street was decaying and becoming increasingly difficult to access across a busy main road. John Bowers pushed for the decision to sell it in favour of what became known as 'The Cottage', which had been purchased by the Diocese some years earlier. Plans for the new parish rooms were drawn up in 1975 and planning permission granted the

following year. In order to create its garden, a strip of land from the old vicarage garden was conveyed by the Canon to the Leicester Diocesan Board of Finance in trust for St Helen's PCC. The Old Parish Hall was sold and is now the Venture Theatre.

The Canon wrote a regular update in the parish magazine of the time, and there's an amusing description of a digger sitting on a pile of bricks: it seems that the original cottage had to be knocked down to put in foundations and then rebuilt as it had been. 40 years later, we were extending and refurbishing the building to become the Community Heritage Centre as it is today. 1974 saw the 500th anniversary of this church and Canon Bowers was instrumental in organising a series of celebrations which started on the Patronal Festival in September 1974, continuing until September 1975.

He wrote many letters, outlining his ideas for the anniversary year of the church and inviting people, schools and local organisations to take part in events. He announced the preparation of a commemorative booklet; he asked Ashby Grammar School to produce a 'Christmas Drama' in the church and he asked Ashby Dramatic Society to produce a Passion Play during Holy Week 1975. This took the form of 'The Life & Times of St Helen,' performed on 18 June.

In May 1975 a 'Parish Festival' took place and the then Lady Huntingdon, better known as Beatrix Potter scholar Margaret Lane, visited to lecture on 'The Secret World of Beatrix Potter.'

The major restoration of the church was now complete. The building had been thoroughly steam cleaned and new floor tiles laid down. Two hundred new hassocks – still in use today, but more often as cushions to sit on than kneelers - had been embroidered by the ladies of the church.



Dr Donald Coggan, then Archbishop of York and shortly to be Archbishop of Canterbury gave the 'Ashe Lecture' in Oct 1974. The Ashe lectures, revived by Canon Bowers, were quite major events which filled the church and at times spilled over into Manor House School next door. Endowed by Francis Ashe in 1654, the Ashe Lecture provided for weekly lectures in the church by a "godly, orthodox and ordained minister", though they later became an annual event. The anniversary year ended with a flower festival in September 1975.

Canon Bowers is also known around the world as a hymn-writer. There are four in the hymn book we use today – Common Praise – but they are to be found in many countries across the world, including Australia and the USA. We sang one at the unveiling.

Canon John Bowers was someone to whom we are grateful for continuing the development of the church buildings to make sure that they are fit for the worship of God and the use of the community. That development is to continue in the coming years, to make sure the church remains an important place in the community of Ashby de la Zouch.

Anne Heaton

ANNE BULKLEY

I am sorry to write that Ann has recently died. She was a member of St Helen's congregation and we met her and her husband, Ian (who was the headmaster of Manor House School) at an 'Epiphany party' at the Old Vicarage many years ago. They were 'Eight-o'clockers' which is why we had never met at church before then.

In later years, Ann led house groups. Firstly I remember joining the Tuesday morning group which took a spiritual book and would discuss a chapter each week. I remember her knowledge of prayer and she led a series of sessions on the different types of prayer. Then we formed a prayer group.

Ann studied calligraphy. For our prayer group, which was mostly silent - she would choose a text, often three verses of a psalm, and write them in calligraphy; photocopying them for us each to have a copy. We developed our own method for this silent prayer group. Ann would always offer us an

introduction to the session with a short piece from a book she had read. For a long time, we met in this way and I greatly appreciated her wisdom and understanding. My life was enriched by knowing Ann.

As well as having skills in painting, Ann learned how to make icons. She described how one needed to spend time in prayer first. Then the small boards would be coated with gesso, and sanded many times. This was all preparation, before drawing the image and painting begun. She learned how to use gold leaf - quite a skill in itself. She attended a Greek Orthodox church in Nottingham and appreciated their form of worship. She and Ian also went regularly to Lichfield cathedral.

I went to art college so had to leave the church groups and so saw less of Ann. In recent years her health was not good. It was hard for her as she had been fit and enjoyed walking her dogs. Sadly, Ian was unwell too, and he died in December.

I remember Ann with gratitude and was glad to have known her.

Audrey Vaughan

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STORMY WEATHER

In a recent Wednesday morning communion service at Prior Park, the gospel reading was from Mark chapter 6. It's the story of the disciples rowing a boat across Lake Galilee, but suddenly the wind gets up and they can make no progress.

Jesus from the land sees what's happening and walks toward them on the water. The disciples think it's a ghost, and cry out in terror. Jesus replies, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' Then the wind dies down and they proceed to the other side without further ado. As you can imagine, the disciples were completely amazed by what had happened.

But then Mark makes an interesting comment about the disciples. He says that they had not understood about the loaves in the feeding of the 5,000, and that their hearts were hardened. The Greek word for 'hardened' is 'poroo'. It means like a stone, or hardened skin, and therefore insensitive. My simile is a rusty bicycle chain that makes it much more difficult to pedal. Solution – oil it! What's the Christian equivalent?

Another interesting thing is that Mark is thought to have written his gospel about 35 years after the death of Jesus. He may have written '...their hearts were hardened' because it seemed to him that the followers of Jesus were still struggling to understand who he was. Long after he'd gone.

Before turning to our own situation in Ashby, let's look at some examples of people who had hard hearts. Firstly there was Pharaoh who got obsessed about controlling the Hebrews in Egypt. As you read of the conflict between Pharaoh and Moses in Exodus chapters 1 to 12, you soon get the idea that Pharaoh is not going to give up. Instead, his heart grew harder and harder.

The next group to consider are the Jewish leaders, who met as a council known as the Sanhedrin. It was made up of the High Priest, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Although they were the most godly people in the land, they opposed Jesus with a vengeance. Could you call that hard-hearted? If so, it was some sort of 'group-think,' and it would have been unwise for any of them to take the contrary view.

Lastly, we have the curious story of Jesus going into the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town, as recorded in Luke 4. Jesus was asked to do the bible reading, and he chose two verses from Isaiah 61. They liked that, but his comments on it made them furious, and they tried to kill him right away

by throwing him off a cliff. Somehow he managed to escape. They were hard-hearted because they couldn't see that Jesus was no longer the local carpenter they knew so well. He was no longer in the box their minds had created.

We observe that it's the religious leaders who had hard hearts and opposed Jesus most. Look around Ashby today. Who are the religious leaders? It's amusing to think that we may be the very people who are somehow blocking Jesus and the one he promised, namely the Holy Spirit.

Looking back on my 55 years as a Christian, I've never been in a church that talks about Jesus and is on fire for him. Sermons are politely and respectfully heard, then immediately put on the shelf. With no wish to put anyone's nose out of joint, it seems every church I've attended was rowing against the wind. They have all kept afloat fortunately, and I'm sure they would say to me, 'Wait, wait for the Lord.' Well, I'm waiting right now, and I've a picture of a riverway carrying streams of living water to the people.

Regarding our own church, we're in Leicester diocese and we're about to reorganise and become a Minster Community. Let's pray it all goes well and that we can avoid the stormy weather. We can copy the believers in Jerusalem who were waiting and praying, not knowing what would happen next. The story starts in Acts chapter 1, and you don't have to wait long before it all kicks off.

Stormy weather for them, but exciting too.

Richard Vann

NEOLIBERALISM-AND WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN FOR SOCIETY

*(*all views are those of the author of this article)*

In my previous articles, I have tried to be detached and even handed about what I have written as regards the spectrum of political views.

However, I now want to be deliberately provocative in order to make the reader sit up and ask, "do I agree with that or not?" and "does this fit with my Christian beliefs and values?"

I want to start with one definition of capitalism. "An economic system in

which the state and/ or powerful private interests use laws, backed by the threat of violence, to turn shared resources into exclusive property, and to turn natural resources, labour and money into saleable items that can be accumulated” If this sounds a bit extreme, then think about logging in the Amazon, overfishing of the oceans, the slave trade, “opening up” of the Wild West in North America, land enclosures in the UK, the race to extract minerals from under the Arctic etc.

For many centuries capitalism expanded with few constraints - its advocates demanding that governments “laissez-nous faire” - i.e. leave them alone. But then it ran into a problem it has been trying to solve ever since - democracy. When most adults became able to vote, they used it to try to change things so that wages increased, working conditions improved, pollution lessened, that the gross inequalities in wealth were reduced. They also pressed for public services in health and education and an economic safety net for the most poor. Neoliberalism was a way for laissez faire economics to try and solve the “problem” of democracy.

Instead of demanding that governments leave them alone, Neoliberalism demands that governments act :- to privatise public assets and public services, dissolve the welfare state and curtail trade unions and protests. Neoliberalism insists that we should resolve our societal problems, not through politics, but through a mechanism that it calls “the market”. If we ask what “the market” actually means, it is the power of money and those who possess it. Neoliberals see competition as the defining feature of humankind. In buying and selling in a competitive market, a natural hierarchy of winners and losers emerges. Anything that gets in the way of this natural hierarchy, such as taxes, redistribution or trade unions just impede human flourishing and paves the way to totalitarianism - a dictatorial state.

But are the Neoliberals correct, or is it just a story designed to justify inequality, which in time leads to oligarchy - rule by a minority - in this case a wealthy minority?

Of course neoliberalism isn't presented as a way to enhance the wealth of the wealthy, it is sold to the electorate as a way to meet the needs of society.

Since I first mooted this article, the USA has chosen Trump to return to be president again. Is it more than co-incidence that the richest man in the world has now become entangled in the world of politics? In return for Musk's millions given in the election campaign, he has been given a major role in the Trump administration. Not content with this, Musk is now using his social media outlet, X, to comment unfavourably on other countries' governments who hold different political views to his own. Is Musk really interested in the good of the average USA citizen, or is he purely seeking to solidify his wealth, and influence throughout the world? (Weren't Jame Bond novels about folks who wanted to gain world dominance !!)

I will leave it up to you to ponder on these questions. Watch the USA carefully in the next four years, because Nigel Farage and the Reform party certainly will be, looking to learn what might play well with the electorate in the next UK election.

Martin Vaughan

PS A lot of these ideas were gleaned from the writings of George Monbiot, author of "The Invisible Doctrine - the secret history of Neoliberalism".



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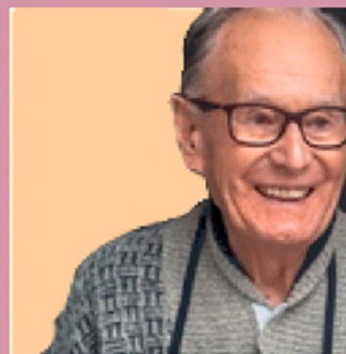
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