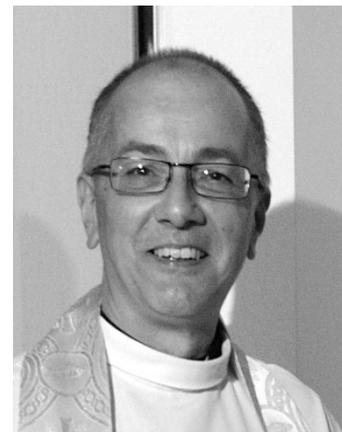


Pastoral Letter

Revd Roger Hagon shares his thoughts...



Dear Friends

Isn't it great that new people come to our church every week? I think the welcome we offer is first class, and many tell me that the reason they stay coming to St Mildred's is the welcome they receive at the door week by week. But one of the big questions I ask myself is, 'How well do I know these new people?' And, 'Do I even know their names?' While many established members make friends over tea and coffee in the Large Hall after the service, newer people tend to go home.

In order to take this further, the Churchwardens and I are planning three 'Getting to know you' Sundays over the course of our 2019/20 services. These 10am services will aim to be an hour long so that everyone can stay for at least a quarter of an hour for refreshments at the back of church. Name labels will be worn and everyone will be encouraged to introduce themselves and chat with someone they've never spoken to before.

Of course, this will involve all of us 'putting ourselves out' a bit. And no-one should feel compelled to do anything they'd rather not do. But maybe we might reflect a little on our own

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experience of first joining a church and how much we valued someone introducing themselves to us in a gentle, kind, loving and unthreatening way. Using someone's name at The Peace can make all the difference, and saying "Hello" on the following Sundays starts to foster an important and growing sense of belonging, without which we have little to offer our increasingly fragmenting society.

Roger



Choir Notes

At the end of July the choir said a heartfelt thanks to Eloise, whose time as Head Chorister has come to an end. Eloise has done a brilliant job of leading and helping the Junior Choir and, over the last few years, she has also become one of the lead singers in the adult choir, memorably singing the first soprano solo brilliantly in Allegri's *Miserere* earlier this year. In her last service as Head Chorister she sang the wonderful, large scale solo in Mendelssohn's *Hear my prayer* in Guildford Cathedral - a fitting way to sign off!

From September, there will be a new Head Chorister - I will be announcing who it is during our trip to Guildford.

SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday 12 October at 7.30pm - Choir Concert

Following the success of last year's concert we will again be performing and, once again, we are extremely lucky to have Sally Stapleton as soprano soloist. The programme is to be announced, but the second half will feature Fauré's *Requiem*.

Christmas CD - over two sessions in June and July the choir has recorded a dozen tracks for our forthcoming Christmas CD. The disc will have all your favourite Christmas hymns and carols, and we aim to have it available to buy at the choir concert on 12 October. All proceeds will go to the Organ Restoration Appeal.

Organ Restoration Appeal Update

Following the unanimous agreement of the PCC to apply for a faculty, I'm delighted to report that the June meeting of the Diocesan Advisory Committee agreed our proposal with no further requirements. There will subsequently be a 30-day public consultation, and then the recommendation will go to the

Chancellor for sign-off. DAC approval is a very significant step forward. Not only is the rest of the process guided by this decision, but once we have the faculty in place we are able to apply for funding to a much broader range of trusts and funds.

With this stage of the process having gone smoothly, we will now be looking to get into the core of the fundraising over the summer, and launch the main appeal in September.

Alongside this, work continues to reach an agreement with St Paul's URC to acquire the Lewis pipework, and I hope this will be completed over the summer.

I expect to be able to provide a further update on progress after the summer holidays.

Richard Mander, Director of Music

We thought our readers might be interested in the following sermon, given by the Lay Training Officer for the Diocese of Southwark, Peter Graystone, in June at Wychcroft Chapel to students of the Bishop's Certificate.

The Editors

Follow me!

John 1:29-42

Isaiah 55:6-13

I wonder what happened to Andrew? Nobody knows much about how his life as a disciple turned out. The last time we come across him in the Bible he is part of the group of Christians meeting in Jerusalem, after Jesus' ascension, praying with utter commitment. But his relationship with Jesus didn't begin in such an uncompromising way; it began with simple curiosity. And that's why I think he is a good model for people coming to the close of a year doing the Bishop's Certificate, and thinking, 'I wonder what happens next?'

Before Andrew met Jesus he had known Jesus' cousin John - the man who was famously nicknamed John the Baptist. John himself had an entourage of people lapping up his preaching - he was a striking figure. Andrew seems to have been one of them. And I guess he would have stayed that way - a quietly religious fisherman - if it weren't for the fact that one day in Galilee John pointed out Jesus and whispered, 'That is the one! The one I've been talking about and preparing you for. The one God has sent.'

It's quite a long time before Jesus grew famous. Quite a long time before Andrew knew what he was letting himself in for. So he and his friend followed Jesus at a distance, out of sight. They were obviously intrigued. And suddenly Jesus caught sight of them. He wheeled round and said, 'Yes, can I help you?'

And you can tell from the way the story is written that they are really embarrassed - the kind of awkwardness you feel when you're sitting on a bus looking at people's faces, and you

catch the eye of someone who is looking back at you. There is an uncomfortable pause, and the only words Andrew can manage to stammer out to Jesus are, 'Erm ... Where are you staying?'

So Jesus replies, 'Come and see!' And before they know what they are doing, they are following. They are going and seeing. And it turns out to be amazing!

But it is hardly any time at all before Jesus says to Andrew and the others, 'Right, I'm leaving this place and going to Galilee. Are you up for going with me, or are you staying?' And suddenly they are faced with their first real decision. They can no longer have both Jesus and the life they are used to. The choice is simple - the dreary safety of what the rest of the world is doing ... or him. They go!

Somebody unsettled me a little while ago by asking whether I ever regret the decision I made thirty-five years ago to follow Jesus. And this is a really good question to ask yourself from time to time if you can answer it honestly. I came out of university and I got a pretty good degree, and all my friends were getting finance jobs in the City. And I got skewered by this question that we all have to face once in our lives: 'Am I going to have the kind of career where I accumulate more and more for me, or am I going to set off down this trail with Jesus striding ahead of me into jobs that are going to build the Kingdom of God?' So I made my choice.

And thirty-five years later I got a round-robin Christmas letter from a friend who left college at the same time as me who said that the most significant thing in his 60th year was that he had just bought a plane. Not a woodwork tool - an aeroplane. And I'm living in a two-bedroom flat on a Croydon estate. So when someone says, 'Do you regret it?', it's a daft question. Of *course* I do. A month never goes by without me spending an hour thinking, 'You stupid man. What have you done?'

And then you catch sight of Jesus, striding up the hill as you follow at an ever slower pace. And he turns and asks, like he did to Andrew: 'Are you part of this adventure or not?'

And you wearily reply, 'Well, what's the view like from the top of the hill?' And he says, 'Come and see!' And, before you know what you're doing, you're going and seeing. And it turns out to be amazing!

Two years after his first tentative meeting with Jesus, Andrew's curiosity had taken him to a place he couldn't possibly have expected to go. He had left his job, security and family. He had gambled everything on going where Jesus wanted him. And Jesus kept on inviting him to give more and more, until finally his demand was completely uncompromising. 'Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'

That must have sent a shudder through Andrew, because a person who took up a cross was a condemned man on his way to his execution. He wasn't coming back. Jesus was asking, 'How far are you prepared to go. Far enough to die with me?' Because by then death was a real possibility.

The further we go with Jesus the further he asks us to go. There is a poignant, bittersweet moment in Jesus' ministry, when he had given a talk that was so long and complicated that most of the audience gave up and walked away. It's the talk we have recorded in John chapter 6. Bitterly disappointed, Jesus turned to the disciples and asked, with a great sigh, 'What about you? Would you prefer to leave as well. You're free to go if you want to.'

And, being honest about their regrets, Andrew and his brother Simon Peter must have realised that they'd cut themselves off from their past so completely that they no longer had a choice. With words that wrapped together sadness and resignation and determination, Peter replied, 'Well, where else could we go? It always was you or nothing. We have found the one who has the words of eternal life. We have found the Holy One of God. We've left ourselves with no choice but to keep following.' And for the hundredth time, or maybe the thousandth, Peter and Andrew decided to take up their cross and go with Jesus, onwards to ... whatever lay in store.

The further we go with Jesus, the further he asks us to go. What is it about Jesus that allows us to take such a reckless gamble, staking everything on following him, letting go of anything we feel life has made us entitled to?

This Jesus is no mere teacher with a bright set of political or moral ideas. This Jesus is the one who has the words of eternal life. He is the Holy One of God. It is his hand that designed and formed the entire created order of time and space. It is his hand that has control over the future of our world and the potential of our lives. And his hand holds the map. It is the map of a Kingdom that will usher in the end of poverty, the end of violence, and the triumph of justice. It is a good map.

Following Jesus will start with simply being intrigued about him. He will accept that.

It will lead us on roads where we make decisions that change our direction. He will expect that.

It will take us to the point where we stake all we have on him. He will respect that.

He may lead me on paths which are not safe; he may throw me among strangers; he may take me to places where I recognise nothing. But he holds the map, and therefore I will trust him.

He may make me confused; make my spirit weary; fill me with apprehension at what the future has in store. But he holds the map, and therefore I will trust him.

He may lead me to question all the things I used to be sure of; he may give me every indication of his plan for me then lead me abruptly to a closed door; he may put me through events whose significance will be a mystery until the very day I reach heaven. But he holds the map, and therefore I will trust him.

I have no idea what the view is like from the top of the next hill. Let's go and find out!

Peter Graystone